Home educating children with special educational needs - an exploration of how mothers experience this unique learning relationship.

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Abstract

This research explores how mothers home educating a child with special educational needs (SEN) experience their relationship with their child. As home education is gaining in popularity it is important to understand this learning relationship in more detail, particularly as the profession of educational psychology is largely driven by knowledge of more traditional educational settings. A review of the literature indicated that there is minimal existing research examining this particular relationship, with even less exploring the experiences of mothers home educating children with SEN. As the research is exploratory in nature a qualitative approach was taken with interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the choice of methodology. Six mothers home educating children with SEN were recruited to take part. Each was interviewed individually using an unstructured approach and audio records of these interviews were transcribed and analysed following the guidelines outlined by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009). Results indicated six overarching themes within the mothers' experiences; (1) Empowering Child, (2) Attunement and Connection, (3) The Super Mother, (4) Threats: Past, Present and Future, (5) Transformation and Growth and (6) Issues of Control. The findings are discussed in relation to existing literature and implications for educational psychologists are explored. Intersectionality is proposed as a useful theoretical context from which to apply the findings. It encourages the professional to examine the learning relationship as it is experienced rather than through the lens of inaccurate stereotypes or assumptions thereby helping to avoid oppressive practices as emphasised in professional guidance and literature. It is suggested that transferability to real life case work within the context of intersectionality can be facilitated by the Home Education Learning Relationship Framework (HELRF), created to provide a clear, visual illustration of the overarching themes and the role of the professional. Limitations of the findings and the research process itself are discussed and avenues for future research identified.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Development of research idea

When I began the research process I was myself a home educator and although my children are now in school, my experience and identity as a home educator was profoundly linked to the development of this research. I was motivated by a desire to improve understanding of home educators' experiences and increase support for families where possible, and when welcomed. As will be outlined in the literature review, little research has been conducted into the experiences of home educating families whose children have Special Educational Needs (SEN). In light of this I hope to use the findings of my research to increase awareness of their experiences and in doing so improve the practice of Educational Psychologists (EP's) and other agencies within the Local Authority (LA).

Of particular importance when defining my research focus was my dual role of 'trainee educational psychologist' and 'home educating mother' which required me to span two worlds – that of the traditional education system and that of home education. In doing so I learned that these 'worlds' although similar on many levels, often involve different ways of evaluating and fostering child development. As home education is rising in popularity and tensions between LA's and families develop, I felt it to be a timely piece of research. I also hoped that in my dual role, I would be in a good position to bridge these two worlds. Being a member of the community I am studying also brought with it benefits and complications and these shall be explored as the thesis proceeds.

My initial exploration of literature covering different aspects of home education revealed some interesting observations. Firstly there is a lot of literature exploring the reasons why parents and carers chose to home educate. Secondly, there is a range of ethnographic approaches to exploring the pedagogical approaches of home educators. In reading around these areas I was drawn to comments on the relationship between home educators and their

children that appeared in research. In some instances these were highly evaluative, for example, a boy is described as 'controlling' by the researcher. This caused me to wonder whether such evaluations were correct or whether there may be more to understand. My curiosity about this and knowledge of the importance of the learning relationship for child development led me to make this my area of study.

To put my area of study into context in the following sections I will describe how the learning relationship is conceptualised in psychological terms and applied by EP's in their day to day work. Following this, I will provide an overview of the national and professional contexts relevant to home education.

1.1.1 The learning relationship

The learning relationship is an extremely important concept in the field of educational psychology and has been the focus of research in a number of fields of psychology. Lev Vygotsky is perhaps one of the most famous theorists working in this area. Vygotsky's work explored how children develop cognitive and other higher order skills such as language through their relationship with adults around them (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978). He proposed that working alone, children would only come to learn so much by themselves and once they had reached a plateau, required an adult to help them on to the next stage. This point in the learning process is termed the zone of proximal development (ZPD). In this way, adults construct children's development, not only helping them to learn skills and facts but also cultural norms and values. These processes span the very earliest relationship children have with their carers where the carer supports the child to, for example, develop language and the relationship between teacher and pupil later on. This theoretical perspective is known broadly as social constructivism. Social constructivism posits that social interaction between people is a central driver of human development.

Vygotsky's theory is largely focused upon cognitive development but another crucial aspect is emotional development. Psychodynamic theorists such as Bion (1967) have argued that

emotional development is crucial not just for mental health but actually forms the foundations of learning more broadly. Youell (2006) and Salzberger-Wittenberg, Williams and Osborne (1983) describe how children's experiences of their first relationship with their carer will profoundly impact on how they are able to relate to teachers and 'take in' learning experiences as they go through school. The teacher and child have to navigate their emotional responses to each other and this can profoundly impact upon learning. Youell (2006) describes an example of one teacher who felt hugely irritated by a child in his class to the point that in one encounter he wanted to 'sweep her aside'. Further exploration revealed that her behaviour, although on the surface seemed very helpful, was in fact also loaded with an intrusive and controlling quality. Gender issues and the role of the child's mother as a school employee were also considered. In this way psychodynamic theory emphasises that the relationship between teacher and child is alive with emotional work and is therefore, not a simple one.

Social constructivism and psychodynamic perspectives demonstrate that the learning relationship is extremely important to development. Both make links between the relationship between the child and their initial carer and the child and their teacher. Because of its importance, it is a central aspect of the work of Educational Psychologists. A number of approaches, models and tools can be used to explore and develop the learning relationship through the processes of assessment and intervention. The following are just a few examples:

- The Tavistock relational model of consultation.
- SCERTS (Social Communication Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support).
- VIG (Video Interactive Guidance).
- Boxall Profile and other attachment approaches (for example, Bomber, 2007).
- Autism Education Trust competencies.
- Dynamic assessment techniques.
- Work discussion groups based on psychodynamic theory.

1.2 National context and legal framework

Home education is also an important area of interest for educational professionals, particularly as home educators are rising in numbers. Kendall and Taylor (2016) note the Department of Education estimated that in 2016, between 45,250 and 150,000 children were being home educated - a marked increase from previous decades. The national support group Education Otherwise (cited by Arora, 2003) suggested that in the late 1990's there were approximately 5000 home educating families. LA's provide varying support to home educators and many EP's work privately and are free to offer services to home educators if they wish.

Families are entitled to home educate their children under Section 7 of the Education Act 1996. Here it is stipulated that parents have the right to home educate their child:

(a) To his age, ability and aptitude, and

(b) To any special educational needs he may have

Families of children with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) are entitled to home educate in the same way as other families. Section 10.30 of the SEN Code of Practice 2014 states that:

'Home education must be suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude and SEN'

Home educators are not required to register with the LA *unless* they remove their child from school. In these circumstances they have to register with the LA as 'Elective Home Educators' (EHE). The LA should fund the SEN needs of home educated children where possible, though evidence from national home education support groups suggests this may be a source of difficulty (www.ehe-sen.org.uk).

There is also a lack of professional expertise in this area. In 2009 the Labour government undertook a review of home education (Badman, 2009). The review was criticized by both

home educators and an independent expert sitting on the committee for lack of rigor. A Commons Select Committee noted that one of the difficulties was there was no 'expert' on home education employed as part of the review process. In the professional journal for EP's, Educational Psychology in Practice, only two articles on home education have been published since 2003. In my own professional training, home education has not even been mentioned. These issues highlight the need for further research in this area which EP's are ideally placed to undertake.

There are also tensions between the home education community and the 'State' as noted by professionals (e.g. Jennens, 2011) and in the national press (e.g. Guardian headline 2016, 'State must raise its game to protect home educated children'). Again, EP's are ideally placed to help improve relationships and identify solutions to areas of difficulty and controversy. This is particularly relevant at the time of writing as a private members bill setting out the need to introduce formal monitoring of home educators makes its way through parliament.

1.2.2 Existing professional interest in this area of research

Although as noted, there is limited professional writing in this area, it has been acknowledged within the profession that there is a need for EP's to be involved in home education. Two articles have appeared in Educational Psychology in Practice. Jones (2013) described her research into the experiences of home educated children and Arora (2003) conducted a literature review identifying aspects of home education which were relevant to the role of the EP. These included:

- Exploration of aspects of the home environment leading to greater wellbeing and motivation for learning.
- How children learn in informal environments.
- How to increase support for home educating families.
- The need to become more involved in the debate about home education.

- With developments in technology it would be helpful for EP's to widen their focus from learning solely within the classroom to learning within the broader community setting.

It can be seen that there is both a professional need and professional interest in the area of home education. Having outlined why the learning relationship is a particularly important aspect of this, in the next chapter I will describe the findings of my review of the literature covering this topic area.

2. Literature Review

In the last chapter I outlined the context and justification for my research area. The aim of my research is to find out how mothers home educating a child with Special Educational Needs (SEN) experience their relationship with their child. The purpose of this is to provide Educational Psychologist's (EP's) with a means of working with home educators that is rooted in evidence based practice and will assist EP's to engage with home educators in a way that will be helpful to them. In order to achieve this, my literature review will describe what is known about home educating mother's relationships with their children and identify gaps in the research base that the findings of my own research can fill.

2.1 Process of searching the databases

I chose three databases to search on the basis they were the most relevant for my research topic. These were Psych Info, Education Source and the Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC). Two separate searches were conducted in each database using the following terms:

1. Home schooling OR home education AND mother*

2. Home schooling OR home education AND relationship* ('relationship' was selected from the abstract only. This enabled me to identify the correct meaning of 'relationship' as it is a term commonly used to describe many different aspects of research that are unrelated to my own and which would result in large numbers of irrelevant returns)

Results were limited to academic journals and, where possible, dissertations. I repeated the searches in March 2018 to ensure that the most up to date results were included. I read the abstracts for each result and included or excluded papers based on the following criteria:

Inclusion criteria	1. Home education/schooling has same meaning as my research.
	2. Research aims to explore *the relationship between home educating mothers and their children*. Or the results of the research included

	significant findings about the relationship (for example grounded theory may have a relatively open remit in terms of the aims but the resulting conclusions draw heavily on the relationship) 3. Research explores *motherhood* with reference to the relationship with children. 4. Research was sufficiently reliable and valid (as detailed below). 5. Empirical work only.
Exclusion criteria	1. The research has a different meaning of home schooling/home education (for example some research looks at the home-school relationship). 2. There are no significant findings about the relationship. 3. The relationship is mentioned but not explored significantly (e.g. some research identifies the relationship as a reason for home educating but does not go beyond this in analysis). 4. The research is evaluated as having insufficient validity (see below). 5. Opinion piece (not empirical research)

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for literature review papers

Appendix A contains a list of results from each search and the reasons for each result being included or excluded. Because this process involved an element of judgement, if I was in doubt whether or not a paper met the inclusion criteria I erred on the side of caution and included it in the review. After completing this process 17 studies met the inclusion criteria. One of these could not be located in spite of a search in the British Library, Institute of Education library and emailing the author. All the papers included in the review were evaluated for quality using the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) Qualitative Research Checklist employing the following traffic light system:

Red	Methodology not sufficiently rigorous or not enough evidence of rigour in the paper. Paper excluded from review.
Amber	Methodology sufficiently rigorous to include with caveats.
Green	Methodology demonstrates high level of rigour.

Table 2: Traffic light system for reviewing the quality of works in the literature review

A table detailing the evaluation of each paper can be found in Appendix B. Three papers (Diciro, 2000; Butler, 2015; Guterman & Neuman, 2017) used quantitative methodology and the CASP tool was adjusted to reflect this. The adjusted version can be found in Appendix C.

2.2 Organisation of the review

In order to provide clarity I have divided the review into three themes based upon the findings of the included papers. These are Culture and Identity, Relationship Styles and Characteristics of the Child.

2.2.1 Culture and Identity

Five papers explore the effect of cultural constructions of motherhood and how they are applied to the role of the home educating mother. These are Lois (2009), Ahmed (2012), Liao (2008), Jung (2010) and Zhang (2015).

Home educating mothers challenging cultural constructions of motherhood

Lois (2009) identified that home educating mothers often experienced family, friends and others casting the decision to home educate as 'deviant' in some way. Lois's work explores how they justified themselves in response. Over four years she conducted observations of the home education community and 24 interviews with home educating mothers, using grounded theory to define how they justified their decision to home educate in response to criticisms from friends and family. Lois found that criticisms were intrinsically related to culturally based definitions of motherhood and in particular the 'emotional culture' of motherhood whereby 'good' mothering is defined as 'sacrifice' and 'bad' mothering as 'selfishness'. Drawing on these themes the home educating mothers in Lois's study were accused of three different types of failure:

1. Being arrogant in thinking they could improve on the education offered by the school system.

2. Being 'socially' over protective and thereby preventing their children from developing the social skills required to enter into society.

3. Being morally self-righteous and extreme, teaching values to their children that would lead them to be marginalised in society.

In essence, Lois (2009) concludes the mothers were accused of having 'too much' of the feelings usually valued in motherhood, that is, confidence, protectiveness, morality and engagement. In response to these accusations, the mothers re-cast their choices as entirely appropriate given the problems of mainstream schooling such as starting too early, not meeting their children's needs and/or not teaching the right values and morals. Lois notes that in this way these mothers raised the bar even higher for what defines a 'good' mother, setting extraordinarily high expectations for themselves. A drawback of these findings, however, is that Lois provides only the briefest detail with regard to the methodology and process of analysis.

Some similarities with Lois's study can be found in the work of Ahmed (2012). Ahmed provides insight into the challenges faced by Islamic mothers who choose to home educate their children in a bid to link Islamic ideology with modern pedagogy in the form of Holistic Islamic Education (HIE). She notes that these mothers have faced a media storm of criticism due to lack of understanding of HIE. She notes that contrary to the belief that Islamic teaching seeks to undermine Western values, many HIE projects have been set up to address the challenge of 'aporia' – or the paradox's – faced by families trying to reconcile the contradictions in their experience; Isolation v. Integration, Islamic identity v. British Identity, Islam v. Secularism and Autonomy v. Tradition.

Ahmed's study specifically explored the experiences of mothers working at the Islamic Shakhisyah Foundation (ISF), a school project set up by home educating mothers. Similarly to Lois (2009), Ahmed draws out how prejudices are re-cast by these mothers in ways that in fact demonstrate congruency and harmony with 'British values'. Her work demonstrates

again, the stigma that can be attached to home educating mothers, particularly within minority groups, and the need to re-cast motherhood in terms acceptable to the broader community in order to justify their care of their children. However, her work does not explore differences within the ideas and practices of motherhood in the ISF, suggesting a highly homogenous experience that is not necessarily realistic.

Religion, culture and authority in the mother-child relationship

The work of Ahmed (2012) and Lois (2006) emphasised the need for home educating mothers to reframe and recast motherhood in ways that make it acceptable to the dominant cultural view. Others have looked at how religious and cultural identity directly impact, not just the conceptualisation of motherhood in home educating families, but also the interactions between mother and child. This link is emphasised in the unpublished doctoral work of three researchers; Liao (2008), Jung (2010) and Zhang (2015).

Liao (2008) explored the home educating practices of 15 conservative Protestant families in the US. Using an ethnographic approach mothers and fathers were interviewed and each family was observed for a week. Liao's findings suggested authority was a key component of interactions between child and mother. The mothers achieved this authority by positioning themselves as the source of correct knowledge. Other authoritarian tools were also employed including the use of 'Yes Ma'am' and corporal punishment. Here, adherence to parental authority was seen as a proxy for adhering to Godly authority. The mothers' authority was also exercised by combining the role of 'mother' with the role of 'teacher'. Gender roles as prescribed by the religious belief systems in these families also had a significant influence upon interactions. Sons did not always respect the authority of their mothers due to the emphasis on patriarchal power structures within their religious philosophy. Authority in these instances was handed to the father, who as a man, had overall authority in the family.

Liao notes a counter-intuitive finding in relation to authority, namely that when it came to testing their children, these 'authoritarian' type mothers frequently took on a more collaborative and gentle interaction style in a bid to ensure their children didn't lose confidence when getting something wrong. One mother concluded this was due to the reduced importance of testing in home educating families since material can be revisited ad infinitum and there is no rush or cut-off date to worry about. In this way Liao's work hints at the complexity of home educating and reminds us to look for exceptions. Liao's work comes attached with significant caveats however as the research design was vague and the manner in which participants were recruited was not made explicit. Furthermore it was not possible to review how the data was analysed since there was limited detail about this process.

The work of Zhang (2015) explores issues of complexity, seeking to demonstrate the web of factors influencing home educating mothers, particularly where culture and religion collide. Zhang carried out four case studies using ethnographic techniques, exploring the lives of home educating Chinese immigrants to the US who after spending time in the US subsequently identified as Evangelical Christian.

Zhang found that religious conceptualisations of the 'self' influenced the mothers' parenting style and thus relationships with their children. For example, one mother perceived the world as cultureless in nature and viewed Christians as being the same everywhere. This led to conflict with one of her children in particular as she could not acknowledge the differences her child perceived between herself as Chinese-American and other friends who were White American. These different world views led to conflict between mother and daughter, particularly when the mother attempted to transmit her values to her daughter through the teaching of Bible stories.

Zhang notes that Confucianism - upon which Chinese culture is based - and Christianity, both value parental authority over the child. Similarly to Xiao's study, this was the guiding

force behind much of the interaction between the mothers and their children, including pushing for obedience and immediate or 'unforgettable' punishment if it wasn't given. However, these strategies were also combined with more flexible approaches drawn from wider American culture to differing degrees among the mothers. In this way Zhang's work also demonstrates not only the impact of religious beliefs upon the relationship, but that stereotypes such as the 'Tiger Mother' shroud the complexity of their experience.

In what may seem a reversal of the mothers' situations in Liao and Zhang's findings, the work of Jung (2010) demonstrated how home education allowed South Korean mothers to *reclaim* motherhood *away* from Confucian ideals. Jung used an ethnographic approach interviewing 41 mothers, sometimes multiple times, over a period of three years. She found that through home education mothers could enact more relaxed and *authoritative*, as opposed to *authoritarian*, approaches to education and parenting that fostered their children's creativity, freedom and individuality. These characteristics were not permitted in the highly authoritarian dominant culture. These mothers' home educating relationship with their children was an act of political and social rebellion as well as personal empowerment for both parties. Jung's study, however, also comes with significant caveats as only the broadest description of data collection was given and data analysis was only briefly mentioned meaning that it could not be fully evaluated for rigour.

Summary of theme one

The work of Lois (2009) and Ahmed (2012) demonstrated the way home educating mothers are required to re-cast and justify their choices to avoid criticism from the dominant cultural view. Mothers in these studies were tasked with a substantial responsibility for reconceptualising motherhood as well as enacting it in a way that navigated tensions between the dominant cultural view and their own identities, religious or not. The effect of culture and religion was then explored further by considering how the religious and cultural characteristics of mothers shaped interactions within home educating families. The work of

Xiao (2008) and Zhang (2015) in this area also suggested some challenges to stereotypes by highlighting variability and complexity. Following this, the work of Jung (2010) demonstrated how home educating mothers' relationship with their children can be a vehicle to reclaim and reconstruct identities that are disempowered within the dominant culture.

Taken as a whole the work identified under the theme of 'culture and identity' has demonstrated the complex influences upon the relationship between home educating mothers and their children and how this relationship can be used for different ends. The next section will explore another approach to understanding this relationship – that of interactional styles.

2.2.2 Relationship Styles

Seven papers explored the style of relationship between mother and child or parent and child. These were Diciro (2000), Kuusisto (2003), Guterman and Neuman (2017), Butler, Harper, Call and Bird (2015), McDowell (2000), Neuman and Guterman (2017) and Lois (2006).

Attachment theory and home educator's relationships

The work of Diciro (2000) explores one of the most influential psychological models of the parent-child relationship – attachment theory (e.g. Bowlby, 1982; Ainsworth,1978). Diciro evaluated 19 parent-child dyads, exploring the relationship between measures of attachment including warmth, control and involvement and measures of academic achievement and academic self-efficacy. The measures used were the Parent Acceptance and Rejection Questionnaire-Child (PARQ), the Parental Acceptance and Rejection Questionnaire-Control Child (PARQ-C Child) the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement-Brief Form (K-TEA-B), the test of Problem Solving-Revised (TOPS) and Harter's Self Perception Profile for Children (HSSP).

Diciro found a strong correlation between attachment quality, in particular parental warmth, and the academic achievement of the home educated children. Diciro also found that levels

of parental involvement and control were *not* associated with academic achievement as predicted by studies of parenting and academic performance of children in school (e.g. Taylor, et al., 1995; Kelleghan, et al., 1993; Steinberg, et al., 1994), though suggests this is an anomaly as nearly all the parents demonstrated optimum levels of control (neither rigid, nor permissive) and involvement. Diciro concludes that the results suggest that home educators can demonstrate high levels of secure attachment and that this counters the arguments by some that home educators are over-controlling or demonstrate inappropriate levels of involvement in their children's lives – much like the accusations faced by the mothers in Lois (2009) study above.

This does not however, rule out the possibility that some home educating families may have unhelpful relationships with their children. The self-selecting nature of participants means that perhaps the most 'reasonable' families were more likely to put themselves forward for research. That said, research identified above suggests that families with what might be thought of as quite extreme beliefs and patterns of interaction *do* put themselves forward. In fact, Diciro also noted that the common stereotype that fundamental religious beliefs lead to rigid parenting styles that are detrimental to the outcomes for home educated children can also be challenged. There was no significant difference between the attachment styles of families identifying with a fundamentalist religious identity and those that didn't.

Diciro's study has a number of methodological drawbacks. It uses a small sample size and is based on a model of correlation and so the direction of relationships cannot be predicted. However, it does suggest that attachment is a useful tool for examining how helpful the relationship between parent and child may be to the home educating family.

Kuusisto (2003) also explored parenting style in home educating families and specifically how this related to the transmission of religious values within home educating Adventist families. Kuusisto conducted interviews with 10 adults who felt they held similar values to their parents in order to identify factors that led to successful transmission of these values.

Interviewees cited that democratic style parenting had been most helpful in transmitting values. This included discussion about choices and values rather than 'forcing'. Interviewees also felt that authoritarian and permissive parenting styles would prevent values being transmitted though none had experienced the latter. In addition to the interviews a survey was completed by 106 Adventist respondents. Within the survey results 27% felt their experiences as a child had been too strict and authoritarian and 47% described only positive experiences or stated they had no negative experiences.

Kuusisto comments that there is a blurred boundary between strict religious education and 'indoctrination' but these findings do suggest that even within highly religious households a 'democratic' parenting style can lead children to feel able to make their own choices. This is consistent with Diciro (2000) with regard to conclusions about stereotypes related to religious based education. However, Kuusisto does not provide a definition of 'democratic' parenting style and it would be interesting to see how different subgroups of home educators defined such a term since it may be highly relative to the extent of freedom or strictness in the broader social context.

In a more recent study, Guterman and Neuman (2017) evaluated the attachment style of 139 home educating parents and conducted multiple regression analyses to explore the relationship between attachment style and home educated children's social encounters. They found a negative correlation between avoidance and number of social encounters. Parental avoidance accounted for 6% of the variance indicated. The more avoidant the parents, the less social encounters their children had. In contrast the more 'conscientious', 'agreeable', and 'extroverted' the parents, the greater the child's social encounters. It is suggested this may be accounted for by the parent's difficulty building relationships with other adults, thus reducing the opportunities for their children to socialize with children in other families.

A significant drawback is that this study focussed only on parental personality characteristics, not on how they cared for their children in practice. The authors also note that the presence of siblings may influence the findings in a number of ways. In addition, 6% of variance, although statistically significant, is not necessarily *clinically* significant and the definition of 'social encounter' is also not explored. For these reasons although the findings may play up to the 'common sense' view that avoidant parents may avoid social interaction, they should be treated with caution.

An alternative perspective on interaction style was explored by Butler et al (2015). Butler et al examined whether home educating families demonstrated higher levels of cohesion compared to public school families using a quasi experimental design by means of two self-report measures; FACES III to measure cohesion and the Interaction Styles Profile (ISP). In order to control for family style, public school families and home educators were chosen on the basis they had a family centric approach. This allowed the researchers to identify the effect of the *style of education* upon family cohesion.

Three different interaction styles were discussed based on the work of researchers in the field of family processes (e.g. Bateson, 1936; Haley, 1963; Harper, Scoresby & Boyce, 1977; Lederer and Jackson, 1968; Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967):

1. *Complementary* - One up/one down interactions where, for example, power is met with submission.
2. *Symmetrical* - Interactions where similar behaviours are exchanged, for example, conflict escalation, couple distancing.
3. *Parallel* - Interactions are based on collaboration with neither party seeking to dominate.

Cohesive families were described as families that engaged in parallel interactive styles rather than symmetrical or complementary. Butler et al cite a range of research suggesting parallel interactions lead to greater family cohesion (e.g. Christensen & Scoresby, 1976 and

Harper et al, 1977). The results suggested that home educating had a small but significant impact on increasing family cohesion compared to families engaged in the public school system. Home educating families also reported, on average significantly more parallel style interactions, but again the differences were small and as the authors point out not necessarily clinically relevant. There was no significant difference between public and home educators with regard to the amount of symmetrical and complementary style interactions they engaged in suggesting home education had only a moderate effect upon parallel interactions.

However the results from Butler et al (2015) do not capture the complexity of home educating relationships and how they change over time. This is explored by Lois (2006) whose work I outline below. In addition, Butler et al claim that families seeking to home educate to increase family cohesion may not experience significant gains if they are already family-centric orientated. It could be argued, however, that the *meaning* of parallel interactions within home educated and publicly educated families is in fact significantly different. This is especially because the home educating family has to navigate greater complexity, not least in the mother's dual roles of teacher and carer. I will explore some of this complexity in the next section.

Impact of mothers' personal home education journey upon interactions with their children

McDowell (2000), also writing from a US perspective, used a grounded theory approach to explore the effect of home education on the mother and the family more broadly. She explored this from the mother's point of view using a combination of interviews with nine mothers and observations of community events held for home educators. She identified differences between what she termed as two 'pseudo' home educators who felt forced into home education and the remaining seven 'classic' or 'mainstream' home educators who chose to home educate. The 'pseudo' home educators appeared to bear an undercurrent of

anger towards their children who had not been successful at school. This anger influenced the process of home education and the mother-child relationship resulting in higher stress levels for both the mothers and children. However, she also notes that these two home educators retained their full-time jobs. In contrast, although the 'classic' home educators worried about the processes of home education, overall they found it stress-reducing as they no longer experienced anxiety about the negative effects of the school day.

Neuman and Guterman (2017) explored the meaning of home education to mothers. They conducted 30 interviews with home educating mothers in Israel and identified seven themes. These are closely related to aspects of their relationship with their children and there are similarities with the work of McDowell (2000). The themes are summarised as follows:

1. *Sense of family* - Some mothers described how home educating felt the 'natural' thing to do. That the family was central to their life as opposed to the values of society.

2. *Child in the centre* - Some of the mothers described how home educating enabled them to put their child at the 'centre' – facilitating the prioritization of the child's own processes at a pace and in a manner that suited them.

3. *Responsibility, choice and control* - Mothers noted that the level of responsibility they held was much greater than those who chose the schooling route. This was sometimes seen as a huge burden with mothers feeling they would be to blame for their children's outcomes. It was also seen as restricting 'freedom' due to the constant need to be thinking about their children's education. Freedom here appears to mean freedom from worry or freedom to think to about aspects of life outside of home education. This feeling of responsibility was sometimes transferred to the child in that the mother would encourage them to take responsibility for day to day tasks such as bringing the correct gear for swimming. The totality of responsibility also brought with it the ability to control not only what was 'studied' but also in terms of the

child's social life. An example is one mother noted she was always there to supervise her child and so this reduced the opportunity for them to behave inappropriately.

4. *Development of self-awareness -* Mothers reported growing in self-awareness as the process of home education unfolded over time. This was felt to be a positive. One mother recalled that this growing awareness of herself inspired her to encourage her children to ask questions of themselves also. In doing this she wished to help them 'connect to themselves'.

5. *Change in lifestyle -* Some mothers reported that home educating their children had led them to re-examine other aspects of their lives such as health, diet and career.

6. *Slowing down the pace of life and living in the present -* Some mothers reported that they now had more time and were less stressed than previously. This was also linked with being able to be more thoughtful and calm. Some mothers also felt that instead of planning for the future they were now able to live in the present.

7. *Rectifying past experiences of school -* Some mothers reported that home educating enabled them to protect their children from aspects of the education system they found difficult themselves.

A drawback of both McDowell's and Neuman and Guterman's work is that the researchers did not explore the pedagogical approaches of the mothers, nor the impact of the duration of home education upon the mothers' responses. It would have been interesting to explore whether orientation towards structured or unstructured pedagogical approaches was linked to the meanings attributed to, for example, responsibility, control and self-awareness and these might have changed over time. The work of Lois (2006) which I will describe next, explores these aspects in more detail.

Lois (2006) notes that the role of 'parent' impacts significantly on the role of 'teacher' in home educating families. The 'emotional labour' of motherhood is therefore also influenced by the child becoming not just a son or daughter, but a student. This drastically differentiates the home educating mother from the classroom teacher. In light of this, Lois used grounded

theory to explore how home educating mothers adjusted to the role of teacher, formulating a four stage model to explain this process:

1. Role ambiguity – mothers were unsure how to be a teacher and a mother, leading to insecurity. In response many felt the need to structure learning by investing in curriculums for example. Experienced home educators would advise the opposite, to be more relaxed, flexible and not doubt their ability but this served to heighten anxiety among many mothers rather than reduce it. This led these mothers to alleviate their anxiety by employing a rigid, structured approach which brought respite – *for a while*.

2. Role failure – for most of the mothers using this structured approach, the initial respite abruptly came to an end when their children lost motivation and lacked the expected progress. Managing their children's negative emotion towards learning was very draining and mothers' happiness was often intimately linked with whether their children conformed to their expectations of performance. If a child was perceived as 'slow' this led to a reduced sense of accomplishment. These events led to extreme feelings of failure and fear of 'ruining' their children. In response, the mothers upped the pressure, introducing an even more intense curriculum.

3. Role conflict and overload – being torn between professional and mother roles – either enforcing learning or responding to children's emotional need for comfort - led many to burnout. This was compounded by the responsibility for managing the household. In response some mothers tried to juggle all of it, compartmentalising roles and keeping them separate. Others used religious beliefs to alleviate their feelings of burnout.

4. Role harmony – some mothers moved through the period of burnout by prioritising the role of motherhood over housework and being more relaxed and flexible with their curriculum, re-defining the role of teacher as 'facilitator'. These

approaches assisted mothers to obtain harmony and for many this also meant relying upon partners to help with the housework.

Lois concludes that in the initial stages of home educating, mothers only had traditional conceptions of 'mother' and 'teacher' to draw upon yet committing to these definitions was extremely difficult, if not impossible, as they led to conflict in their relationship with their children. This links with the work described in theme one above that identified how cultural ideas about motherhood are frequently not sufficient to cater for mothers who are home educating. In addition, definitions of what it means to learn and teach are based upon the school system and so also cannot cater for the home education process. Mothers are required to discover new definitions, which can be a painful experience.

This casts the work of Butler et al (2015) in a new light. Butler et al suggested the differences in family cohesion between home and public school educators was small. However, the results of Lois suggested that for many mothers, 'harmony' – which could be considered a similar concept to 'cohesion' - was only achieved after a period of time in which there was distinct *lack of harmony or cohesion*. These mothers first started out with a formal, structured curriculum which demanded they engage in a symmetrical style relationship before moving into a more parallel approach over time. This suggests that interaction styles can and do change over time and thus are likely to have different meanings depending on the family history.

Summary of theme two

Theme two has explored different aspects of interaction style. Diciro (2000), Kuusisto (2003), Guterman and Neuman (2017) and Butler et al (2015) all explored the presence and influence of attachment and interactional styles within home educating families. Findings open up thinking about how attachment style and relational styles in home educating families can influence the nature of home education positively and negatively. The findings both challenge some stereotypes regarding home educators and provide support for concerns

about the experiences of some children. Taken together they suggest that secure attachment and parallel interaction styles lead to more positive experiences for all.

The work of McDowell (2000), Neuman and Guterman (2017) and Lois (2006) add complexity to this conclusion, demonstrating that mothers' personal home educating journeys can directly impact upon their relationship with their children and that this can change over time as the role of mother is redefined through experience. Family 'harmony' or 'cohesion' is not a fixed characteristic, but fluid and changeable. The next theme shall consider research that explores home educating mothers' relationships with children who are outside of the 'norm' and how this relates to finding in themes one and two.

2.2.3 Characteristics of the Child

Three studies explored the experience of home educating mothers whose children have a particular need, either because they are gifted or because they have Special Educational Needs (SEN). These were Kidd and Kaczmarek (2010), Jolly, Matthews and Nester (2012) and Mouzourou, Santos and Gaffney (2011). The findings of these studies linked to aspects of the relationship between mother and child.

Kidd and Kaczmarek (2010) conducted research exploring the experiences of mothers' home educating children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). They recruited 10 mothers with children aged 8 to 14 years old and conducted semi-structured interviews, taking a phenomenological approach.

The mothers in this study saw their children increase in confidence after taking them out of the school system and in general home education was felt to be a positive experience. The authors did find however, those mothers who felt they had actively *chosen* to home educate experienced more of a sense of empowerment than those who felt forced into it. This is similar to the findings of McDowell (2000) discussed in theme two above.

Kidd and Kaczmarek also found that feelings of isolation were significant for a number of these mothers, caused by not being able to access home education support groups due to

their children finding these too difficult and in addition, not being able to access support regarding educating their children. However, the most interesting finding is the mention of a *journey*, for example, one mother says:

> "…it's actually learning about ourselves and what we're capable of and what we're not capable of, looking at our strengths and weaknesses and how then we can use that for our kids and that's what I think home schooling is all about."

This suggests a powerful relationship between the mother's process of self-discovery and how this came to influence her relationship with her child. This correlates strongly with the work of Lois (2006) and Neuman and Guterman (2017) who found that the mother's personal journey over time directly shaped their interactions and thus relationship with their children.

The theme of isolation is also picked up by Jolly, Matthews and Nester (2012) who used semi-structured interviews with 13 home educators in the US who identified their children as 'gifted'. Combining grounded theory with a phenomenological approach, the researchers asked 19 questions about various aspects of home education. It should be noted that phenomenological aspects of this are not given great clarity. A number of themes regarding motivations and curriculum choices were identified from the data. Most were not in my topic area but one – sense of isolation – was. This was attributed to feeling their children were not understood by home educators whose children were not gifted or who chose home education for religious purposes. This led the mothers of gifted children to feel 'exiled' from the wider home education community. They also felt their children were unable to connect with peers similar to them and that this resulted in a dilemma – either to force them into social situations they did not enjoy or simply not socialise. This links with the difficulty noted by McDowell (2000) with working out how best to be a mother and teacher. The work of Kidd and Kaczmarek (2010) and Jolly, Matthews and Nester (2012) also demonstrates that the

task of managing the relationship with a child who does not conform to what is considered normal development adds significantly greater complexity.

This complexity is considered in more depth by Mouzourou, Santos and Gaffney (2011) who conducted a single case study of a Cypriot family's experiences of a child with autism, Yiannis (pseudonym). Using semi-structured interviews, observations, discussions of photos and other objects, the researcher's sought each family member's personal narrative of their experiences of Yiannis. This included his mother who home educated him until first grade at school. This mother dedicated her entire life to the wellbeing of Yiannis, and describes her 'overprotective' nature as a response to negative experiences with psychologists who had previously supported her with Yiannis' care. During this time she felt she was 'being false' and 'betraying' him by trying to make the psychologist's happy instead of him. After this time there was a need to make up for this with *extra* thought and care.

This demonstrates how this mother's relationship with her child was influenced by her experience of *other* relationships around them. These other relationships helped her to define and clarify her own relationship with Yiannis by signifying what was bad or unhelpful and therefore to be avoided. This is an aspect of the mother-child relationship that does not arise in the work of any other researchers explored here. It raises interesting questions about the experiences of families and children with SEN and the impact of professional support in shaping relationships. This is perhaps even more pertinent since, as explained in the introductory chapter of this thesis, many families of children with SEN choose to home educate due to negative school experiences.

Summary of theme three

No research has been undertaken that directly explores the relationship between home educating mothers and children who are outside of what is considered 'normal' development. However, some studies have taken a broad look at the experiences of such home educators and in doing so have uncovered aspects of the relationship that are important. The work of

Kidd and Kaczmarek (2010) and Jolly, Matthews and Nester (2012) identified some similar findings to those in theme two above and also identified that some mothers experienced significant isolation. The work of Mouzourou, Santos and Gaffney (2011) revealed further insights, suggesting that the mother's experience of prior professional relationships influenced how she related to her child. As families of children with SEN are more likely to be receiving advice from outside professionals this aspect of experience is potentially significantly different to other home educating parents.

2.3 Commentary on methodological issues

Having considered the findings of the studies included in the literature review I wish to provide some additional methodological commentary as it directly relates to the aims of my research.

Firstly, the position of the researcher/s is rarely mentioned or explored. This is a significant difficulty as the beliefs and values of the researcher are intertwined at every stage of the research process and therefore should be acknowledged as far as possible. Academics in the field of social psychology have demonstrated how, for example, social science researchers can subtly influence the nature of participant's responses by including certain references in semi-structured interviews (Potter, 2012, Potter & Hepburn, 2005).

Secondly, much of the research relies heavily on participant's opinions, however, this leaves it open to the criticisms levelled at all 'attitude based' research. Billig (1987) argued that all language is rhetorical and researchers in the field of discursive psychology have demonstrated that ideas and opinions are action-orientated, that is, constructed in order to achieve a goal of some kind and are therefore variable (see Wetherall, 2001). Essentially, any effort to try to pin them down can be thought of as misconceived. In addition, conscious reasoning may in fact be influenced by unconscious processes within individuals. Researchers such as Hollway (see Smith et al, 2005) note that standard qualitative

methodologies are not equipped to explore this and these issues are not explored at all by the researchers above.

Thirdly, contradictions and variations in findings are rarely mentioned and almost never explored. This in some ways reduces the value of findings since qualitative research by nature involves embracing complexity (Banister et al, 2002).

Fourthly, some research draws on the findings of prior researchers when constructing interviews (e.g. Jolly, Matthews and Nester, 2012). It is therefore possible that the method of data collection might have reproduced similar findings – if the researcher asks a question about a topic they are lending it authority prior to any data being collected and this may skew findings. This approach has the potential to limit the possibility of uncovering new perspectives.

2.4 Conclusion and research question

The relationship between home educating mothers and their children is extraordinarily complex. This review demonstrates that a number of factors come to play including culture, religion, interactional styles, time spent home educating, the personal journeys of mothers and the characteristics of individual children. Traditional definitions of the roles of 'mother' and 'teacher' are called into question, suggesting they require reconceptualising in order to account for the complexity of the home educating relationship. The findings also demonstrate the significance of the mother-child relationship for the wellbeing of mothers, children and families as well as the connection between the style of relationship and pedagogical approaches.

These findings are, however, largely based upon home educating families where children do not have SEN, highlighting that little research has considered relationships where SEN is a factor. The limited findings in this area suggest that as well as sharing some commonality of experience with other home educators, these mothers' relationships are influenced by additional factors such as feelings of isolation, difficulties accessing the home education

community and the impact of prior professional support. It is sensible to conclude that such mothers face greater complexity when navigating their relationships with their children. In light of this my research question is:

> *How do mothers home educating children with special educational needs (SEN) experience their relationship with their children?*

As outlined in the introductory chapter, this will provide Educational Psychologists with a framework from which to understand home educating processes where children have SEN, improving case conceptualisation and providing a starting point for exploration and support. My research will also address the methodological issues highlighted both during and at the end of this review.

3. Methodology

In this chapter I will detail my chosen methodology. The chapter will be divided into two distinct sections; part A and part B. In part A I will identify my specific research questions and aims and explore how these can be answered using qualitative methodology, and specifically, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). I will explore the epistemological and ontological positioning of the research and provide an introduction to IPA, including a critique. In part B I will detail the procedures I used to conduct the research and identify how I have ensured the research process meets the highest standards of validity, reliability and ethics.

3.1 Part A – Aims and theoretical background

3.1.1 Research aims, questions and purpose

The aim of my research is to gain an understanding of how mothers home educating children with special educational needs (SEN) experience their relationship with their children. I will describe the characteristics of this experience and, in particular, motherhood in the context of home education.

In the introductory chapter I explained the importance of the relationship between teacher and child to the learning process and therefore the relevance and value of my research to Educational Psychologists (EP's) and other professionals working with home educating families. I also identified that the relationship between parent and child is a universal starting point, which is particularly helpful given that home educators are a very diverse group.

In the literature review I identified a gap in this area of research and thus how my findings will make a unique contribution to this area of work. The literature also identified methodological drawbacks of previous research and thus my own research also aims to improve upon these by a applying a rigorous and reflexive process as will be outlined in the following sections of this chapter.

My overarching research question is:

"How do mothers home educating children with Special Educational Needs experience their relationship with their children"?

The purpose of my research is primarily exploratory, however, there is also an emancipatory emphasis, which grew in pertinence as it became apparent how strongly participants wished to advocate for themselves and their children. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5. The aims and purposes of the research have been met through my choice of qualitative methodology, in particular, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).

3.1.2 Qualitative research – ontological and epistemological characteristics

Qualitative approaches are most suited to the exploratory and emancipatory purposes of my research question. Parker (2002) defines qualitative methodology as, "the interpretative study of a specified issue or problem in which the researcher is central to the sense that is made." (p. 2). Qualitative research is therefore focused upon interpretation and meaning. Qualitative researchers are central to the process because this type of research acknowledges that it is not possible to truly come to know a phenomena as it 'really is', instead, there will always be a *gap* between the object of study and our understanding of it. The 'gap' is formed of three problems described by Woolgar (1998, cited by Parker, 2002) as the 'three horrors':

1. Indexicality - explanations are always tied to particular occasions and therefore change as occasions change.

2. Inconcludability – accounts of phenomena can always be added to and are therefore always in a process of change.

3. Reflexivity – how people characterise a phenomenon changes the way it works for them which then changes how they characterise it and so on and so forth.

These problems are helpfully demonstrated by the work of discursive psychologists who have shown that psychological phenomena such as memory or attitudes, far from being

discrete, consistent, events, are actually employed by people in different ways in different situations for different purposes (see Potter, 2004, for an introduction). This draws into question the ability of quantitative, experimental research to draw meaningful conclusions since, as Parker (2002) argues, the quantitative drive to 'wish the gap away' through greater and greater control of variables only leads to a point where phenomena become so *reduced* as to become meaningless.

The problems associated with the gap led me to question whether it was possible to explore human experience and, more particularly, mothers' experiences. To answer this requires an exploration of ontology. Ontology can be thought of as how we see the *nature* of the world, for example, whether it is truly 'knowable' or not. Sometimes qualitative and quantitative approaches are positioned as having opposing ontologies. Qualitative work is *relativist* and quantitative work is *positivist/realist*. Relativism suggests that we can only come to understand phenomena through our own personal meaning making and therefore any attempt to systematically observe or measure a phenomenon is impossible since all knowledge is subjective. Positivism/realism, however, suggests that phenomena do exist *outside* of human subjectivity and can therefore be observed and measured systematically and objectively.

However, I argue that both these positions taken to their extreme lead to fundamental difficulties. If one takes up a pure relativist stance then this leads to what is described by Burman (2002) as 'relativistic nihilism', that is, it becomes impossible to draw conclusions about anything, making the pursuit of research futile. On the other side of the dichotomy, a pure positivism/realism completely ignores the fact that there are multiple factors that influence phenomena – encapsulated in the notion of the three horrors described above. There is a solution to this, however, which is a middle ground known as 'critical realism'.

Critical realism causes us to shift the relativist-positivist arguments from a dichotomy to a *spectrum* - with critical realism falling in the middle region.

RELATIVISM <------------------CRITICAL REALISM------------------> POSITIVISM/REALISM

Figure 1: ontological spectrum

Critical realism grew out of dissatisfaction with positivism in the 1960's, stemming in particular from the work of Harre (e.g. Harre, 1984) and Bhaskar (e.g. Bhaskar and Hartwig, 2008). Critical realism as an approach acknowledges that there *are* phenomena that exist outside of human subjectivity and that some ways of understanding these phenomena are better than others. But it also acknowledges that any understanding will always be partial and that people can have different experiences of the same phenomena because they experience different aspects of it in different ways. Critical realism can therefore be seen as a way of resolving the tension between positivist reductionism and relativist nihilism. Importantly, it allows not only for conclusions to be drawn from research but also promotes a dialogue with *the gap* between phenomena and our understanding of it. This is achieved through the promotion of engagement with the 'three horrors'; indexicality, inconcludability and reflexivity. As I will demonstrate later, this engagement is crucial to the process of my research and is a fundamental aspect of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

The ontological position of IPA, although situated in the realm of critical realism, can actually be delineated further. IPA is founded upon Heidegger's 'minimal hermeneutic realism' (Dreyfus, 1995, cited by Larkin, Smith and Clifton, 2006). This is the idea that although things do exist outside of human awareness, they can only be made sense of and understood when they are *brought into human awareness and interpreted through human thought*. This leads me to another fundamental question: if this is the case then what is an appropriate method of exploring phenomenon? This question can be answered by identifying an appropriate epistemology. Epistemology encompasses the tools we use to seek knowledge and as I shall demonstrate, is intimately linked with ontology.

Larkin et al (2006) note that it is difficult to identify a straightforward epistemological approach that underpins IPA. However, two key points stand out from their discussion. Firstly, because minimal hermeneutic realism argues that phenomena can only be understood through a process of human thinking, the influence of ideas brought to this process by the researcher *must be taken into account* and, as far as possible, minimised. This will maximise the chances of the phenomena showing itself *as it truly is,* even if this can never be fully achieved. Secondly, such an epistemological approach necessarily requires a huge amount of reflexivity on the part of the researcher to ensure that the most sensitive tactic is taken when exploring the phenomena in question, in my case, mothers' experiences.

The following diagram describes the relationship between these epistemological considerations and the ontological stance taken above:

Relativism   --------------------Critical Realism--------------   Positivism/Realism

Heidegger's 'minimal hermeneutic realism'

Epistemological approach must:

1. Acknowledge the influence of prior ideas on the understanding and interpretation of the phenomena
2. Be sensitive enough so that the phenomena may reveal *itself* as *it is* as far as possible
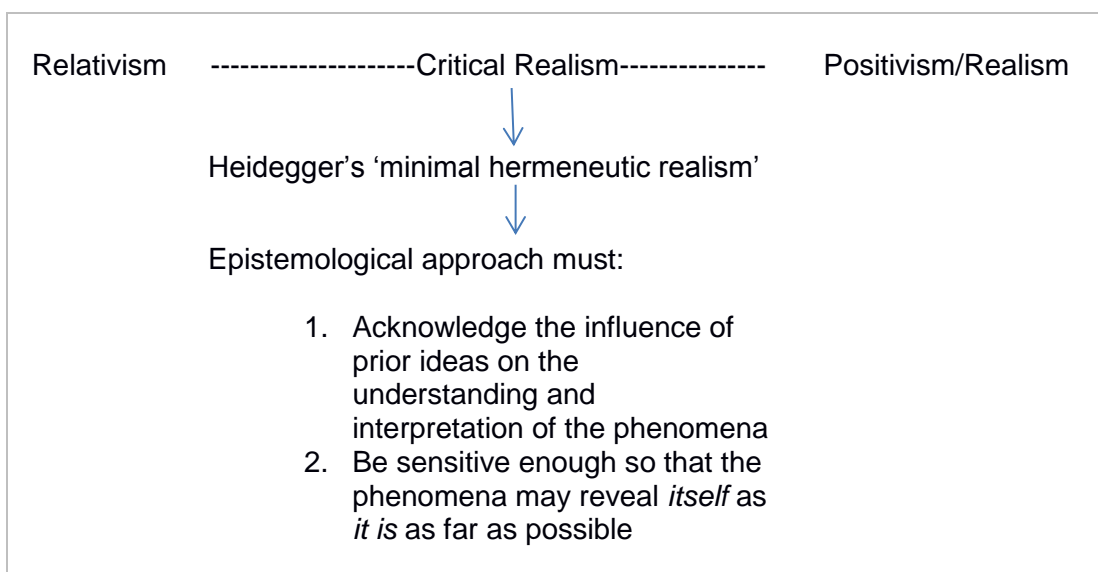
Figure 2: ontological spectrum demonstrating epistemological links

Having established my ontological and epistemological positions, in the next section I will define and present an argument for choosing IPA.

3.1.3 An introduction to IPA

The purpose of IPA is to explore the meaning of experiences. It is an idiographic approach, which means the focus is on individual experiences rather than generalisability. However, as is befitting of the critical realist stance, it is founded upon the notion that within a community of people who share some characteristic there will be similarities as well as differences. Knowledge about these can then be applied to others in the community through what is called 'theoretical transferability' (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2012). Theoretical transferability allows the reader to compare and contrast the findings with their own experiences of themselves and others, fostering deeper and more meaningful understanding. These outcomes are an ideal fit with the aim of my research; to provide professionals with insight about the relationship some home educating mothers have with their children so that they can draw upon this with other home educators they work with.

IPA usually involves interviewing a small number of participants, transcribing the interview and then analysing the transcript in order to identify (a) how participants experience a phenomena and (b) the meaning of their experience to them. It has been used frequently in health research and a growing body of work within psychology is also emerging (Smith et al. 2012). The researcher is deemed to be central to IPA and reflection upon the researcher's influence is built into the IPA process as suggested in the epistemology above.

3.1.4 The theoretical underpinnings of IPA

IPA takes an empathic and curious stance towards participants and as much as possible privileges the participants' voice. The following discussion will draw on Smith et al. (2012) whose book on the subject of IPA is widely considered a seminal text in the field. Smith et al. (2012) write that IPA is driven by two philosophical traditions; phenomenology and hermeneutics.

Phenomenology

The field of phenomenology is derived from the work of Husserl (e.g. 1982), Heidegger (e.g. 1962), Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Sartre (1956). Husserl describes phenomenology as

'experience before we have thought about it' and thus phenomenological analysis involves stopping and reflecting on experience. Smith et al. (2012, p. 189) outline four different layers of reflection described in the work of Husserl (e.g. 1982):

1. **Pre-reflective reflexivity**. This is the lowest level of reflection, simply being aware of being conscious.

2. **The reflective 'glancing at' a pre-reflective experience**. This is when we engage in undirected reflection, for example, being reminded of an event in the past by a smell or sound.

3. **Attentive reflection on the pre-reflective.** This when an experience is intuitively registered as a part of our 'natural attitude' (Smith et al., 2012, p. 191). Here an experience is registered as important, for example, I have a recurring headache and I wonder if this indicates a more serious condition. According to Smith et al. such reflection involves cognitions including memory, fantasy, judgements, conclusions or volition and is "dynamic, multi-dimensional, affective, embodied, and intricately connected with our engagement with the world" (p. 191).

4. **Deliberate controlled reflection.** This is deliberate re-analysis of an event where we actively reflect upon layers 1, 2 and 3.

Interviewing a participant for the purposes of IPA involves the researcher asking a participant about a specific experience in order to facilitate them to engage in layer 4; 'deliberate controlled reflection'. This is also a bid to capture how the participant experienced layers 1, 2 and in particular, layer 3. For this reason IPA is said to be a study of cognition but Smith et al. are at pains to point out this is not the traditional definition of cognition as viewed by mainstream experimental social psychology, but cognition as complex, nuanced, situated and sense-making. This process also involves the researcher themselves engaging in layer 4 - deliberate controlled reflection - in order to *make sense* of the participant's reflections. This is what is called the 'double hermeneutic'. The double hermeneutic will be continually

revisited in the course of this thesis as I demonstrate not only participants' reflective process but my own also. For IPA researchers like me this means it is crucial to identify as far as possible my own thoughts and feelings on my research subject in order to put these aside, or 'bracket them off'. This will ensure that their influence upon my interpretation of participants is limited, or at least transparent.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics can be thought of as the study of *interpretation* or *how we draw meaning* from texts. Schleiermacher (e.g. 1988) emphasised that interpretation of text is based not just upon grammatical and language conventions but also the personal meanings brought to it by the author and reader. The act of interpretation in my research is therefore the act of establishing what is in the *intersubjective* space between participant, phenomena and myself. Interpretation also involves taking account of the 'hermeneutic circle' which describes how for example, a single word may influence the meaning of a sentence and the meaning of the sentence also influences the meaning of the single word.

Reflecting upon experience and interpreting participants' experiences is the main purpose of IPA which sits nicely with the ontological position of minimal hermeneutic realism which proposes that things do exist outside of human experience but they can only be brought into human awareness through the process of human thought.

The particular process of data collection and analysis that I used will be explored later, but first, in the spirit of rigour, I would like to address the drawbacks of this approach and consider how I will take account of these and why I rejected other approaches in favour of IPA.

3.1.5 Criticisms and alternative approaches

Although I have argued for the use of IPA in my research there are some drawbacks or limitations to this approach. In this section I will therefore present some alternative views and consider how other approaches could be applied to answer my question. In being open

about these alternative views I hope the rigour of my research will be increased through acknowledging its imperfections.

Some have examined the quality of published IPA work. Smith (2010) provides an overview of features that demonstrate good quality and bad quality IPA work, focussing mainly on what might be called fidelity - or how well IPA principles were applied during the research process. Brocki and Weardon (2006) completed a similar project but also provide insight into more fundamental difficulties with IPA itself. Brocki and Weardon (2006) reviewed 52 articles from the field of health psychology where the authors had applied IPA as their methodology. They identified problems with fidelity including researchers not being open about their own views and preconceptions so the impact of these upon the analysis could not be considered. They also identified that limited descriptions of the process of interviewing made it difficult to evaluate how the interview process influenced the participant's responses. This included not just the particular questions used by the researcher but also whether or not they offered interpretation during the process of the interview and the potential impact of this. It was also noted that in some papers the final themes simply reflected the topics on the interview schedule. Interview techniques will be discussed in more detail later but an issue perhaps more fundamental to the very premise of IPA is that Brocki and Weardon (2006) suggest that the individual and idiosyncratic aspects of participants' data could be lost through the process of looking for similarities and differences across a larger sample. By doing this, the particular feel and quality of each participant's experience could be flattened or lost. All of these issues are addressed later in this thesis.

In addition to the potential pitfalls of IPA itself there are also alternative approaches to the type of qualitative work I have undertaken in this project. Smith et al. (2012) provides an exploration of these. Firstly, IPA actually shares some similarity with, for example, discourse analysis in that, as mentioned above, it has reinterpreted what it means to study 'cognition', moving away from the experimental view of cognition as a set of information processes and towards viewing cognition as a process of meaning making. Approaches to discourse

analysis such as discursive psychology have done something similar, except for a crucial difference; discourse analysis explores how cognitions (or meanings) are *constructed by language*. Such approaches are more heavily embedded in social constructionism and lean further towards relativism on the ontological spectrum. The following table demonstrates how discourse analysis would change the meaning of my research.

IPA	Discourse analysis approaches	
	Discursive psychology	Foucauldian analysis
Understanding the meaning of mothers' experiences	Understanding how the mothers draw upon language resources to express themselves and for what purposes.	Understanding how the mothers' accounts are constructed by socio-political power structures embedded in our language.

Table 3: IPA versus discourse analysis: a comparison of approaches

As noted, IPA takes a curious and empathic stance towards participants in the belief that no matter how they construct their accounts or how enmeshed they are within cultural ideology, they are meaningful to them as individuals. The primary focus of IPA is the experience, not how it is constructed. However, the participant's cultural enmeshment (and indeed the researcher's) is, in fact, still a crucial aspect of the interpretative process. This is demonstrated and described in more detail in the analysis section later in this chapter.

Another qualitative approach called 'psycho-social' research highlights a potentially significant limitation in IPA research. Hollway (writing in Smith, Hollway, Mishler, Potter & Hepburn, 2005), emphasizes that unconscious processes are always at play and therefore what a participant *says* may not encompass the entire meaning of their experience. It is therefore a risk to accept participant's words as directly relating to their 'real' experience. This is difficult to argue with, however, the process of IPA invites the researcher to be *curious* about what is said and it is in this curiosity that there is room to acknowledge and think about the possibility of *unconscious* motivations behind participants' reflections.

3.2 Part B - Procedure

3.2.1 Validity and reliability

Having considered some of the limitations of IPA it seems like an appropriate point to discuss issues of validity and reliability. Before considering how I have specifically addressed these in the course of my research it is important to note that no discussion about 'validity' can be had without at least a nod to the cultural and historical positioning of science. As Harre (1984) emphasised, "science is a social activity. It is carried out by groups of people, for groups of people. Its results are used by communities" (p. 184). This means that how findings are judged depends on the values of the community in which it was produced and is being judged by. This challenges the notion that there is some fundamental approach to evaluating science that exists separate to those who developed it. As Harre (1984) points out, the *only* phenomena we can truly say exists is that which we feel through the sensations of our body. I can only know that, as I type these words, my fingertips detect a number of smooth, hard surfaces. Everything else about these surfaces (keys on a laptop) and what they mean (letters in the alphabet) is subject to probability and conjecture.

Writers such as Billig (1987) have pointed out that all language has a rhetorical function, including the language of sciences. This means that specific words are chosen in order to put across a particular argument. For example, words like 'rigour' or 'epistemology' are used to promote a sense of 'correctness' and make my research more believable since the academic community likes these words a lot. Billig (1987) argues that such language 'sells' the reader and academic community a particular idea of what knowledge should look like. Mishler (writing in Smith et al., 2005), for example, argues that Jeffersonian transcription methods used by conversation analysts have a 'rhetorical function' in that they form part of the argument for that approach (see the interview section below for further discussion). In my research the tools of IPA that I describe and use undoubtedly have a rhetorical function, selling the project to the reader.

While these issues may imply that there is no such thing as a good piece of research because there is no truth beyond our sensations and it's all made up by different scientific communities any way, there are in fact some ways of evaluating research. As Harre (1984) points out, there are some procedures that are better than others and I shall now consider how I will ensure that my own procedures are these better ones.

Firstly, simply by identifying the limitations both to the method of IPA and the process of evaluation itself I am being as transparent as possible. This is very important since by opening factors up to scrutiny I am ensuring that their impact can be considered. In addition, there are certain principles that have been declared benchmarks against which research should be judged. These are outlined by Yardley (2000) and recommended by Smith et al. (2012) for IPA projects:

1. *Sensitivity to context.* This means including the socio-cultural, theoretical and research contexts within which the project and findings are situated. It also means ensuring there is an audit trail so that it is clear how themes and conclusions were developed from the data.

2. *Commitment and rigour*. This means attending in detail to the data collection and analysis and applying rigour in the sample selection, question development and application of the methodological approach. The approach of IPA emphasises that participants must share a significant level of homogeneity in order that interpretations between and across experiences can be meaningful.

3. *Transparency and coherence*. This means ensuring the research is written with clarity and a coherent argument is presented. This is of great importance to me and, in particular, I take inspiration from the work of Billig (2011) who criticises how social psychological research is often intelligible to all but a few experts which reduces the opportunity for it to be challenged. I will also include visual descriptions of the development of themes to aid understanding.

4. ***Impact and importance***. This means ensuring that the research can be applied usefully within real life context. As IPA is founded on the notion of 'theoretical transferability' this means the findings should enable EP's and other professionals to apply the insight gained.

It can be seen that the current and previous chapters have already addressed many of the issues outlined and the rest shall be examined as the thesis proceeds.

3.2.2 Ethics

The ethics of research can be thought of in two ways, firstly, whether or not the findings of research may be harmful to society and secondly, whether the process is harmful to participants. I shall discuss both aspects here.

Harre (1984) explains that the psychological sciences encompass a much closer relationship between moral values and research programmes than the natural sciences. The outcomes of psychological science more directly influence human thought and practices. It is clear that psychological research, including this very project, must not be misused. This principle is embedded in the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Practice (2018) in which the duty of psychologists' to act responsibly is enshrined. As this project is exploratory and emancipatory in nature the aim is to highlight experiences that already exist in the world, to open up thinking about the experiences of home educators. But the morality of this may be perceived differently by different people. As suggested in the introductory chapter, there are areas of tension between the 'State' and home educators with debates about 'monitoring' in full swing as a private members bill proposing that home educators are monitored and adhere to particular requirements makes its way towards a second hearing in parliament. For some, my research may be seen as promoting something dangerous, for others it will be welcomed as a vehicle to giving authority to experiences that rightly counter accepted wisdom and cultural ideology about child development. This demonstrates that it is difficult to

control how the findings of research will be received since the reader will come to it with their own preconceptions.

The second aspect of ethics involves ensuring the process of the research is not harmful to participants. This required careful consideration of the impact of the research upon the wellbeing of participants both during and after the interviews. The following issues were considered:

- Would the interview upset participants?

- What help could be offered to participants?

- What impact would the research have? Would this be disappointing?

- Would the research be valid and therefore justify asking participants to take part?

- What would happen to the privacy of participants and their data?

To ensure that these questions were considered in full, I sought ethical approval from the Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC). This process of seeking external verification helped to ensure that all moral and ethical perspectives were considered, reducing the risk of me pursuing research that was unethical. The letter of approval from TREC can be found in Appendix D.

Ensuring the research meets the highest ethical standards includes ensuring a critical and detailed exploration has taken place at every decision making point in the research process. This exploration is illustrated throughout this chapter. There are also technical considerations, for example, with regard to the handling of data. These are outlined in the following table:

Ethical issue	Action taken to address the issue
Confidentiality and anonymity	Participants' data were anonymised and their personal details were known only to me (see below for issues regarding data

	storage). I informed participants that if any information arose during the interview that suggested they or someone else was in danger of harm I may need to break confidentiality. In addition, as part of health and safety procedures I would need to inform one member of staff as to my whereabouts when conducting interviews in participants' homes. With regard to anonymity, although all data was assigned with a pseudonym, it was possible that, for example, excerpts from the transcripts included in the research write up may be identified as coming from a specific person by someone close to them in the community.
Right to withdraw	Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point in the research process.
Data collection	Data was handled according to the Data Protection Act (1998). Digital files were anonymised and stored on password protected devices. Names, addresses and other identifying information was made known to me only. Participants' data will be stored for a minimum of 10 years as recommended by Research Councils UK (RCUK).
Duty of care	I highlighted to participants that due to the nature of the topic participants may feel upset during interviews. Furthermore the results of the research may not have the impact on services that was desired and this may be disappointing. I built in time at the end of interviews to provide participants with information about support services should they need them.

Table 4: Ethical considerations

Participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form highlighting all the above information prior to agreeing to take part in the research. These forms can be found in Appendix E.

3.2.3 Participants

I recruited six participants, which is suggested in Smith et al. (2012) as an appropriate number for a doctoral level project. This number also facilitated sufficient depth of analysis within the time scales for the project. The inclusion criteria for participation was designed to meet the aims of the study and also to ensure that participants had a sufficient level of homogeneity to facilitate theoretical transferability as is the aim of an IPA study. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were as follows:

Inclusion Criteria	Rationale
Proficiency in English	This was essential and assumed on the basis that interested participants would be confident English language speakers otherwise they would not want to take part.
The participant must be a mother.	The focus of the research is motherhood and, in particular, the relationship between mother and child. Bearing in mind potential gender differences, the experience of fathers may be significantly different, thus introducing heterogeneity.
Participants must be responsible for their children for at least 50% of the time.	This ensured that participants would all have a similar experience in terms of the amount of time spent with them. This was important because mothers who care for their children two days a week may have significantly different experiences to mothers who care for their children seven days a week.

Participants must not use private tutors	The research is situated within home education with the aim of capturing mothers' experiences as home educators themselves. The use of private tutoring may significantly change the dynamic between mother and child.
Participants will have a child with an identified special educational need OR an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) OR an older style Statement of Special Educational Needs.	This ensured that all the children being home educated by participants had a significant level of special needs. This, unfortunately, excluded those who did not yet have a diagnosis or EHCP but it was felt that to ensure sufficient homogeneity this was a necessary criteria.
The participants' children with SEN would be aged seven to eleven years old.	This age range represents the period known as 'latency' when developmental experience is often more stable compared to the more turbulent years before and after this age range (Waddell, 2005). This is also an age when, in our society, children are often expected to be taught specific skills such as reading and writing and therefore this was likely to be a common factor among the participants. In addition, the very act of restricting the age range fostered similarity in experience.
Participants must have been home educating for at least one year	This ensured that all participants had experienced a significant length of time to transition to home education. I wanted to find out participants' experiences once they had settled in to home education and therefore had a significant period of time to reflect upon during the interview.

The location of participants was restricted to London, the South East and the Midlands.	This ensured that I could access participants within a reasonable travelling time. Initially the geographical criteria encompassed London, Hertfordshire, Essex, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire or Bedfordshire but I extended it when I could not recruit the correct number of participants.

Table 5: Inclusion criteria for participants

Exclusion Criteria
Fathers
Mothers who spent less than half the week with their children
Mothers home educating for less than a year
Participant's child outside of the age range
Living outside of the geographical area

Table 6: Exclusion criteria for participants

Recruitment of participants took careful consideration since as a member of the home educating community myself, there were potentially a number of issues that could arise. These were:

- Knowing participants in a personal capacity could influence their contribution and also limit my own ability to 'bracket off' my thoughts and feelings during the interview and analysis stages.

- Recruiting participants from home educating forums to which I was already a member may have changed the way I was perceived by that community and impact on the support I previously received as a *mother* as I would now be perceived as a *professional*.

For these reasons I decided to recruit participants in a way that would reduce the likelihood of a personal connection. To do this I used closed online forums that I was not already a

member of and which were specifically aimed at supporting home educating parents whose children had special educational needs. In addition, the Elective Home Education team in the Local Authority where I worked agreed to send out my information sheet and consent forms to all home educators whose children had EHCP's (see Appendix F for recruitment adverts).

To recruit participants through online support forums I first located some suitable groups using Facebook as this is a popular way of people connecting to each other. Using this method I found four groups:

- Two general groups for home educators with children with all kinds of SEN.
- A group for home educators with children with autism.
- A group for home educators with children with autism and pathological demand avoidance.

I contacted each forum administrator explaining why I wanted to join and asking if I could have permission to use the forum to recruit participants. On being granted permission I placed an advert in the forum asking interested parties to contact me using my Tavistock email address. After much thought I decided that I would declare my status as a home educator from the outset. The reason for doing so was that this status has a profound influence on what is known as my 'footing', which will be explored further below. In addition, although I was attempting to limit the chances of personal contact with participants I could not rule this out altogether and it could potentially create problems of trust if I was to be accidentally discovered as home educator. In addition, some participants may have asked me directly and I felt it would be inappropriate to decline to answer this question when it was so pertinent to the research. Furthermore, participants were welcomed to read my thesis, throughout which I am open about being a home educator. I took this decision knowing that by informing participants of my status I would also be influencing their view of me, and therefore their responses. However, I felt that overall this may be beneficial since it may foster a greater amount of trust, which could lead to richer interviews.

I would like to note at this point that in order to protect the anonymity of participants and their children I have not described details of their children's age, gender or special educational needs beyond the broad criteria outlined above. This is because I felt this level of information would significantly increase the chances of participants being identifiable and wanted to prevent this happening.

3.2.4 Interviews and transcription

Once I recruited my participants I arranged to interview them at home. For my own protection I followed both the Tavistock and Local Authority policies regarding risk assessment and lone working. I recorded the interviews using two devices in case one failed. The interviews were then sent to a transcription service and transcribed verbatim. Details of this can be found in the next section. I decided not to conduct a pilot interview as I felt it would be unethical for me to request a participant delve into their experience of such a personal and meaningful topic only for it not to be included in the research. Additionally, conducting one pilot interview would not necessarily have prepared me for the others since every participant was likely to bring different issues, different feelings and a different interview dynamic. Instead, to prepare for the interviews I explored the interview technique in detail as I shall demonstrate next.

The interview stage of research is perhaps one of the most defining features of the entire process and thus I gave it substantial thought. The interview method is fraught with potential pitfalls and at times has quite rightly received substantial criticism. Potter (2012) emphasises that naturalistic sources of data should be favoured over interview data because they are less fettered by the research process. To demonstrate, Potter (2012) notes that conversation analysts have explored how the structure and content of questions can constrain the responses given. Potter and Hepburn (2005) argue that such issues create significant problems when researchers remove the traces of the interviewer from the interview process. This prevents the reader being able to judge the influence of the researcher on the outcomes of the research.

Potter and Hepburn also identify more fundamental difficulties with interview research. They claim that the interview itself will be 'flooded' with ideas and emphases central to the researcher and their academic tradition. These can be obvious or very subtle. Questions can be loaded with the researcher's agenda in such a way that they produce answers the researcher is looking for. This is similar to some of the criticisms of IPA research noted above where the interview topics defined the themes in the findings. Potter and Hepburn also argue that interviews should always be transcribed using the Jeffersonian method (Jefferson, 2004) which includes aspects of non-verbal communication such as length of pauses. They argue that such phenomena may change the meaning of any given utterance.

In any interview, the participant and researcher will have a particular 'footing' or stance from which they are engaging in the topic and which influences the interview process. Of particular importance here is my own footing which was shaped by the fact that I was a home educator at the time of conducting the interviews. As discussed I felt that this footing was important to declare so that it could be thought about and considered as part of the analysis, or the 'double hermeneutic' described above.

Although Potter and Hepburn (2005) make excellent points, there are alternative views. Smith (writing in Smith et al., 2005) suggests that Jeffersonian transcription methods may, in fact, highlight interactional elements which *are not* the focus of the research. This highlights an important issue for my own research: which interactional elements *are* the foci of the research? The question and answer format employed implies it might be the interaction between the interviewer and participant, however, there is also a more hidden interaction - that between the participants and the wider academic audience they may imagine will read their responses. This broader interpretation of 'interaction' demonstrates that Jeffersonian transcription actually only captures a limited number of interactional elements. Smith, being one of the founders of the IPA approach, naturally argues that interviews can be very useful for exploring particular types of questions such as the way in people make sense of experiences.

Hollway (also writing in Smith et al., 2005) also points out that questions that elicit experiences can help avoid reproducing common discourses or the social science agenda. She also argues that interviews can be used to explore different aspects of a relationship between people, for example, the subconscious positioning of the interviewer and interviewee. In this sense the interview format, far from encroaching upon the purity of data, is what fundamentally drives the analysis. Hollway also argues that the focus upon Jeffersonian transcription ignores subconscious elements and the way in which meaning is derived from the whole interaction, not just individual excerpts. The emotional responses of the interviewer are equally valid data and these cannot be captured using transcription. This is obviously a key factor in my own research project and I have endeavoured to be as open as possible about my thoughts, feelings and fears in order that these are open to scrutiny.

Having considered some of the general arguments for and against interviewing as a technique for data collection I will now explore in more detail the exact approach I took to the interview process. Some guidance is found in Smith et al. (2012) in which two broad approaches to IPA interviewing are described; semi-structured and unstructured. In response to the findings in the literature review and some of the criticisms of IPA studies identified by Brocki and Weardon (2006) above, I decided to take an unstructured approach. This would enable the participants to describe to me what was important to them. To do this I started with an overall core question:

"Can you tell me what your relationship with x is like?"

In response to this participants described a number of features of their relationship and these formed the broad interview schedule. As the interview progressed I returned to these topics to explore them further. In this way I reduced the risk of simply repeating themes that had previously been outlined by others. In the discussion chapter of this thesis I compare participants' responses to the results of previous studies, finding some interesting contrasts and similarities.

Although this unstructured approach was designed to limit the risk of my own agenda influencing participants, as pointed out by Potter (2012) and Potter and Hepburn (2005) this was not possible to eliminate altogether. To explore this, during the interview process I kept a reflective diary, noting down thoughts about my performance in each interview. This allowed me to keep track of how I may have been impacting on the data collection. I will highlight a number of observations now.

Although participants provided a 'schedule' in their response to my core question, I still played a significant role in defining this by selecting what I *thought* to be key factors to follow up. It is possible and likely that my choices may have been influenced by my own agenda. In addition, at times I was unable to follow up on all points due to time constraints and at other times my own knowledge of particular home educating and parenting practices interfered with me unpicking the participant's own meanings. As an example, here is an extract from my reflective diary:

> *"... she referred to the 'unschooling' and I failed to ask her to explain what this meant to her because I am very familiar with the term from my own experience as a home educator. This has made me realise I need to ensure that I ask participants to explain terms even when I already have a good understanding of them because a) they may have a different understanding and b) readers of my research will not understand the term at all."*
>
> *(Entry from 25/10/2017)*

I also played a role in steering the interview by the comments I made and the style of the follow up questions I asked. As far as possible I made the choice not to offer interpretations to the participants as the interview progressed. This was because I felt strongly that I wanted to prioritise the participants' own interpretations. To do this I limited my responses to offering empathy or expressing interest. Furthermore, the questions I posed were neutral and probing, as described by Smith and Osborn (2003):

> *Can you tell me more about that?*
>
> *What does that mean to you?*

How did that feel?

What was the impact on you?

Finally, it was also the case that with each interview my technique improved as I became more adept at probing participants and picking up on the topics they raised. Central to this improvement was my reflective diary which allowed me to identify areas in interviewing technique that were going well and areas that I felt needed to improve. In the next section I will describe how I analysed the data, exploring the factors that bore upon this and thus the final results.

3.2.5 Data analysis

Once the data was transcribed I conducted the analysis drawing on guidance from Smith et al. (2012). This involved the following steps:

a. Reading and re-reading each transcription

b. Initial noting examining descriptive, semantic and linguistic content on an exploratory level (see Appendix G for an example excerpt).

c. Developing emergent themes by mapping interrelationships, connections and patterns in exploratory notes.

d. Searching for connections across emergent themes and grouping them to form subordinate themes.

e. Due to the high number of subordinate themes I included another layer of thematic development, searching for connections across subordinate themes to create 8 to ten *super*ordinate themes.

f. Repeating steps (a) – (f) with each transcription.

g. Looking for patterns across all the cases to form six overarching themes.

For clarity, the full thematic development for each participant, including development of overarching themes, can be found in Appendix H. Two of the participants did not meet the inclusion criteria, but this only came to light during my interview with them. As they had

already committed significant time, thought and effort to the process I felt it most ethical to incorporate their data. To do this while maintaining the integrity of the IPA process they were omitted from step g so as to ensure only the most homogenous group were included when looking for patterns across cases. Instead I compared their superordinate themes to the *overarching* themes of the main group, looking for similarities and differences in this way.

Smith et al. (2012) emphasise that the researcher should not only describe what the participants have said but look for deeper meaning through the process of *interpretation*. This required me to look beyond a surface level understanding and use significant personal resources when deciding how to interpret the data. In order to do so sensitively and without imposing false meaning I recorded my personal observations and reactions to the data. This helped me to surface and 'bracket off' ideas that may contaminate or misrepresent the data. The following are extracts from these observations:

- Feeling critical towards participants who parented in a different way to me.
- Being drawn to aspects of experience that I could relate to my own, for example, worrying about my children not doing enough 'learning', emphasising building self-esteem.
- Feeling envious of participants' descriptions of their relationship with their children.
- Feeling angry at how participants were sometimes treated by professionals and others.
- Wanting to 'advise' or 'reassure' participants.
- Wondering how my role as a professional and the purpose of the research may have influenced what the participant's said.
- Having a strong emotional response to participant's descriptions, for example, feeling in awe of the commitment they had made.
- Fear about how the participants' experiences will be received by professionals and others.
- Fear about how my interpretations will be received by the participants themselves.

By noting these observations they became clarified, helping to ensure that my interpretation was led by the participant's experience *as they described it* and not just my own reactions. Of course, this is not a perfect process and there will undoubtedly have been unconscious processes at play as noted in my discussion of Hollway (writing in Smith et al. 2005) above. However, to minimise the impact of this I asked a colleague and my research supervisor to read a full notated transcript to ensure that my interpretations were reasonable. As noted, thematic development for each participant can also be found in the appendix.

3.3 Summary

In this chapter I have described the theoretical underpinnings of IPA and the procedures I used to conduct the research. This has included casting a critical eye upon at all aspects of the project from conception to analysis and an exploration of validity and reliability. In the next section I will present the findings of my analysis.

4. Results

4. 1 Chapter overview

The aim of this chapter is to describe the results of the analytical process, providing quotes from the participants' interviews to evidence the findings. The analytical process resulted in the creation of five overarching themes; 'Empowering Child', 'Attunement and Connection', 'The Super Mother', 'Threats: Past, Present and Future' and 'Transformation and Growth'. After exploring how these themes are present in Natalie, Ruth, Rowena and Layla's accounts, I will compare Wendy and Sarah's experiences as outlined in section 3.2.5 of the methodology chapter.

Before proceeding I would like to set the findings into context by highlighting some important factors. Smith et al. (2012) note that *writing up* findings involves returning to the detail of participants' experiences. This process contributes further to the analysis as subtleties and emphases shift and change in response to the detail. In the case of my research, some subordinate themes came forth more strongly and others dropped back into the background. This is reflected in the choices of quotes to evidence the overarching themes. The participants' interviews yielded enormously rich data and by nature of the process, some of the subtleties within these accounts have been lost as choosing to include one aspect involves excluding another. However, in order to uphold the individual personalities and overall integrity and individuality of each participant's experience I have chosen to describe each in turn when exploring the overarching themes. There is also a risk that by creating a set of discrete themes the impression is given of hard boundaries between each. In fact, they are highly interrelated and I shall note when these inter-relations are particularly strong. Finally, all but one mother had more than one child and at times the mothers talked holistically about their parenting approach, making no distinction between children, and for this reason references to siblings are also included in the analysis where appropriate. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Transcription / quote key	
"…"	Quote from participant
[ ]	My own utterances
{ }	Participant's non-verbal communication
R, R, N, L, W, S	Indicates participant's initial during an exchange
I	Indicates a question asked by the interviewer (me)

Table 7: Transcription/quote key

4.2 Empowering Child

As an introduction to this theme, Table 9 demonstrates how the super-ordinate themes from each mother were drawn together to form the overarching theme 'Empowering Child'.

Thematic map: Empowering Child	
	Super-ordinate themes
Natalie	Nurturing confidence and strength Prioritising child's own processes Being on the same level
Ruth	Collaboration not control Facilitating child's autonomy
Rowena	Guardian and mentor*
Layla	Acting as a human bridge

Table 8: Thematic map: Empowering child

*Rowena's superordinate theme 'guardian and mentor' was shared across two overarching themes. Different subordinate themes are included in each.

4.2.1 Natalie (nurturing confidence and strength, prioritising child's own processes, being on the same level)

> "A life to watch and to be part of [mmm hmm]… having that life entwined with yours".
> (lines 1166-1169)

Empowerment is the central theme in Natalie's relationship with her children. The above

quote demonstrates her belief in fostering her children's individual identities (*a life to watch*)

and her job of supporting and collaborating (*be part of, entwined*) with her children. In particular, as I shall demonstrate, Natalie rejects the notion of parent 'knowing best' and instead seeks to empower her children in a distinctly child-centred way. The following excerpt demonstrates Natalie's priority to foster her children's individual identities through total acceptance of who they are:

> *"I make sure that they know that they have as much right to be themselves [mmm] in our house as I do or anyone else [yeah]. You know, their precise personality and how it is, is to be respected".* (lines 149-153)

This bold statement suggests a lack of fear or worry and importantly a high level of what might be termed 'respect'. Hand in hand with this stems Natalie's belief in positioning her children as having equal status with her:

> *"…so it's about putting yourself in a position where you're not better than them and you don't know more than them".* (lines 499-501)

Natalie's approach implies a great deal of humility which forms the foundation of her approach to developing self-esteem by being non-judgemental, fostering the feeling of acceptance and by conferring her children with autonomy. These are interlinked concepts and incorporate Natalie's personal relationship with her children as well as her desire to help them feel successful in the activities they undertake:

> *" I really want you to grow in confidence [yeah absolutely] and I think the last thing you need is to be told what to do. You don't need to be told you're wrong, you don't need to be criticised". (lines 364-366)*

Here, Natalie demonstrates her emphasis on helping her children to feel successful particularly when her son is stressed and worried. It also demonstrates how Natalie's beliefs are translated into actions. Natalie's belief that acceptance is key to developing confidence also leads her to seek outside help, identifying an opportunity for her son to gain *external* validation by recruiting volunteers to hang out with him:

"… it was amazing and… and they changed him [yeah]. And I think that was because they were there saying, you're okay [yeah]. Never saying you're okay, but saying it by being there, by giving him time and by letting him be himself." (lines 431-438)

Here, Natalie feels that her son felt accepted and validated through his experience of the volunteers. This example also demonstrates that empowering her son involves seeking opportunities outside of her relationship with him - seeking the power of new relationships.

The giving of autonomy is the final key component in Natalie's desire to support the development of her children's empowerment. This involves letting go of control and having great trust in her children's own processes; not just with play activities but also with making choices about aspects of their daily lives usually dictated by parents - such as sleep:

"I bought him a computer, let him go on it for hours, let him watch telly. He would read, he would go on his computer [yeah], he would sleep funny hours, um, but I gave him autonomy, and I still give him autonomy". (lines 357-361)

4.2.2 Ruth (collaboration not control, facilitating child's autonomy)

Ruth also had a strong focus upon what she termed 'consensual living' which involves collaborating and finding solutions together:

"So, um… so at the same time I dropped all the house rules, which sounds a bit radical, um, and we work on three principles. The principles of respecting each other [yeah], respecting our property and respecting ourselves and basically if things are happening and I feel it's a little bit not appropriate we'll talk about those principles [yeah]. So, I don't have any hard and fast rules, I also don't have any punishments, I don't have any rewards [right okay yeah]". (lines 25-33)

This passage suggests a strongly democratic approach to family life with children enabled to live as they wish within the boundaries of the three principles. This unbounds them from the control of rules in the traditional sense. Ruth states that her aim is to foster intrinsic motivation and this encompasses not just a way of living as described above, but also her educational philosophy known as 'unschooling'. This approach actively promotes autonomy and involves seeing the developmental value in children's play and interests. Ruth notes that

crucially, it is through being allowed to follow his own processes that her son (with autism) has been able to take steps forward in his development:

> *"what I've found since… particularly with unschooling because he's free to do what… you know, where his passions and interests take him. It's interesting to see how he seems to be backfilling…[mmm] many of the developmental stages that he missed".* (lines 174-179)

Importantly, this involves valuing activities that are not traditionally seen as 'educational' such as watching YouTube:

> *"So, Pokémon is… is just beautiful, the pro social behaviours are amazing. The… yes these kids are battling these Pokémon but their team spirit and their support of each other [mmm]…and, um, their sportsmanship is phenomenal".* (lines 1173-1178)

This suggests that the conferring of autonomy acts as the vehicle for learning and development and Ruth's role, in her words, becomes one of 'facilitator' or 'enabler' (line 196). In a similar way to Natalie, Ruth rejects a role of authority. However, she is always present and takes a subtle role in extending her children's development:

> *"rather than forcing them down any… I try and open things up and say we could try this and we could try that".* (lines 200-201)

For Ruth then, empowering her children means conferring autonomy and seeing the value in her children's choices of activity. It also means extending learning by presenting new opportunities.

4.2.3 Rowena (guardian and mentor)

For Rowena, empowering her child (who has a diagnosis of ADHD) involves thinking about the future and keeping him safe:

> *"I just want to keep him out of the criminal justice system, that's my main aim [yeah]. To try and get him savvy to what's going on, and try and get him to choose positive things to do with his time".* (lines 711-714)

In this instance, empowerment stems from a worry about her son's future and a need to

protect him. This garners a more authoritative approach towards him than Natalie and Ruth - acting as his guardian and mentor. In this sense Rowena also takes up a more traditional teaching approach compared to Natalie and Ruth:

"So, I teach Liam a lot about, you know, observe the group, watch the group, decide if you're going to go into the group". (lines 642-644)

Social experiences, as well as talk and conversation, are viewed as essential to equipping her son with skills:

"I'm more focused on getting him to be sociable [yeah], interacting, taking him to lunch, all these kind of things [yeah]. Speaking to people in the supermarket". (lines 30-32)

This also entails taking up a role as a 'persuader' through imparting wisdom and advice in a bid to help her child fit in with the social world:

"I try to explain to him if you don't brush your hair you look crazy and people won't want to talk to you [yeah]". (lines 873-874)

Rowena's approach marks a shift towards a more traditional parental role in comparison to Ruth and Natalie. For her, empowering her child means not just ensuring his happiness but helping him to fit in with society.

4.2.4 Layla (acting as a human bridge)

Layla similarly seeks to empower her child (with autism) by planning for what his future may look like. She also draws on the concept of acceptance in a similar way to Natalie. Accepting her son for who he is appears to be fundamental to ensuring he has the skills he needs later on:

"I don't need him to be different, I don't need him to be neurotypical [mm hmm]. I want to give him the abilities to choose how he expresses himself". (lines 160-162)

"If he wants to PFN (pass for normal) for a while in a situation then that's fine. If you want to, you know, be fiddling with something in your pocket, [mmm] or be… be stimming in a way that everyone else does [yeah] that's okay too. You know, so my… I have a whole life view for him". (lines 178-182)

Empowering her child is therefore about helping him to be himself in a world that is designed for neurotypical people. Layla seeks to achieve this by taking on a role that she describes as an 'interpreter':

> *"I explain the world to Dylan and if necessary I explain Dylan to the world."* (lines 130-131)

This involves conversation about events that seek to build his understanding such as exploring interactions that have happened in the day. Layla also steers her son's education, providing lessons that are familiar to the school system such as history and science (lines 440-442). However, she, like the other mothers, has a focus on providing experiences such as attending regular autism groups and boys brigade (line 473). Layla experiences her relationship with her son as very attached and she uses the nature of this attachment to her to inform her home education goals:

> *"because he's very Velcro so one of the aims for this year, this year six [mm], is that he does more without me".* (lines 653-654)

Here there is a reference to developing autonomy which fits with her 'whole life' view of 'opening as many doors' as she can for her son (line 158). Autonomy in this relationship is conceptualised as something to be developed over time.

4.3 Attunement and Connection

As an introduction to this theme, Table 10 demonstrates how the super-ordinate themes from each mother were drawn together to form the overarching theme 'Attunement and Connection'.

Thematic map: Attunement and Connection	
	Super-ordinate themes
Ruth	Attunement fundamental

Natalie	Happy family Connection as a tool
Layla	Self as connected to child Relationship tools Being in harmony
Rowena	Guardian and mentor* Struggles with child

Table 9: Thematic map: Attunement and connection

*Rowena's superordinate theme 'guardian and mentor' was shared across two overarching themes. Different subordinate themes are included in each.

4.3.1 Ruth (attunement fundamental)

For Ruth, her relationship with her child is the driver of learning and development and the key tool in this relationship can be conceptualised as attunement. At the start of home educating, Ruth describes embarking upon a process of 'deschooling', the aim of which is to 'reconnect' (line 447) which suggests developing a better understanding of him and becoming more in tune with his needs. In theme 1 'empowering child' I described how Ruth allows her son to follow his own interests and it is through careful observation of these that she builds her connection with her child. This is viewed as providing a road into her child's mind:

> R   *"And actually you can see him now taking this part, and this part and this part, I think we should build a videogame or story that does this and this, and you can almost see it.*
> I   *When you say that you can almost see it can you tell me more about that?*
> R   *It's just… I don't know it's… it's not… it's not actually visual [yeah] but you can see how… his brain is… I recognise the chunks that are coming from different places and together they form a unique picture that he's created".*
> (lines 1182-1191)

Ruth describes how she not only observes her child, but takes part in the activities that he is interested in and how this connection opens up opportunities for development:

> *"it started out that he wanted to play Minecraft so I play Minecraft with him [yeah]. He wanted to watch various videos and DVDs so I either watched them with him [yeah] or I would keep an eye on it while I did other things and then we'd talk about it [yeah]. And I would support… I would say oh, have you tried this, have you tried that [yeah], and value what he's interested in and that builds that connection".* (lines 1111-1118)

Crucially, these connection activities develop what Ruth describes as an instinctive understanding of her son (line 220). For Ruth, the experience of a high level of attunement helps to facilitate decision-making about the next stages of her son's development:

> *"I feel his boredom now. I can feel it [yeah]. I know the difference between him actively watching YouTube and exploring things and looking at things and passively watching it".* (lines 290-293)

Ruth experiences connection and attunement as facilitators of development but they also underpin a trusting and loving relationship. For Ruth, this represents a significant shift from her relationship with her son prior to home education, which was fraught:

> *"He genuinely loves giving you a big cuddle [yeah] and sometimes he'll come and give me a kiss whereas I never had that when he was in school [yeah] because we were at such loggerheads. Whereas now I think he believes that I have his best interests at heart [yeah] and I try… and I've got his back."* (lines 1090-1096)

Attunement with others is also seen as valuable and Ruth views her son's relationship with his brother and other friendships as crucial to developing social skills. These relationships are felt to be qualitatively different to school based friendships because they are viewed as 'deeper, proper' friendships, suggesting a greater level of attunement than experienced before:

> *"I would say now the friendships he has are more genuine [yeah], deeper, proper friendships, um, and he's learning… his social skills are coming on much, much faster and much, much better now that he's not in school and he's in these one to one relationships".* (lines 1245-1250)

4.3.2 Natalie (connection as a tool, happy family)

For Natalie, interactions with her son are an avenue to a deeper connection through which an understanding of his emotional needs and trust are developed. It is through her observations of these interactions that Natalie experiences changes to her relationship with her son. This includes influencing the way others communicate with him in a bid to nurture his wellbeing:

> *"So, it was a little bit more than six months [yeah] but all my interactions… I could see how much it affected him to be told off [mmm], and in fact I was put in the position to tell Brian off quite a few times [right], you know, his dad."* (lines 396-400)

For Natalie, connection is also attached to playfulness and warmth and her account emanates a sense of great happiness within the family. She notes that physical connection such as bouncing on the trampoline together is particularly important. Natalie feels this increases her children's happiness and 'fills their cup' (line 682). It is also specifically through playful activities that learning opportunities evolve:

> *"I love laughing with her and connecting with her, that's a really… it's a really crucial thing and in fact it's changed since the writing. Since I discovered that she prefers me writing and her copying"* (lines 669-672)

Connection is also used as a tool for healing anxiety and distress in both Natalie and her son. For her son, connecting with the volunteers who came to hang out with him had a 'calming down' effect (line 455). It also enabled him to try out new activities he was previously too anxious to attempt:

> *"He wanted to go (to martial arts) but he was too anxious.... just couldn't face being around children, being in a… in a room [yeah], worried about doing things wrong and then Freddie, the last of the volunteers to join us, I asked him would you be up for Saturday mornings? I collect Freddie from the village where we have our martial arts, bring him home, he chats and laughs with Tom for ten or 15 minutes, they go to martial arts together and Tom has no qualms."* (lines 475-484)

Connection is also deeply important for Natalie. She describes her experience of being traumatised after her son's accident and resulting brain injury. Speaking to friends on the phone throughout the day supported her through this period. She describes this as 'emotional hygiene' (line 1137) noting the importance of socialising for her:

> *"it's important for me to socialise, and to talk to people from the heart and to have connections. So really important to me".* (lines 1100-1102)

4.3.3 Layla (self as connected to child, relationship tools, being in harmony)

Layla experiences connection as an aspect of her relationship with her son from his very early life. There is a sense of this being a special kind of connection because she facilitated his development of communication by using sign language with him. As noted in the theme Empowering Child, Layla describes herself as her son's interpreter. This special partnership meant that from a young age there was a great deal of closeness:

> *"I was signing with him and I was the person that was in essence teaching him his language [yeah] meant that we had a good relationship early on".* (lines 37-40)

For Layla, as well as sign language, communication with her son is facilitated by the use of other 'tools' such as boardmarker symbols and sand timers. She finds that these provide clarity and have helped to reduce tension in the relationship in the past:

> *"we had sand timers for… and it was that… because he was signing it was 'wait wait' sand, and that was brilliant because somehow in his head it wasn't you [mm]. It was the wait wait sand".* (lines 577-580)

Physical connectedness is also a huge part of Layla's relationship with her son. She views its use not just as an expression of love and warmth but as way of supporting wellbeing:

> *"he does suffer with anxiety [yeah] but he's also quite, um… he's quite responsive to tactile reassurance [yeah, okay] so, you know, a cuddle, and a squeeze and a stroke works for him".* (lines 90-93)

For Layla, these physical and psychological connections facilitate harmony which appears to be underpinned by a high level of *congruency* between everyone's needs. An example of this is that Layla notes her son is 'sensory seeking' but the family style is *also* very 'touchy feely' (line 82) - although she feels that this can get a bit much at times. Layla also notes that they take a semi-structured approach to learning because it suits both of them (lines 214-216). This congruency is felt to foster wellbeing in both Layla and her son and to nurture their relationship:

> *"We're in a little bubble of actually we're okay [yeah]. Um, he's okay and I'm okay, and we're okay and it's okay."* (lines 407-408)

This sense of harmony and enjoyment is also evident through the range of activities carried out together; listening to radio programmes, going on trips, watching movies, singing and dancing, eating lunch as a family (e.g. lines 446 and 458). This 'togetherness' in turn facilitates further learning opportunities through conversation and discussion (line 460).

4.3.4 Rowena (guardian and mentor, struggles with child)

Rowena's experience of connection and attunement provides a different perspective to the others. She speaks of a 'knowing' her child instinctively, appealing to the notion that this is the role of a mother (lines 650-651):

> *"I know that his triggers, his sensory issues, his heat problems, all the rafter of stuff that makes it really difficult for him [mm], especially indoor environments. You know, give him a tree and water half the problems are dissipated [yeah], water especially".* (lines 143-149)

Rowena's sense of 'knowing' her child gains extra emphasis by being juxtaposed with her experience of struggles with professionals in the education and health care systems who, in a sense, are unable to 'know' him (to be explored later). Because Rowena experiences a strong sense of knowing her son she is poignantly able to recognise his strengths and achievements:

> *"I'm very, very proud of him. I think he's a great kid [yeah]. He's managed to get up, keep going, be rejected, keep going, you know, he's full of life. He's charming, he's funny, he's compassionate. He's got more understanding than probably a lot of children because he's gone to special educational provision."* (lines 655-660)

As with the other mothers, Rowena describes spending lots of time with her son doing activities together (line 568) but she also recalls more difficult times they have together. Congruency and harmony can be hard to come by at times and Rowena describes, for example, battles over daily tasks (lines 869-870). During these times there is a deep sense of disconnection:

> *"he's very controlling. [yeah] He doesn't like me doing anything. I can't walk the dog*

anymore. Um, having him at home is exhausting, [yeah] just pure and simple, it's just constant". (lines 3-6)

This excerpt also raises another aspect of attunement and connectedness touched upon by Natalie previously – that of the mothers' own wellbeing. Rowena's experience of her own wellbeing is important and she describes times when stress and worry have impacted upon her ability to connect with her son and parent in the way she wants to:

> *"we spent like a year with the whole sitting on the sofa just… I was absolutely just in a state of shock [yeah], I'd say for about nine months [really]. And Liam, bless him, he was just carrying on watching TV, watching this, watching that".* (lines 317-322)

> *"I can be horrible, I can say horrible things, you know, you're a lazy little beep, get off your arse and do something, you know. I get my days where I'm just… I'm not [yeah] the compassionate mother that I want to be [yeah] because it gets frustrating".* (lines 913-917)

Rowena's account of her experiences led me to wonder if cultural values were also influencing her experiences. For example, another possible barrier to Rowena being able to 'tune in' to her son may stem from cultural expectations about what it is to be a good mother. Rowena makes reference to her own strict upbringing and parenting 'rules' such as limiting time watching TV (line 324). Yet she also notes that TV on in the background helps her son to relax (line 327). These tensions in her experience are evident on a few occasions in her account and I wonder how difficult these are to grapple with.

4.4 The Super Mother

As an introduction to this theme, Table 11 demonstrates how the super-ordinate themes from each mother were drawn together to form the overarching theme 'The Super Mother'.

Thematic map: The Super Mother	
	Super-ordinate themes
Layla	Super parent
Ruth	Introspection Re-claiming education

Natalie	The mind as a source Mother as the source
Rowena	Keeping going

Table 10: Thematic map: The 'super' mother

4.4.1 Rowena (*keeping going*)

Rowena's experience fits the theme of 'super-mother' in a quite a different way to the other participants. Earlier on I outlined some of the struggles she faced in her relationship with her son. I wonder if these challenges mean that she perhaps requires more compassion than others in her life, in order to cope with some of her son's actions. She finds it helps to remind herself that he is not intentionally vindictive (line 951). As the following excerpt shows she is able to see a wider perspective that others can't:

> *"Well, I had to obviously adapt having a child like Liam [yeah]. You can't… you have to… you can't let bad behaviour go but you can't fight every single battle [yeah] because you would be exhausted, and there's certain things you just let go and then maybe get judgement from family. Oh, he swore at you. Yeah, I know he swore at me, it's not nice, it's… it doesn't feel good but really in the grand scheme of things nobody's injured".* (lines 1173-1180)

In addition, Rowena feels she has to keep going in spite of significant health difficulties that have made ordinary activities much more difficult to cope with:

> *"by the time I get somewhere my heart's racing, I'm usually sweating [yeah]. I feel like exhausted, it's just really tiring".* (lines 485-488)

For Rowena, these health difficulties contribute to fears about her own wellbeing, to the point of worrying about whether the difficulties with her son may actually lead to her death. This highlights the level of stress that Rowena has to bear:

> *"I can't do this. I'm literally going to have a coronary heart attack because of your… you know, unwillingness because of his learning disabilities".* (lines 25-27)

4.4.2 Layla (super parent)

For Layla, being a 'super' mother is characterised by her professional identities as a social

worker for people with disabilities and a university lecturer merging with her role as mum. This merged role supports her to carefully manage her son's home education experience and also become a 'manager' of outside professionals. This 'professional' experience enables her to take up a lot of authority and confidence:

> *"So, I keep good records [right okay yeah] and I, um… I know exactly who's doing what, what they're doing, why they're doing it, when it will be done by [okay yeah yeah]. And you can absolutely guarantee that the day after it isn't done I will be on the phone very politely [yeah], very professionally wanting to just check out why it wasn't done, and when it will be done".* (lines 107-112)

An important distinction to make is that this strong, authoritative part of her identity does not seem to be applied to her relationship with her son which, as explored above, has a warmer sense of experience. Instead, it appears to help Layla as a planning and organising mechanism and a way of interacting with others to 'get things done'. Layla also employs a high level of reflection that drives her to question and explore:

> *"So, I really know my son and that doesn't mean I don't have anything learn, I have loads to learn, I'm constantly learning [mm]. I'm constantly going, do you know, I never thought of that. How interesting, I wonder if that…".* (lines 308-311)

This 'reflective practice' feeds into her planning and knowledge of her son, for example, she describes gradually facilitating her son's independence "carefully and consciously" (line 679). When I asked her what it was like to be carrying out all these processes for her son she replies:

> *"you don't notice you do it [mmm] until you tell somebody about what you do because that's our normal".* (lines 147-148)

The irony in 'our normal' suggests awareness that it is decidedly not 'normal' to be employing such a high level of thought and planning. Layla acknowledges that although every child needs to learn to develop, her son needs *more* (line 726). So although, her experience has become 'normal', it may be better thought of as a 'super-normality'. This super-normality requires significant resources, not just in skills but in dedication also. This is

summed up poignantly in Layla's reflection:

> *"I don't mean my job, I mean my... calling. This is what I am to do. This is my [pauses]… this is what I am to do and I do this to the nth degree, to the best of my ability, to the last breath in my body [mm] and then I let him go".* (lines 719-722)

4.4.3 Ruth (introspection, re-claiming education)

Unlike Layla, Ruth does not have professional training in a related field but she engages in a deep level of thinking and introspection. This includes asking questions about her and her son's experiences to deepen her awareness:

> *"You could look and say, urgh, what are you getting out of this? [mm] And that's where the challenge comes, that's where the value is. You kind of go…what is he getting out of it, he's drawn to this all the time…what is the value to him? Because there must be a value to him, there must be something."* (lines 1127-1135)

For Ruth, this drive to explore and question is fostered through her experience of 'deschooling' a process which she describes as reconnecting (line 447), healing (line 452) and observation (line 459). She feels this process trains her to see education in broader terms (line 490). This is not an easy task and requires significant self-reflection and as we shall see later in the analysis, Ruth feels she has gone through a paradigm shift in her own parenting philosophy. The end result is a harnessing of restraint so that restraint itself becomes a thinking tool:

> *"Um, but, um, I… it is about holding yourself in check [mmm] whilst it all goes… seemingly goes pear-shaped and actually saying what is going on here and [mm hmm]…what's the important message because… then working to a solution together".* (lines 858-864)

Ruth makes every effort to think about what is going on under the surface before responding to her son (line 872-874). She also feels that raising *his* awareness of what is under the surface is key to helping him overcome fear and anxiety:

> *"So, I am starting very much to talk to him about anxiety [yeah] and just talking about, um, how it feels and… and… I'll say to him I think you're actually avoiding this and I think it's because you feel anxious about this [yeah], and can I find out what it is*

because then we can help [yeah]. Um, so I don't have a plan as such other than to try and… my current plan is to just bring that anxiety into his conscious [yeah] as opposed to in his subconscious". (lines 654-662)

Here, we also see that Ruth has a focus on unconscious processes and this extends to her belief that much learning takes place unconsciously (line 1159). This belief links to another way in which Ruth can be thought of as pushing the boundaries of motherhood – through 'deschooling' mentioned earlier - she reclaims and reconstructs the very fundamentals of what education means:

"I'm not worrying about academics. It's about supporting his developmental needs now [yeah] because the academics will come, I'm sure of it. It's all about whole person view as opposed to this we must keep you going down this societal route of, you know, these… an educational route of these markers".(lines 190-197)

This reconceptualization involves the bringing together of parenting and schooling (e.g. lines 22-25). In this way life skills are gained through *interactions* and *experiences* with each other:

"But we can work together [yeah] in a compromise situation and that… not only is that good for our relationship but it's good modelling for them as they go into be adults, how to compromise in their relationships with other people". (970-973)

4.4.4 Natalie (the mother as the source, the mind as the source)

"I know that the more I put in the more it benefits them". (lines 718-719)

What stands out from Natalie's experiences is the total synthesis between her values towards herself and her values towards her children. For Natalie, she heals and they heal, she finds her strengths and helps them find their strengths, she tunes into her own feelings and tunes into theirs. In the following excerpt this is illustrated in relation to strengths:

"To value it in myself, find my own strength and help them to find their strengths so that they can be amazing". (lines 562-564)

Natalie also emphasises that she knows her children better than anyone else (line 275) and in this sense holds herself very responsible for her children's outcomes. This is manifested in

a desire to be highly rigorous in her thinking and approach (line 972) and she embarks upon what she terms an 'academic project' to research and understand not just parenting but brain injury too. This dominates her thinking and she notes she is never 'not mulling something over' (line 742) and in fact enjoys 'obsessing about the brain' (line 897).

Natalie feels her role is of central importance to her children and feels this special relationship shouldn't be compromised. She reflects with sadness upon the experiences of mothers whose relationship with their children has broken down because they are sending them to school even though they know it is stressing them (line 596). She notes:

> *"I speak to a couple of mums every week [mm] and their story is just so… I just find it unbelievably tragic that the whole day long you've got [mm] I hate you, just go and die now, just leave the room and die now….My impression is that, you know, the relationship between a mum and her children is very, very important and she shouldn't sacrifice it, you know, [mmm]… you know, just to fit in [yes]. And just to follow the accepted norm and just because it's all about finding that core of self-belief isn't it?".* (lines 594-610)

Here, Natalie's experience suggests she has overcome a significant pressure 'to fit in' that she feels other mothers in her life have found themselves under. There is a sense this requires a high level of bravery and strength - 'core of self-belief' - to move away from cultural norms.

4.5 Threats: Past, Present and Future

As an introduction to this theme, Table 12 demonstrates how the super-ordinate themes from each mother were drawn together to form the overarching theme 'Threats: Past, Present and Future'.

Thematic map for Threats: Past, Present and Future	
	Super-ordinate themes
Layla	Being under attack Defence systems Struggle to meet own needs

Natalie	Trials and tribulations of the other Trauma
Rowena	Fear and worry Scars Negative impact of culture Isolation Dark times
Ruth	The other Fear

Table 11: Thematic map: Threats: Past, Present and Future

4.5.1 Layla (being under attack, defence systems, struggle to meet own needs)

Layla's experience is one of a history of not being taken seriously by others. She has felt patronised and treated like a child. She mentions being on the receiving end of the 'cats bum' face on a number of occasions (lines 59 and 599) and being 'patted':

> *"he wasn't kind of making the progress that you would expect [yeah] and everybody, as they do, kind of pats you on the head and tells you things like, well of course he's a boy, so boys do…".* (lines 25-38)

Her knowledge of professionals galvanised her protectiveness over her son (line 52). Layla also references how parents can feel a sense of judgement and blame for their children's needs (line 510). She also remembers her own doubt as a first time parent and wondering if she was just 'a crap mother' (line 547). However, she feels she has been somewhat protected from the blame of professionals by her own professional status which has kept at bay some of the more judgemental experiences that other parents have suffered:

> *"nobody has ever been brave enough to tell me I ought to go and do a parenting course because as Peter (husband) puts it I can be proper scary [yeah], you know, take no prisoners. And I used to run parenting courses [yeah yeah], you know, I used to provide them so nobody's ever said that to us".* (lines 512-516)

Here, Layla also hints at the way in which she has felt the need to use her strength and authority to protect both herself and her family. She describes this as being 'momma bear' (line 61). This is a response not just to her experience of the ineptitude of professionals (lines 109-114) but also a more omnipotent fear of the local authority:

"there's always I think those feelings of, um [sighs]… you know, the big bad local authority [mm] that's going to sort of swoop in and, you know, give you a back to school order". (lines 396-399)

There is also a sense of a constant threat to Layla's own needs and wellbeing, describing herself as stretched so thin 'you could read a paper through me at times' (line 197) and feeling like 'strudel pastry' (line 776). This stems not just from her role as a home educating mother, but also from her own pressure to be responsible for 'everything and everyone' (line 759). She remarks that although she is working on lessening this pressure on herself, it is also something that 'enhances my mummying' (line 770) illustrating the tension between caring for herself and caring for others. Perhaps most poignantly Layla suggests she is rarely asked about herself and reflects on how much, in fact, she has to talk about:

"It's so nice somebody asking the question that you've just got loads (to say) [laughs]". (lines 119-120)

4.5.2 Natalie (trials and tribulations of the 'other', trauma)

For Natalie, her experience of professionals and the reactions of family in the past were extremely troubling and interfered with her relationship with her son and also her confidence in herself. After her son's accident she found herself isolated and unheard (lines 310-315) by both family and professionals. Although she sensed that her son was deeply stressed and anxious upon returning to school, others did not, dismissing her concerns (line 276) and recommending that he, in fact, increase his attendance at school:

"It was {sighs}, it was people not hear… not seeing the thing I saw. You know, I saw Tom and he was stressed, he couldn't express himself, he was overwhelmed, he was panicking [mm] and at the end of every day he was gone, he was just in another planet. He'd got so stressed that he was unreachable for several hours and then he would come back to me [yeah], but then he would… and I was losing him more and more as the weeks went by". (lines 207-214)

"I could not express this in a way that they could understand and I tried writing letters, phoning up, going for meetings and I could not make myself understood". (lines 282-285)

Such difficulty having her son's needs understood left Natalie questioning her own reality

almost as if she felt she might be going mad (lines 228-230). This meant that she continued to send her son to school for another six months before withdrawing him, even though he was distressed. This remains a source of sadness and regret (lines 194-195).

Later on Natalie felt vindicated when she found information by the Children's Trust that highlighted the potential for distress and anxiety like her son experienced (lines 807-810). Her experiences suggest that navigating 'differences' with others can be tricky. This includes her experiences with home educators with a different philosophy to her as well as professionals.

> *"God, it was horrible, it was just so horrible and it's just not who I am… and so it's about meeting mums that you may have huge difference of opinion with [mmm], massive difference of style [mmm], and how you cope with that [mmm]. Whether you can cope with it".* (lines 1054-1058)

4.5.3 Rowena (fear and worry, scars, negative impact of culture, isolation, dark times)

For Rowena, the difficulties she has faced with professionals across her son's life are also very much with her. She describes winning two tribunals against the local authority and still being unable to find provision for her child that suits his learning needs. This has garnered a sense of deep mistrust and Rowena describes herself as naively assuming that the state would be helpful (line 43). Instead blame, judgement and threat characterise her experience of professionals:

> *"it was all judgement. You know, ah well, if your husband was at home. Oh yeah, that would solve everything wouldn't it? ".* (lines 61-63)

> *"That's the judgement. We've had social services, we've had… we've had the whole shebang [yeah]. We've had people coming in and out this house like nobody's business [really?]. Your house is not your home".* (lines 386-389)

> *"we saw a consultant who dismissed everything I was saying, hundred percent. Well, why is he not at school?". (lines 213-215)*

There is also a great sense of isolation, both in the present and in the past for both herself

and her son. As well as being excluded from the school system, Rowena does not feel she

fits in within the home education scene as her son's needs mean she cannot relax like other

mothers do (line 971). This is on top of having experiences of being excluded from a group

in the past (line 422). She explained how she and her son are also largely excluded from

their wider family, which she describes as "destroyed" as a result of her son's difficulties (line

234). This sense of isolation and blame is underpinned by the feeling of not meeting

society's expectation of what a 'good' person or mother should be. For example:

> *"I still get people saying to me why don't you work the two days that he's not with you
> and I'm like because one, I need to clean my house and two, I need to sit down and
> relax sometimes and I do have chronic health conditions of my own [yeah]. But yeah,
> it's judgement isn't it? [yeah] It's that judgement, oh, you're not contributing, you're
> not working, in society fully [yeah], it's horrible".* (lines 849-856)

Fear and worry also stretch out into thoughts about her son's future:

> *"So, I try not to dwell on it. I just try and work on one day at a time [yeah] mentality
> but it's hard, it's really hard".* (lines 563-565)

4.5.4 Ruth (the 'other', fear)

For Ruth, a significant threat comes from the perception of her from outsiders. This is

particularly as she experiences her parenting choices as standing outside from the

mainstream leaving her feeling vulnerable to attack and judgement, particularly when she

prioritises her children's needs in situations where the adult is usually prioritised. She notes

how difficult this can be:

> *"Because that's the mainstream parenting approach and that's what you're
> encouraged to do. So, again it feels like you're flying in the face of [laughs]… and it's
> often… it's often misconstrued as permissive parenting".* (lines 851-854)

This sense of her mothering being criticised stretches back to the time when her son was in

school and his difficulties were put down to poor parenting and Ruth being "oversensitive"

(line 116-117). In addition, Ruth describes how the expectations of school caused her son

great anguish and distress and she now lives with the worry that her children will be sent

back to school. She describes living in 'constant fear' (line749), which prompts a 'fight/flight' type response, encouraging her to become a 'tiger' to protect her children (line 709):

> *"So, I'm… I would move country before he goes into school [yeah]. Over my dead body is he going back into a school".* (lines 695-697)

Ruth experiences other pressures also, some of these stem from other families who have decided they don't want their children to play with her son because they disapprove that he watches YouTube (1219-1221). But she also experiences her own doubts and fears about her choices, noting that shouldering all the responsibility for her children's education as well as 'going against the grain' is tough. People's judgements, in particular, cause her to worry:

> *"you feel judged and it all kind of escalates in your own head [yeah]. So, it is actually quite difficult to remain off-piste {laughs} and feel comfortable".* (lines 1060-1062)

There is also a sense in which she experiences the need to tolerate not just her overall responsibility but also the uncertainty attached to making decisions about supporting her son's wellbeing:

> R   *Marginally terrifying I have to say, um…*
> I   *And why is it terrifying?*
> R   *Because I don't really know what to do next {laughs} for the best.* (lines 582-586)

4.6 Transformation and Growth

As an introduction to this theme, Table 13 demonstrates how the super-ordinate themes from each mother were drawn together to form the overarching theme 'Transformation and Growth'.

Thematic map: Transformation and Growth	
	Super-ordinate themes
Rowena	Evolving
Layla	Finding strength

Ruth	Survival skills Personal empowerment New identity
Natalie	Becoming enlightened

Table 12: Thematic map: Transformation and growth

4.6.1 Rowena (evolving)

For Rowena, transformation and growth comes in a number of forms. The difficulties she has faced with professionals in education and health care settings have increased her resilience. There is a sense of developing 'hardness' in order to cope with coming under attack. It is almost as if Rowena has been through a war:

> *"We're out the other side now. You know, I'm really thick-skinned, [yeah] maybe because of what's happened. I was fairly tough before but it's just made me even more tough".* (lines 196-199)

Although Rowena has developed this tough exterior, in other ways growth has meant learning. Rowena's learning encompasses not just 'knowledge' in the traditional sense but also learning to follow her values and to utilise her strengths. Initially, Rowena was fighting battles with her son to complete academic work, this in spite of the fact that her *instinct* was that active, child-led learning was better. When I asked her how she moved from one position to the other she replied:

> *"It's gradual isn't it? You just gradually, you know… like… as I say I've always been… child-led to me is like a no-brainer. Like to me, it's just like when a child's ready they're going to learn because… that to me is just common sense".* (lines 536-540)

Her experience prompted me to wonder if it was hard for her to move away from traditional ideas about 'sit-down' learning – even though this felt right. Rowena has also learned to harness her strengths and in doing so has been able to find a better balance for both her and her son. Her son's father now takes on literacy and numeracy which frees Rowena to focus on other skills:

> *I'm more focused on getting him to be sociable [yeah], interacting, taking him to*

lunch, all these kind of things [yeah]. Speaking to people". (lines 29-32)

In doing so, Rowena now has positive experiences to look back on and that provide her with comfort and reassurance that she is doing the right thing. In this sense she is able to coach herself through her doubts because she now has evidence of things that are working:

> *"I do get those moments [yeah] of we are failing him, we are failing and then I have to go, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, [yeah] because if he was in specialist provision he wouldn't be achieving all this social dynamic [yeah]. So, you know, he wouldn't be outside climbing trees, he wouldn't be doing all this stuff that we can provide for him, or if they were doing it, it would be on a time restraint [yeah]. Where we have all the time in world for our kid".* (lines 524-532)

4.6.2 Layla (finding strength)

As noted previously, Layla is able to use her professional identity to reclaim authority as a parent. But perhaps most interestingly, Layla's self-concept appears to contradict what might be thought of as the traditional identity of a mother, or perhaps more accurately, a *woman*:

> *"I take no prisoners [yeah]. I'm too old and too ugly to give a… let's say damn. {laugh} I… I don't… I don't… I'm not interested in playing games".* (lines 97-99)

This excerpt suggests Layla's experience is that she has been positioned by professionals in the past as someone who can be 'played' and draws to mind the treatment of her by professionals that she felt was patronising (discussed in the previous theme). More importantly 'too old and too ugly' implies that *youth* and *beauty* are not empowering concepts. It is as if having disentangled herself from these cultural notions of femininity she is now freed to take on a stronger identity. Feminist themes also come through later:

> *"I've also had some real mummying mentors [yeah], some amazing women who have children with disabilities who have, yeah, taken on the world".* (lines 789-791)

The notion of taking on the world suggests a battle or war, much like in Rowena's account of being 'out the other side'. Layla's mentors have inspired her to take up the fight and I wonder if this is something not usually welcomed or expected of mothers. However, Layla is very

clear:

> *"bottom-line is, um, you know, if you don't put your arse kicking boots on and go out there and do it and take on the world no one else will".* (lines 785-787)

There is also a sense of a much more personal type of transformation being undertaken. As described above, Layla notes that she has always felt responsible for 'everyone and everything' but now she realises that this may need to shift in order for her to care for own wellbeing. The process of home educating her child has prompted her to reflect upon aspects of her personality that have been present since childhood and for which the time has come to deconstruct:

> *"you keep all the balls in the air, keep all the plates spinning, you know, that's what I do. I am working hard on that not being what I do which is challenging um but I'm learning that and that's okay".* (lines 761-764)

4.6.3 Ruth (new identity, personal empowerment, survival skills)

Ruth has also undergone a significant transition particularly in the way she parents, moving from what she describes as an 'authoritarian' approach to a highly child led approach. This change was prompted by what Ruth describes as a breakdown in her relationship with her son caused by insisting he go to school and the emotional toll of this on the whole family:

> *"he was just so stressed [yeah]. Um, and it was horrible and every… it got to the point I thought there's got to be a better way of doing this [yeah], there's got to, we cannot go on like this, from a mental health point of view from all us but our relationship. It was becoming so {sighs}, just so damaging for all of us".* (lines 130-135)

The shift to home education resulted in a journey of discovery for Ruth as she felt more able to respond to her child's needs rather than follow her internalised sense of societal expectations. No longer being a 'slave to the system' (line 1461) was hugely freeing and being challenged to find alternative ways of conceptualising parenthood and child development was hugely fulfilling (line 1447). This shift away from, in particular, her experience of an asymmetric power dynamic between parent and child, enabled Ruth to

explore and understand her son's needs more fully. This in itself was empowering:

> *"because I think more about it, I understand the behaviours, I understand things more, I feel more empowered."* (lines 1471-1473)

Ruth's empowerment has helped develop her survival skills including a can-do attitude (line 1468), thicker skin (line 951) and turning anger into something helpful. Ruth is developing a new role advocating and supporting others in a similar situation to her:

> *"And it's just a cascade now of people coming out [yeah], to the point I can't manage all the queries, I can't manage all the support. So, I'm building a website for (names Local Authority) to go on The Local Offer about how you go about home educating your children in (names Local Authority) {laughs}".* (line 371-377)

Ruth notes that although to the outside world being a single mother caring full time for her children at home may not offer much status, she is in fact the most fulfilled she has ever been. Ruth describes her experience home educating as:

> *"the best thing I've ever done, by far, absolutely".* (lines 1338-1339)

4.6.4 Natalie (becoming enlightened)

For Natalie there is a sense in which her growth and transformation links both to aspects of herself that were present before becoming a mother, such as believing in having freedom to be yourself (line 548), and in response to events following her son's accident. Since the accident she feels she has found a purpose:

> *"I've found a purpose [yeah]. And it is absolutely true, you know, it's completely true. One year after his accident I was a total, utter mess [yeah], I was depressed, I was anxious, I had no idea what to do with anything. A year later I started counselling [yeah] and I've really only started to put myself properly back together for, you know, probably 18 months max [yeah], maybe a year".* (lines 836-842)

Natalie describes how she now feels 'fulfilled' (line 749) and that her brain is 'turned on' (line 904) in a way it wasn't before. In a similar way to Ruth, she would like to take her new found knowledge out into the world to help others. This is prompted by disappointment in the

advice she had been given by professionals (line 963) and seeing other mothers struggling for the same reasons:

> N   *"Because I don't see anyone in that world [yeah] who sees it the way I do.*
> I   *What world is that? The sort of… the brain injury sort of world?*
> N   *Yeah, the brain injury world. The world of all these poor*
>   *mums who've had massive, massive traumas [mmm] and who are following the recommended paths [mmm] and it's not working out".*(lines 755-762)

In this way, Natalie's experiences and learning are not only supporting her son but opening up opportunities for herself in the future:

> *"That's the thing I want to do. I want to share, this is what I've learnt, and this is where I've learnt it from and this is how I'm using it and… you know, and it is working".* (lines 766-769)

4.7 Wendy and Sarah

As outlined in section 3.2.5, two participants met the exclusion criteria of 'employing a tutor' and one of these (Sarah) also met the exclusion criteria of 'child being out of the 7 to 11 age range'. As this only came to light during the interviews it was decided that in order to maintain the planned-for homogeneity of the sample and to honour the contribution of these participants, their data would not be used to develop the overarching themes.

The analysis of Wendy and Sarah's interviews suggests significant similarity with the main group of participants. The superordinate themes derived from their experiences correlate easily with the five overarching themes of the main group. There is also an additional overarching theme. Both Sarah and Wendy had superordinate themes relating specifically to the concept of 'control'. The broader implications of this will be discussed in the next chapter but now I will discuss the findings from Wendy and Sarah's comparison taking each overarching theme in turn.

	Superordinate themes	
Overarching themes from main group	*Wendy*	*Sarah*
Empowering Child	*The whole child*	*Nurturing for adulthood*
Attunement and Connection	*Centrality of connection*	*Engagement and trust*
The 'Super' Mother	*Professionalised motherhood Super nurturer*	*Developing expertise*
Threats: Past, Present and Future	*In the wilderness Defending against ignorance*	*The past in the present Not being good enough Embattled Offering up of self*
Transformation and Growth	*Fulfilment*	*Growing in strength*
Issues of Control (Wendy and Sarah)	*Issues of control*	*Tensions in control*

Table 13: Comparison of Wendy and Sarah's superordinate themes with the five overarching themes

4.7.1 Empowering Child – Wendy and Sarah's experiences

Wendy's experiences fit within the theme of 'expansion', which characterises the synthesis between her philosophical standpoint and her approach to empowering her children. She highly values independence of thought and the questioning of norms, which she feels the school system doesn't encourage:

> *"it teaches children to have a hive mind as opposed to an independent mind [mmm] and what I've really enjoyed about home ed is that the children have developed critical thinking of their own".* (lines 1093-1096)

Alongside this is a heavy focus on nurture. Wendy notes that mental health is her biggest priority (line 798) and particularly in relation to her son (with autism), lessening his anxiety (line 714). These two lines of approach are combined with a focus upon helping children's individuality to 'flourish' and in this respect Wendy characterises herself as a greenhouse keeper:

> *"And certainly when it comes to my children I've always wanted them all to flourish and blossom in their own healthy independent way [mmm]. And if that means I have to control the environment… it's like in a greenhouse, say, you know, you plant the seeds and then you control the soil, you control the humidity [mmm], you control the moisture all that sort of thing, heat. And then you watch that flower grow in its beauty and full health".* (lines 358-365)

Sarah has a distinct focus upon the future and empowering her son (with severe learning disabilities) to advocate for himself and manage new situations. This was prompted by a fear of the future:

> *"Because if something happens to me tomorrow, next week, next year [yeah] Danny's going to be lost, he's never going to cope. He couldn't cope in school. He's been home with me for all this time [yeah]. If I go he's got nothing [yeah], you know, um, and that was a pretty scary thought".* (lines 650-655)

This 'scary thought' drives Sarah to facilitate new experiences and situations that will enable her son to develop skills such as telling someone when he is not happy (line 393), using a touchscreen computer by himself (line 914) and getting used to different carers (line 682).

4.7.2 Attunement and Connection – Wendy and Sarah's experiences

For Wendy there is a distinct sense of symbiosis with her son that stems from the medical care she gave him in his early life. These life-sustaining tasks led to the experience of heightened attunement:

> *"So, I became familiar with his everything, his pulse, his breathing patterns [yeah], the smell of the bacteria around his trachy tube, just everything [yeah]. So, I feel like I know that child inside out".* (lines 41-44)

Wendy notes that this 'hypervigilance' has helped her not just keep her son alive, but to educate him too (line 52). The experience of becoming skilled in observation has developed her sense of insight and improved decision making. Wendy notes that this nurtures the symbiosis between them:

> *"once you're better at tracking and identifying things [mm hmm] you become more skilled… you have the symbiotic bit I suppose". (lines 673-676)*

As a result, Wendy finds that small windows for learning can be spotted and capitalised. In the following example, Wendy describes getting her son to do some maths:

> W   *"What we have is a maths file and when we get a good half hour we'll get the maths file out [yeah], oh what fun, and we do the maths then.*
> I   *And how do you identify what a good half hour is?*
> W   *He's in a good mood. We've got no additional stresses going on. There's a good clear window of behaviour, doesn't seem to be anything provoking. We might get 15 minutes in".* (lines 721-727)

For Sarah, a sense of connection and attunement with her child has fostered feelings of expertise that enable her to pick up on the tiniest of cues. She reflects that when she began home educating she undertook a process of exploration, observation and problem solving in order to understand her child more deeply, and specifically why he was distressed. There is a sense in which she became a detective:

> *"I had to understand why these things. So, I thought about things [yeah], I problem solved a lot, I wrote things down, I wrote behaviours down, when and where they were happening so I could work out".* (lines 227-230)

Sarah attributes her sense of attunement, *seeing the world from his point of view,* to her son's blindness. She describes scanning the environment, checking for hazards, ensuring his safety (line 26). Sarah describes an intimate knowledge that has developed into a type of intuition that she feels she does not have with her other son who does not have learning disability:

> *"he can be playing in there with the carers and they'll be doing something, and he just has to do a movement or… and I just know. And I'm like, oh he wants that, and they're like how do you know that? And I'm like I just know, I don't even know how I know but I just know and I always know when he's going to get ill as well [yeah] because his mannerisms and how he is [yeah]. Like, it's really weird because I don't have that relationship with my little one".* (lines 334-342)

Being in tune seems also to be related to giving the world meaning to her son (line 615) which she emphasises is crucial not just to his wellbeing, but their relationship too. She describes how if he understands what is happening he feels secure and safe enough to

follow her lead. She feels the development of trust has been central to engaging her son in new and different activities:

> S   "Like if I say to him right, we need to do this, he normally does do it now.
> I   Yeah, and why do you think he does it now?
> S   I think because he feels safe [mmm], he feels secure, he knows that he's loved, he knows that everything I do is to help him [mmm]. I think he gets that". (lines 597-602)

4.7.3 The 'Super' Mother – Wendy and Sarah's experiences

There are two strands to Wendy's experiences as a 'super' mother. Firstly, Wendy provides a high level of medical support to her son. This is essential to maintain his heart transplant:

> "His heart health is only maintained by the fact that I tube feed him and give him his medicines twice a day [mmm], and take him to his regular check-ups [mmm], and react to every single infection. So, there's that vigilance level going on" (lines 541-544)

But in addition to this she has to meet the needs of her other three children, holding in mind the whole family at all times (lines 405-413). This is all the more significant as she feels the mental health of the whole family remains affected by the trauma of her son's early life (line 263). Meeting her family and son's challenges has required extensive creativity and adaptability from creating bespoke learning resources using Charlie and Lola (line 452) to developing a library of specialised approaches such as traffic light systems and timers (lines 584-588). In addition, Wendy engages in extensive learning including courses with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (line 631), books (line 615) and conferences (line 622). This is coupled with holding herself highly responsible for her son's wellbeing including reflecting on her part in his meltdowns (line 666) to how she prepares learning activities:

> "he'll get up and go, I don't want to do this. It's… {sighs},although if he does that then I would blame myself because that would be lazy management actually. Um, if he gets up half way through an activity and wanders off that's because I didn't prepare it properly". (lines 728-732)

For Sarah, her role as a mother has the sense of becoming highly *managerialised*, not just because of the extent of thinking and knowledge she has acquired, but because she has

been thrust into the position of an 'employer'. Because she has been given funding to employ carers for her son she is now obliged to manage them. She feels uncomfortable with this, grappling with the distinction between mother and 'boss', particularly when she is in the position of addressing difficulties:

> *"I don't know how I don't lose my temper sometimes but again as a boss, being a mum, I find that the hardest because I am just a mum, I'm not a boss but I am a boss".* (lines 397-400)

> *"we've had someone recently leave and before he used to get really upset. He used to cry for days [yeah] and stuff like that and as a mum that's really hard, and as a boss that makes me really angry".* (lines 690-695)

Sarah finds herself needing to explain and advise the professionals that come into contact with her son and in this way her knowledge of his special needs has significant authority. However, as shall be explored later, this also brings with it additional tensions related to power and control.

4.7.4 Threats: Past, Present and Future – Wendy and Sarah's experiences

Although Wendy has had difficult experiences with professionals - which I will come to next - it is also valuable to note that some have been positive. Wendy describes applying learning from courses about ADHD and PDA and some other helpful relationships with professionals. In her recalling of these there is a sense of trust and congruency:

> *"We had an ed psych, I wish I could remember her name, but she was really positive about home ed at the time and she brought out the, um… the document is the early years foundation stage files and she said you know what you're doing. Here, you have a copy for reference, you can work through at Charlie's pace [mmm] and we'll review when we need to review".* (lines 166-172)

Wendy has also experienced difficulties particularly related to lack of knowledge about home education and reliance on stereotypes and cultural tropes:

> *"A lot of the professional opinions are… about home education are so inaccurate. You'll say yes, I'm planning to home educate and they just splurge with the, oh where are they going to learn their social skills?".* (lines 312-316)

Wendy feels that because of her son's communication needs alongside some negative experiences with others, she needs to put extra trust in the adults around her son (lines 551 and 563) and themes around protection are scattered throughout the interview (e.g. lines 143). In addition there is a sense in which Wendy has experienced significant trauma in the past and this is still with her. Her past anguish is visceral as is her sadness at the memory of her son's early years which resulted in her being diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (line 260). These feel like dark times and Wendy recalls isolation and exclusion from mother and baby groups (lines 69 and 91) and being neglected by the social care system (line 106).

Sarah has experienced a sense of not being 'good enough'. This includes feeling guilt about not being able to take her children on outings (line 472) and feeling limited in skills to develop her son (line 884). Sarah reflects that it is very difficult being both a 'special needs mum and a normal mum' (line 454). As with Wendy, Sarah has painful memories of the past, particularly related to her son's experiences at school. Acts of cruelty towards him such as being put in an isolation room are remembered as deeply upsetting (line 182). This led to an instinctive need to protect and comfort her son:

S   *"When I got to the school I could hear him screaming from the front of the school."*
I   *"Wow, what was that like?"*
S   *"Horrendous, I wanted to kill someone, even now thinking about it makes me cry".*
        (lines 185-189)

This need to protect and defend is still present as Sarah describes her anger at her son recently being called 'lazy' by a professional (line 980). But Sarah also experiences a significant threat to her 'self'. As well as the exhausting and relentless tasks she faces each day (line 1261) she has totally sacrificed her own life to care for her children. Sarah notes that her son takes up all her thoughts (line 20) and she has no time to care for herself, even when experiencing mental health problems:

"I did some, um, CBT training with the doctor [yeah] but I had to give it up because I

had no one to have Danny". (lines 41-42)

Sarah's matter of fact tone in this example and others suggests an acceptance of her loss of self. She also remembers the irony of being 'slagged off' and accused of selfishness by other mothers and school staff for home educating - when in fact she was giving up her own life entirely:

> *"It made me really angry actually because I thought well, if I was selfish I'd have left him at school because, you know, bringing him out of school [yeah] gave me no time at all".* (lines 262-274)

4.7.5 Transformation and Growth – Wendy and Sarah's experiences

For Wendy, starting home education facilitated transformation and growth both for the family relationships and in terms of opening up opportunities for the future. She felt that her children leaving school improved her relationship with them as the pressures on her were reduced (line 1005). It also meant that Wendy and her family could feel the regaining of control that they didn't feel they had through all the difficult times noted above:

> *"I do think that re-grouping, and home educating did give us back an element of control over some very difficult circumstances".* (lines 300-302)

For Wendy, home educating also enabled her to connect with others, emphasising the value of finding like-minded people and also the isolation she experienced previously:

> *"Um, you've got to find your tribe, as they say, [mmm]. I hate statements like that because they seem like inspirational posters [mmm] but there is a truth in that. You have to find people who are likeminded and who you trust to be around your children [mmm] and I wasn't getting that from the school environment".* (lines 1056-1062)

Like Natalie and Ruth, Wendy has taken on an advocacy role for the home education community and now works with the Local Authority as part of the parent-carer forum (line 1153):

> *"my goal as a home educator, and as someone who now works alongside the county council because I do the parent carer forum, is to stop home educators who are doing so in response to poor schooling. So, where the service provision is poor and*

they've responded by taking their children out. Stop those families being vilified [mmm] for what they're doing, which is actually loving parenting [mmm], wanting to meet the children's needs, and get the EHCPs organised so that a personal budget can allow them to buy the therapies that children need". (lines 1151-1160)

For Sarah, growth comes from developing strength and confidence in her choices. One aspect of this is learning to do things that work for her family instead of trying to fit in:

"And I've long gone trying to do normal things [yeah] with him. I used to, all the time, and it would always end in disaster [yeah] and then I was like why am I doing this? There's no point". (lines 1158-1161)

This confidence also seems related to a huge sense of resilience; knowing that 'good enough' is okay (line 523) and having a can-do attitude (line 734). There is also a feeling that reflecting upon her and her son's achievements validates choices and builds confidence. As well as becoming happier and more settled (line 297) he is surpassing expectations:

"He's just started to learn to use the cane [wow], something we never, ever, ever in a million years thought he'd be able to do". (lines 804-807)

4.7.6 Issues of Control

A significant difference between the experiences of Wendy and Sarah and the main group is that they both describe tensions in the concept of control. Although this is present in some ways in the larger group, it is a more significant theme in Wendy and Sarah's interviews. Control is touched upon in the experiences of Wendy outlined in the themes of 'Empowering Child' and 'Transformation and Growth' and is also evident within her relationship with her son where she describes engineering situations so that they both have a sense of getting something they want/need (lines 746-751). But Wendy also describes how she is wary of being seen as 'the controlling mother':

"Um, well it… it's a stereotype isn't it? That the mothers who don't want to let their children grow up, they don't want to let them be like other children, they don't want them to take part in normal life, whatever normal means. And I… I have issues with that because I don't feel like I am a controlling person, um, but it's all relative isn't it? [mmm]. Um, quite hard to explain [mmm].... I think responsible parenting does mean that you have to exact a certain level of control, in the sense of how much screen time they get or whether they're allowed to taste alcohol before they're 18. You are

controlling these things and if that makes you a controlling person then so be it [mmm] but then there's controlling in that you don't allow a person to be themselves". (lines 343-357)

This stereotype of the 'controlling mother' is also felt by Sarah and she poignantly discusses how control is in fact important to her and her son and yet she does, in fact, have little control over her life:

"Um, I think because I am quite strict with how things need to be done [mmm], and because Danny is such a calm placid child now people who didn't know him back then haven't seen that side of him. So, they think that it's me putting all these things in place [mmm]…

…and because you don't really have control over your life when you have a special needs child [mmm], I think that's grabbing a little bit of control back for me. That I can control how my house is [yeah] and I want it tidy and I want it clean [yeah], and Danny needs that so it's kind of… not an obsession but… do you know what I mean? [yeah]. Those things are important so I have to get those things done every day because that makes me feel in control of something". (lines 531-551)

5. Discussion

5.1 Chapter overview

In this chapter I will summarise the findings encapsulated within the overarching themes and explore these in relation to pertinent research identified in the literature review. Following this, I will consider how the findings can be used by Educational Psychologists (EP's) and other professionals through the theory and practice of intersectionality. The strengths and limitations of the research shall then be considered including the implications for further research and a reflection on my own experience of this process.

5.2 Summary of findings

The aim of this research was to explore how home educating mothers experience their relationship with their children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). I sought to identify the characteristics of their relationships and these have been categorised using six overarching themes. I will discuss each in turn.

5.2.1 Empowering Child

An important factor in all six mother's experience was the process of empowering their children, sometimes in ways similar to each other and sometimes different. Of particular note is that although the mothers differed in their description of their approach to this, they all viewed *experiences* as an important aspect of the empowerment process. The way in which empowerment was conceptualised by the mothers influenced the type of experiences that were important and the role they positioned themselves in to facilitate the process. Experiences included the nature of the mother-child relationship, how children were supported to relate with others and to develop autonomy, acceptance, self-esteem and safety. These empowerment activities are managed in different ways; through stepping back, facilitating or leading. The findings therefore suggested that, for these mothers, empowering their children involved three interrelated experiences; conceptualising what empowerment means, providing experiences to achieve this, positioning the self in a specific

role to facilitate this process. I have summarised the findings under these headings to illustrate how each mother described this.

- *Conceptualising empowerment*

Ruth and Natalie's experiences emphasised promoting their children's autonomy. For Natalie, autonomy was also linked with fostering her children's sense of acceptance and validation. Autonomy and acceptance were viewed by these mothers as linked to empowerment. The concept of acceptance was also important for Layla and this was linked to her thoughts about the future in which she wanted her son feel able to be himself in a neurotypical world. However, for Layla there was a sense that autonomy as a vehicle for empowerment was something to be fostered more slowly over time. For Rowena there was a sense in which empowering her son was framed by a focus upon him being safe in the future and fitting in with society. Wendy placed value on developing her children's critical thinking skills and fostering their mental health and wellbeing, particularly reducing her son's anxiety. In Sarah's case, empowerment was characterised by her focus on the future and providing her son with the skills needed to cope without her such as advocating for himself.

- *Experiences to achieve empowerment*

Ruth felt that facilitating her son's interests enabled him to 'back-fill' skills he hadn't yet learned. Natalie sought to realise her goals for her children through the processes of her own relationship with them and also through external relationships with volunteers for example. Layla used the 'feel' of her relationship with her son to guide the pace and nature of growing autonomy. An example of this was noting he was very 'velcro' and therefore her aim for the year was to encourage him to try more activities by himself. Rowena's goals to help her son fit in with society seemed to underpin her emphasis on helping him to develop social skills and understanding. The very act of bringing her children out of school provides Wendy's children with the opportunity to develop their thinking skills (as opposed to being in school where she feels a 'hive mind' is promoted). Sarah engages her son in specific

activities such as learning to use a touchscreen computer and getting used to different carers.

- *Positioning of self to facilitate the process*

For Ruth and Natalie, empowerment was promoted through a distinctly democratic approach to family life where the emphasis was upon equality between mother and child. Layla's descriptions suggested she took a stronger lead in directing her son's activities than Natalie and Ruth, acting almost as a bridge between her son and the world (an 'interpreter'). This also meant that she engaged him in learning in a more direct sense, covering subjects such as history and science. Rowena's experiences shared some similarity with Layla in that she took the lead in teaching and guiding her son, particularly in relation to socialising. Wendy described herself in a very particular role as a 'greenhouse keeper', controlling the environment to help her children flourish as individuals. Sarah's positioning is not explicit under the theme 'empowering child' but later themes highlight how she is required to highly manage and plan her son's experiences.

These findings are quite unique; *empowerment* as an aspect of the relationship was described in very limited terms within the literature review. Neuman and Guterman (2017) described how mothers felt that home educating had enabled them to prioritise the child's own processes at a pace and in a manner that suited them but how they achieved this was not explored. Other studies attempted a very broad look at how parents positioned themselves in facilitating children's experiences. Kuusisto (2003) concluded that 'democratic' approaches to family life may increase the transmission of family 'values' but did not explore what a democratic approach might look like in practice. Butler et al (2015) explored family cohesion, linking this to 'parallel' interaction styles. However, findings from my research indicate a more complex picture than Butler's work suggests. Whilst Natalie and Ruth reported what could be thought of as 'parallel' interactions in the pursuit of empowering their children, Layla describes using more 'complimentary' style approaches to empowering her

child. All three families described cohesive and harmonious experiences whereas Butler's work would predict that only Ruth and Natalie's experiences would lead to 'cohesion'.

This could be related to the differing needs of children with SEN where different styles of interaction may be more or less suited to the goal of empowering the child. Perhaps family styles cannot be categorised as either 'better' or 'worse' but more as a 'best fit' approach between child and parent. This is closely related to the concepts of attunement and connection.

5.2.2 Attunement and Connection – summary of findings

The findings suggested that the mothers engaged in what might be called attunement and connection *activities* as well reflecting on the benefits and usefulness of attunement. These different aspects were linked to a range of outcomes for the quality of the relationship as well as opportunities for learning and development. To aid clarity I have summarised the findings as follows:

- *Observation as a tool*

Ruth, Natalie, Wendy and Sarah all described using observation as a tool for becoming more attuned and connected to their children and thus gaining insight and understanding. They link this insight to shaping their decisions about their children's development as well as opening up learning opportunities.

- *Trust, healing and wellbeing*

Both Ruth and Sarah linked building connections with their children to the concept of trust. Ruth feels her relationship with her son has significantly improved now he trusts her to support him and Sarah suggests that it is trust in her and a sense of safety with her that helps her son to engage in new activities. Connection and attunement are felt to be linked not just to emotional warmth but also healing and wellbeing. Natalie and Layla both describe physical connection as key aspects of their relationship that not only represent closeness but

also alleviate anxiety. For Natalie physical connection not only 'fills her children's cups' but acts as 'emotional hygiene' for her too, emphasising how important it has been for her mental health to connect to friends. Mental health is also linked to connection by Rowena who recounts times in which her own stress has been a barrier to connecting with her child.

- *Sharing activities*

An important aspect of attunement and connection appeared to be the mothers sharing in activities with their children. A range of activities were described, from playing Minecraft to walking in the woods, to listening to the radio and talking together. Natalie, Ruth, Rowena, Layla and Sarah's experiences specifically linked these activities with enjoyment, opportunities for observing and learning about their children and a sense of harmony or getting on well together.

- *Harmony and congruency*

The concept of harmony was a particular aspect of Layla and Rowena's experiences. In Layla's account, harmony appeared linked to *congruency* between her and her son and she reflected upon how his sensory need for touch fitted with their 'touchy feely' family style. The opposite experience to this, disharmony, is evident in Rowena's experiences as she describes 'battles' between her and her son during which there is a sense of great disconnection.

- *Specialist tools*

Sarah and Wendy's accounts in particular suggested that their children's medical and special needs have prompted a specialist or out of the ordinary level of attunement. This is also evident in Layla's description of using sign language with her son and a range of communication tools with him including sand timers and symbols. She reflects upon how in the past these have helped to prevent tension in their relationship.

- *Siblings and friendships*

Natalie and Ruth both describe their sons' connection with others as important. For Ruth her son's new found friendships have helped him to develop new skills. Importantly these friendships operate on a one to one level. Similarly, Natalie facilitates connection between her son and volunteers who spend time with him, noting that connection with the volunteers has helped him to feel calmer and even to try new things he was previously too anxious for.

The majority of the findings above supplement the findings in the literature review. However, some aspects were present in the review findings in a limited way. Diciro (2000) found the attachment quality of 'warmth' was linked to the academic outcomes of home educated children. 'Warmth' was an explicit feature of some of the mothers' relationships in my study but was not linked with academic outcomes. However, warmth *was* linked with developing learning opportunities, a 'good relationship' and also a healing mechanism. It could be that 'warmth' in Diciro's study encapsulated a particular quality of connection which fostered learning experiences through aspects such as those described above e.g. trust, safety, enjoyment, insight.

The literature review also highlighted what could be characterised as barriers to attunement and connection. Zhang (2015) found that mothers' interpretations of religious conceptualisations of the 'self' influenced their relationship with their children, leading one mother in particular into conflict with her daughter as they had different views about the world. McDowell (2000) also described how some home educators appeared to bear an undercurrent of anger towards their children who had not been successful at school. This anger influenced the process of home education and the mother-child relationship resulting in higher stress levels for both the mothers and children.

These findings suggest that the mother's own identity and wellbeing can be a barrier to attuning to their child's needs. There is a sense in which this reflects aspects of Rowena's experiences. But it may in fact be more complicated than this. Within Rowena's account,

there appears to be a tension between her desire to parent according to perceived cultural needs and her desire to meet her child's needs which don't necessarily fit with cultural expectations of parenting. This begs the question, how much should culture and society bear some responsibility for the conflict that Rowena experienced? Aspects of this question will be explored further in the next two themes.

5.2.3 The Super Mother – summary of findings

The mother's experiences all suggested that they were engaged in activities that pushed the boundaries of the nature of motherhood. Rowena reported a level of compassion for her child that outstripped those around her as she managed very challenging behaviours. She also described managing her own health condition sometimes even fearing her own death as the result of the stress she experienced in relation to her son's behaviour.

Layla's ironic description of her 'normal' involves bringing to her role as mother a wealth of professional experience that helps her not only interact with her son using specialist techniques but also to take up her own authority in relation to professionals. Layla's combining of professional skills with motherhood is not a usual aspect of motherhood. She also describes dedicating her life to her son to the 'nth degree' and there is a distinct sense, as with all the mothers, of having given over her life to her child. Ruth describes engaging in a deep level of thinking and introspection including thinking about unconscious processes in order to resolve and understand her son's difficulties and needs. She also describes a process of reconceptualising what education is through a process of 'deschooling' and her experience suggests a *merging* of parenting and education, again, something not usually part of the mothering experience.

Natalie describes what appears to be a complete synthesis between her values towards herself and her children. This is complemented with a rigour in her approach and what she describes as an *obsessive* approach to researching and understanding brain injury. In addition she feels able to resist the drive to 'fit in' that she feels other mothers experience

and suggests it requires a strong core of self-belief to do so – breaking out of the mould appears to require extraordinary determination or strength.

Wendy has to maintain her son's life with extensive daily medical support which is not something that is required of most mothers. At the same time she describes holding in mind not just him but her whole family, employing creativity and resourcefulness in creating learning and communication resources for her son. She also engages in a deep level of self-reflection, holding herself highly accountable when things go wrong for her son. Sarah's role as a mother has become managerialised and professionalised in a similar way to Layla. She is required to be a 'boss' to her son's carers and this is challenging for her and something not likely to be experienced by mothers unless they have a child with SEN.

These findings link to the work of Lois (2009) who concluded the mothers in her study were criticised for having 'too much' of the feelings usually valued in motherhood, that is, confidence, protectiveness, morality and engagement. In response, the mothers re-cast their choices as entirely appropriate given the problems of mainstream schooling. In this way these mothers raised the bar even higher for what defined a 'good' mother, setting extraordinarily high expectations for themselves. This links to the sense of the mothers in my research having - or needing - 'moreness' in order to meet the challenges of home educating a child with SEN.

5.2.4 Threats: Past, Present and Future – summary of findings

All the mothers described threats either in the past, present or future. These were multiple and varied, relating to relationships with others and the daily responsibilities they undertook. All described experiences of feeling judged, blamed and unheard by professionals and for Natalie and Rowena, family attitudes and responses also played a role in this. These experiences included their parenting being seen as a problem as well as negative reactions towards the choice to home educate. Natalie, Ruth and Rowena also had negative experiences with other parents and home educators. These experiences sometimes

garnered a sense of isolation, in particular, for Rowena and Wendy. For Layla, Ruth, Wendy and Sarah, negative experiences of others also led to a perceived need to be more protective towards their children. Wendy, however, also described times when working with professionals was not difficult, but helpful and these times appeared to be characterised by a sense of trust and congruency that went both ways.

Fear and worry was also evident among the mothers. Rowena expressed fearing the future for her son and Ruth's experiences suggested a need to tolerate uncertainty about what she was doing. There was a significant reported impact on some of the mothers' own wellbeing both in the past and the present. Layla described being stretched thin and rarely being asked about herself; Natalie described a profound sense of doubt in herself in the past; Wendy was diagnosed with PTSD and feels the family are still impacted upon by her son's traumatic early life; Sarah described feeling unable to meet her own mental health needs due to having no one to care for her son. Sarah also communicated a feeling of guilt and not being good enough as well as the toll of exhausting and relentless tasks each day.

Some of these experiences correlate with the findings in the third theme of the literature review which related to experiences of mothers of children who were either 'gifted' or had SEN. The need to be more 'protective' in response to previous experiences of professionals was described by the mother in the study by Mouzourou, Santos and Gaffney (2011). The sense of exclusion, rejection or isolation experienced by the mothers in my research was also referenced in research by Jolly, Matthews and Nester (2012). Some mothers in their study felt other home educators did not understand their children and this led them to feel 'exiled' from the wider home education community. Kidd and Kaczmarek (2010) also found that feelings of isolation were significant for a number of mothers in their study, caused by not being able to access home education support groups due to their children finding these too difficult and, in addition, not being able to access support regarding the education of their children. The work by Neuman and Guterman (2017) references the burden experienced by home educators and the lack of freedom due to needing to be constantly thinking about their

children. This links to the impact of stress and responsibility described by the mothers in my research.

5.2.5 Transformation and Growth – summary of findings

All six mothers described aspects of their experiences that led to transformation and growth. This was sometimes directly related to feeling badly treated by others in the past. Rowena developed more strength having come 'out the other side' and Ruth developed a 'thicker skin'.

There was also a sense of growth in personal satisfaction. Ruth described transforming her parenting and how being able to think about her children and understand them better was empowering. She felt that home education was the 'best thing she had ever done'. Natalie described feeling fulfilled, that her brain is 'turned on' and through her son's experiences she has found her purpose. Wendy notes that home education gave her family back control and improved their relationships.

For Rowena and Sarah, reflecting on positive experiences appears to boost confidence. Rowena reflects on the positive experiences her son has been getting and this reassures her that home education is positive for him. Sarah notes the developments in her son that she never thought would be possible.

There is also a sense in which feeling released from internalised cultural expectations is freeing. Over time Sarah describes feeling more able to make choices that suit her family's needs rather than follow the norm and Rowena's descriptions suggest her child-led values gradually come forth. Ruth describes feeling a sense of freedom from the 'system' and feels she has moved her parenting away from what she feels are societal norms. Layla's description of being 'too old and too ugly' also suggested she has taken up more power by moving away from stereotypes of femininity/mothers. She describes being inspired by 'mummy mentors' to take on the world for her son. Making links with others was also

important to Ruth, Wendy and Natalie, all of whom were developing or already involved in projects supporting other home educators or promoting the benefits of home education.

These findings link with the work of Kidd and Kaczmarek (2010) in which a mother's process of self-discovery came to influence her relationship with her child. In a similar vein, mothers in the study by Neuman and Guterman (2017) reported growing in self-awareness as the process of home education unfolded over time. This was felt to be positive and inspiring. There is also a significant link with the work of Lois (2006) who outlines a four stage model explaining the process of adjusting to the roles of both mother and teacher. In the model the initial anxiety created by role ambiguity and then a sense of role failure, conflict and overload is finally replaced, over time, with a harmonious relationship. Lois concludes that initially, home educating mothers only had traditional conceptions of 'mother' and 'teacher' to draw upon yet committing to these definitions was extremely difficult, if not impossible, as they led to conflict in their relationship with their children. There are parallels to this process in my own participants' experiences.

5.2.6 Issues of control

This theme was derived from my interviews with Wendy and Sarah. Although 'control' is something touched upon in relation to other themes above, for example, the giving of autonomy, it was more strongly present in Wendy and Sarah's experiences as a separate and important factor. It is apparent in Wendy's experience of her relationship with her son when she describes managing interactions so that both her and her son have a sense of getting something they want/need. However, Wendy also describes concern about being seen as 'the controlling mother'. She differentiates between needing to exert *some* control in order to be a 'responsible' parent and controlling a child in a way that they can't be themselves. This suggests a fine line needs to be trod in terms of the extra stereotyping and judgement faced by home educators. Sarah also discusses how she feels perceived as a controlling mother and yet not only does she need to, for example, keep things organised in order to meet her son's needs, this 'control' is small compensation for actually being totally

out of control of her life.

Here, again the work of Lois (2009) is highly relevant. In fact Wendy describes the stereotype she feels may be assumed about her in the same terms as Lois (2009):

> "*mothers who don't want to let their children grow up, they don't want to let them be like other children, they don't want them to take part in normal life*"

5.3 Implications for Educational Psychologists

In the introduction to this research I described the importance of the learning relationship and why it lays the foundation for development. The findings of my research and the literature review have cast light on the learning relationship between home educating mother and child. When exploring the implications for Educational Psychologists (EP's) what struck me was the complexity of the relationship. This was captured in the work of Lois (2006) and Lois (2009) who demonstrated how mothers needed to discover new ways of defining their role as there was a sense in which cultural ideas about motherhood and/or 'teaching' did not always seem to capture the experience of home educating mothers. The findings of my own research highlight aspects of this complexity, for example, the different ways in which mothers position themselves in relation to their children. It would appear then, there is a risk that stereotyped understanding of the role of mothers and teachers may act as a barrier to understanding the home educating relationship. It is therefore important for EP's and other professionals to find ways of working with home educators that prevent this. The need for this is perhaps crystallised further by the level of threat experienced by the mothers in my research, including past experiences with professionals as well as fear of the power of the Local Authority. This emphasises the need to work with home educators in a way that reduces rather than increases fear, and instead reflects Wendy's experiences in which a sense of trust and congruency were reached.

In the following sections I will explore how EP's and other professionals can use the findings of my research and the literature review to achieve these goals. Intersectionality will be explored as a theoretical context from which such work can be carried out.

5.3.1 Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an approach to examining how disenfranchised groups intersect on dimensions such as gender, socio-economic status, race and disability. It is built on the premise that particular human experiences are invisible because they do not fit the stereotype of a particular category. An early example of this work is Bambara (1970) whose work highlighted how feminist discourses did not capture the experiences of black women, only white women. In this sense the popular concept of 'woman' was that of a *white* woman. The experiences of being a home educating mother of a child with SEN are likely to be 'invisible' since the stereotyped concept of a 'mother' does not include these mothers' experiences. For home educating mothers there is an additional complication since they are also *teachers* but, again, the concept of 'teacher' does not capture the meaning of what it is to be a *mother-teacher*.

- Home educators as oppressed

Applying intersectionality theory and practice to home educating mothers also requires them to be defined as an oppressed group. This is a potentially difficult and contentious issue. It could be argued that being able to home educate suggests a level of privilege that others may not have access to. This may indeed be the case, however, the participants in my study included mothers in rented accommodation and in the receipt of benefits. Five out of six were single parents. The mother who wasn't was a full time carer for her husband who had a degenerative condition. The notion of privilege that could be attached to home educators is therefore difficult and debatable and may in itself be driven by a stereotype. Although some may be privileged in the traditional sense, others may sacrifice aspects of their lives, such as financial income, in order to home educate.

There are other dimensions that need to be taken into account. It could be argued that simply being a mother means one is already oppressed since that involves being female and there are multiple commentaries within feminist theory that explore the on-going oppression of women in general. Being a mother involves taking on responsibilities not expected of men within our cultural discourse and the juggling of career and motherhood is a common cultural debate. Rowena references this herself when she mentions feeling criticised for not working. As noted by other researchers, in the realm of home education it is, unsurprisingly, most likely that the mother will be at home. Home education could therefore be regarded as a rich landscape for feminist debate.

In addition, although these mothers are responsible for the education of their children they do not have access to the structural authority or resources that educational professionals have. Although it could be said that home educating means making a choice to reject these resources, many feel *pushed out* of the education system through lack of provision and poor experiences in schools (e.g. Kendall & Taylor, 2016; Arora, 2006). This issue is perhaps even more pertinent in a time of austerity, for example, in the Local Authority for which I work a Head Teacher wrote a letter to parents explaining that due to budget cuts they would be losing teaching assistant support. Local Authorities themselves have acknowledged difficulties with provision. In a meeting at the House of Lords, Local Authority professionals identified the practice of schools trying to off-roll 'difficult' students and parents feeling compelled to home educate to avoid exclusion (freedom of information request for meeting notes 17th October 2017, www.whatdotheyknow.com). Indeed, all the mothers in my research felt that schools were unable to meet their children's needs or were detrimental to their children's development.

Access to resources includes not just physical resources such as money and funding but also ideological resources such as particular definitions of what education means and should include. Currently, the 'State' can make a judgement with regard to what is and isn't appropriate education and this means the State owns the definition of education and can

use it, for example, to issue a School Order which requires children to be returned to the school system. Although this may be felt important to protect children, a Foucauldian analysis of this might provide an additional perspective, exploring the relationship with power and control and not necessarily to the benefit of the individual child. Collins and Bilge (2016) note that Western state education can be characterised by its link to feeding neoliberal economies and can be described as a rich, white man's system designed for the needs of rich, white men. Whilst this is controversial it highlights the complexity of definitions of education that home educators may sometimes feel at the mercy of.

In addition home educators can be subject to many negative stereotypes such as those highlighted in the work of Lois (2009) and the experiences of Wendy and Sarah and others. Furthermore, children with SEN are themselves an oppressed group since by definition this involves having what is termed a 'disability' which reduces the likelihood of gaining access to resources. Hollomotz (2013), for example, provides a sociological exploration of the micro and macro factors that oppress disabled people including social exclusion, lack of autonomy and wider structural factors.

As mentioned, whether home educators can be described as oppressed is a contentious issue. Although the arguments above suggest they can, the empowerment experienced by some of the mothers in my study and others suggests an alternative view. The work of Field-Smith and Kisura (2013) also suggests that home education can be used to re-claim power for mothers and their children. Field-Smith and Kisura explored the reasons why Black families chose to home educate demonstrating that home education was a method of 'radical self-actualisation' for both mother and child. They describe how Black American women used home education to reclaim the home environment as a place of empowerment rather than domestic servitude as it is historically positioned for them (described as the 'kitchen legacy'). In home educating their children, particularly boys, Black mothers were also empowering their children by actively constructing their identity *away* from a school system that systematically oppressed them.

It can be seen then, that home education is not just a context in which identities, values and experiences can be misunderstood due to stereotypes or supressed due to lack of resources, but also a context in which the oppressed can escape and *re-author* their identity. Home education is a context in which complex politics of representation and power are played out. Sometimes these are related to growth and sometimes oppression.

- The role of EP's

Although opportunities for empowerment exist within home education I would argue the risk of oppression is high, particularly for families of children with SEN. In this sense, EP's could make a specific contribution in terms of re-dressing inequality through providing support *steeped in an understanding of the structural and personal contexts that underpin the choice to home educate and the experience of home education* as well as the provision of expertise usually found in the school system. Because intersectionality is also an action-oriented approach it provides not just a theoretical context but can also help to shape practice. Collins and Bilge (2016) write that intersectionality involves a process of criticising, rejecting or fixing social problems that arise as a consequence of social injustice. Importantly, this is primarily achieved by exploring individual experience. Because of their role, expertise and authority, EPs are well placed to do this where warranted and necessary.

The groundwork for EP's applying intersectionality in their practice is already laid out in professional and legal guidance. It is already acknowledged that EP's may use their authority to either oppress or empower - and should aim for the latter. The British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009) emphasises that psychologists need to reflect upon and address the power differential between themselves and clients. The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2015) describes how parents and carers should be given central roles in decision-making processes that affect their children, particularly those under the age of 16 and/or those who lack capacity as defined by the Mental Capacity Act (2005). Writing in the journal Educational Psychology in Practice,

Sewell (2016) describes the importance of avoiding 'epistemological oppression' where parents and carers are effectively prevented from engaging fully in the assessment process due to the use of highly technical theory and practices that cannot be understood without formal training.

EP's can therefore play a role in supporting children in the home education context through the lens of intersectionality, not only by simply avoiding oppressive practices, but by catalysing new interpretations of learning relationships and what it means to learn and teach. By focussing on home educating relationships *as they are experienced*, more meaningful support can be put in place by avoiding misconceptions based upon stereotypical understanding and therefore the playing out of oppressive practices. This also provides an opportunity for the profession to develop expertise outside of the education system paradigm.

5.3.2 The home education learning relationship framework (HELRF)

How may this be achieved? Using the findings of my research and the literature review I have developed a model that supports the EP to explore the meaning and context of the learning relationship by providing a clear visual representation of the overarching themes. The aim of this is to facilitate theoretical transferability as is appropriate for an IPA study. Given the huge complexity involved in transferability it should be approached with caution and the professional should use their judgement with regard to the extent to which the findings are relevant to their work and transferability is appropriate. This framework is not intended to describe all home educating relationships since one study could never achieve this. Instead, its intended use is to assist hypothesis development when working with home educators by highlighting areas of the learning relationship that might be pertinent yet invisible for the reasons outlined above. It should also be recognised that these themes are unlikely to cover all aspects of the learning relationship and are just a starting point rather than a complete assessment framework. The framework should not be applied rigidly,

instead professionals can take ownership, applying it flexibly and in a way that is helpful and appropriate to their aims.

The 'Home Education Learning Relationship Framework' (HELRF) divides the themes identified above into three dimensions that capture different aspects of the relationship:

a) Contextual influences drawn from the themes of 'super mother' and 'threats: past, present and future'.

b) Changes over time drawn from the theme 'transformation and growth'

c) Relationship activities drawn from the themes of 'empowering child' and 'connection and attunement'.

Crucially, in light of the EP's authority and power, HELRF also positions them as an active agent in the relationship between mother and child. In response to this it emphasises the importance of sensitising oneself to one's own values and opinions in order that, much like in the process of this research, these can be examined and their potential influence on assessment and support established. In a sense, HELRF positions the EP as a 'researcher' in this way.
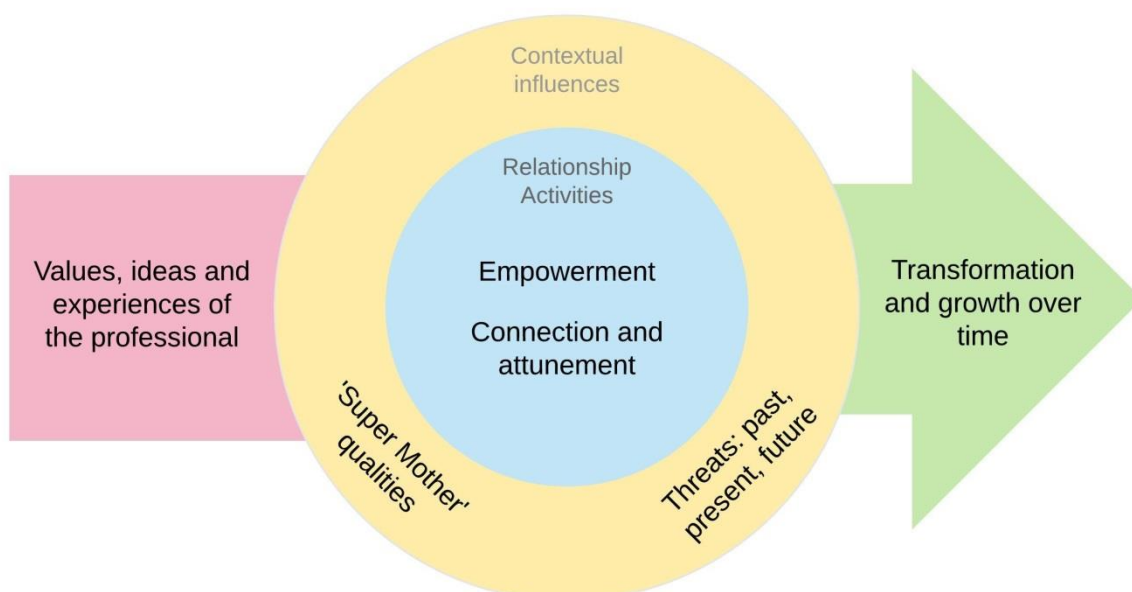
Figure 3: The home education learning relationship framework (HELRF)

The HELRF can be used in conjunction with a prompt sheet with ideas for exploring each area (see below) that draw more explicitly upon the experiences of Ruth, Rowena, Natalie, Layla, Sarah and Wendy. The prompt sheet *is not* an interview schedule but again, highlights areas for reflection and hypothesis generation. It has the potential to be applied to a wider population, for example, families supporting children who may be described as 'school refusers' or home educating families whose children do not have SEN or who are older or younger. As before, the professional can use their judgement as to the relevance of the prompts for different populations.

Prompts for the Home Education Learning Relationship Framework

Self-reflection

- What comes to mind when you think about education e.g. what does it mean? What is the purpose? What is a 'good' education versus a 'bad' education?
- What comes to mind when you think about parenting e.g. what role does a parent have? What is a 'good' mother versus a 'bad' mother?
- What comes to mind when you think about a teacher e.g. what do they do? How do they teach? What is 'good' teaching versus 'bad' teaching?
- Where do you think your views stem from e.g. your own experiences as a child/mother/family member? From cultural expectations?
- What is your experience of working with mothers in the past? How might this impact working with a home educating mother?

How does the mother seek to empower their child?

- What are their aims for their child and how did these come about?
- What empowerment experiences do they facilitate for their child e.g. choice, autonomy, outside relationships?
- How are is the child's self-esteem fostered?
- How do they make decisions about their child? In what ways does their relationship help them to do this?
- How do they position themselves in relation to empowering their child e.g. facilitator? leader?
- What hopes for the future do they have for their child e.g. self-esteem, confidence, safety, skills?

What is the nature of connection and attunement within this mother's experience?

- How do they attune to their child e.g. through observation, recording, reflection?
- Do they take part in the child's activities and interests?
- What activities are shared?
- How is trust fostered between mother and child?
- What other attuned relationships are there in the child's life e.g. siblings, friends, additional supporters?
- What aspects of the relationship foster enjoyment, warmth and playfulness within the relationship?
- How does physical connection benefit the relationship?
- What aspects of the relationship are used to heal or support the child's emotional wellbeing?
- How do they use connections to others to support their own wellbeing?
- What communication tools are being used e.g. sand timers, visuals, sign language?
- What is the congruency between their values and needs and the child's needs?
- What do they see as their child's strengths?
- What tensions do they experience e.g. are there internalised values that conflict with the child's needs?
- What types of stress may be acting as a barrier to them attuning to their child?
- What specialised knowledge/skills are they using with their child e.g. are they their child's eyes? Have they provided high levels of medical care?

What does this parent bring to the relationship over and above being a mother?

- What qualities do they have e.g. compassion, bravery, rigour, organisation, creativity, resourcefulness?
- What other factors do they have to manage e.g. health conditions?
- What professional experience do they have and how does it help them?
- How much authority are they able to take up/given?
- How much of their lives do they dedicate to their children?
- What level of thinking, reflection, learning and introspection do they employ?
- How do they conceptualise education?
- How much self-belief do they have?
- What roles do they combine e.g. do they manage carers?

What threats have this mother and child experienced?

- What has their experience of professionals been?
- What has their experience of family and friends been?
- What has their experience of the home education community been?
- How have they responded to their experiences of threat?
- What fears and worries do they have?
- How do they perceive the Local Authority?
- What is the impact of threats on their own wellbeing?
- How are they able to meet their own needs?
- How do they feel their parenting/educational philosophy is perceived?
- How do they feel about uncertainty and the level of responsibility they have?
- What additional needs do they have e.g. medical or mental health needs?

In what ways has this mother experienced growth or transformation?
• How long have they been home educating for? • What has their home education journey been like so far? • What, if anything, has changed over time? • What have they learned since home educating? • What has been helpful? • What has been unhelpful? • How have they coped? • What is their educational philosophy? Has this changed over time? • To what extent do they enjoy home educating? • What impact has it had on their home life and family relationships? • What have their children achieved? • What do they feel proud of?

Table 14: Prompts for the home education learning relationship framework

Together, these tools provide an opportunity to explore the relationship between mother and child in a way that does not require the EP to draw on stereotyped understandings, but instead, encourages them to focus upon the lived experience of their client, fostering anti-oppressive practice in this way. It could be used in conjunction with approaches such as SCERTS (Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support). Here the HELRF could enrich the understanding of transactional support for example.

The HELRF may also be useful where there are questions over the nature of the learning relationship, for example, prompting the professional to consider the meaning behind the educational approach taken by a family. It could also help to identify how best to support a family to develop and apply techniques and strategies successfully, for example, by understanding the positioning of the mother to the child. Furthermore, it could promote relationship building between EP and mother by highlighting potential barriers to this such as previous difficult experiences with professionals.

Any such model will of course have its limitations and there are a number that need to be considered. These and other factors related to the course of this research will be explored next.

5.4 Project review

5.4.1 Strengths

My research sought to explore how home educating mothers experienced their relationship with their children with SEN. By using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) I was able to achieve this. A particular strength of IPA is that as well as being able to find common experiences, differences can also be explored, fostering richness in meaning.

In addition, the research process was organic in nature, by which I mean the results of each stage were used to inform the next, helping to ensure that the findings were not a foregone conclusion. For example, by taking an unstructured approach at the interview stage I allowed my participants to bring to the table what was important to them. These topics informed the development of themes, which informed the implications for EP's and other professionals.

As explored in the methodology chapter, I sought to highlight the ways in which the research process may be influenced by my own experiences and agendas, thereby increasing transparency.

5.4.2 Limitations

There are also a number of limitations to this research. IPA as a methodology does not enable generalisations to be made. The HELRF is not intended to do this, but to present the findings in an accessible way to assist theoretical transferability to other cases.

Other limitations stem from details of the research itself. Not all the participants met the original inclusion criteria and adjustments were made in order to honour their experiences and participation. Something not foreseen before the interviews was the extent to which mothers would include siblings in their discussion. These reflections were included in the analysis since it was clear that mothers could not always neatly separate out their relationships with different children. This is a particular issue because although two mothers had one child, the others had two to four children and therefore the homogeneity of the

sample could have been compromised. Furthermore, the number of children present in the family may also have a broader impact on the experience of the learning relationship. Home educating an only child could be very different to home educating four children. This may also have decreased the homogeneity of the sample.

Further limitations stem from the theoretical underpinning of IPA and the nature of the analysis itself. IPA takes an empathic and curious stance towards participants and also the researcher's own positioning in relation to the data. However, this enables only a limited exploration of processes that may be happening 'under the surface'. In the Methodology chapter I described how psychodynamic approaches support the researcher to examine unconscious processes. Within the psychodynamic tradition there is an emphasis upon thinking about what might be driving people to take particular positions. In essence, IPA only allows exploration of what is happening on the surface. This also extends to the interaction between researcher and participant. For example, during the analysis I questioned how much participants may be trying to 'sell' an idea to me and whether this 'selling' might shape what was said and unsaid. Equally, unconscious processes are likely to have driven my own interactions with participants and their data. Not all possible interpretations could be included and the reasons for leaving some out may not be obvious. These issues were also highlighted in sections 3.2.4 and 3.2.5.

5.4.3 Future research

There are a number of ways this research could be taken forward to build an understanding of the home education relationship. These are as follows:

- A grounded theory approach could be used to develop the HELRF further.
- Comparative IPA studies could explore the differences between families with different numbers of siblings.

- A psychosocial study could be used to explore the experiences of mothers' relationships with their children at a deeper level, investigating unconscious processes involved.

5.4.4 Feedback to participants

Participants will each receive a summary of the research and a copy of the full thesis if they would like, once it has been submitted in September 2018. They will be offered the opportunity to provide feedback to me if they wish.

5.4.5 Reflections

During the course of this research I learned a great deal. It was extremely fulfilling and a privilege to be given access to the participants' personal experiences. I was deeply moved and humbled by their accounts of both successes and difficulties.

As IPA acknowledges the researcher will bring their own interpretations to the analysis, I was encouraged to explore my reactions to the material. These were recorded, where possible, in my research journal and some are described in the methodology section. At the start of the research I was a home educator. My position was therefore as an 'insider' which helped me to access participants and may have helped to build trust with them also. It also meant that I came to their material with a particular view – a positive view – of home education. It was therefore crucial to question whether I was selecting interpretations or developing themes in ways that reflected my own experiences or only positive experiences. When I asked my supervisor to review a transcript I had annotated and used to develop emerging themes, I was extremely anxious to find out whether my interpretations were appropriate or not. This demonstrated the important, if worrisome, process of transparency and validity.

After starting the analysis stage of the process my daughter started a new school after two years home educating her. This brought a different meaning to the analysis since I was no longer a member of the home education community. I noticed feeling envious of some of the

experiences of the participants since I could no longer claim them also to be my own. This highlighted how challenging it has been to 'step back' as a researcher and resist over identifying with the participants. However, I also experienced a sense of relief that I was unburdened by the responsibility that the participants had taken on.

I was also concerned that each participant should feel their contribution had been done justice. At the beginning of the research process I described the project as exploratory and emancipatory in nature. I hoped emancipation would be achieved by allowing the experiences of the participants to come through and, crucially, to transform these experiences into tools that may support professionals to provide home educators with a helpful service. In this sense I am keen to trial the HELRF.

6. Conclusion

In the Introduction chapter I described how the learning relationship was central to children's development, drawing on Vygotsky's social constructivist theory and psychodynamic theory to demonstrate this. I also noted that the learning relationship is something that EP's explore in their day-to-day work using a variety of tools and approaches. This positioned the learning relationship as an important area of work for EP's.

In the Introduction I also emphasised a lack of professional expertise in the area of home education and that exploring how children learn in informal and community settings would extend our understanding of children and young people's learning and development outside of the education system. I also suggested that EP's were well placed not only to do this, but to bridge tensions between the 'State' and home educators due to the level and nature of professional training.

The findings of my research contribute to these areas in a number of ways. Firstly, by identifying characteristics of home educating mothers' experiences with their children it has been possible to open up understanding of not only the home education learning relationship but the nature of learning in informal contexts more generally. These characteristics were encapsulated in six overarching themes:

- Empowering child

- Attunement and Connection

- The Super Mother

- Threats: Past, Present and Future

- Transformation and Growth

- Issues of Control

Drawing on these findings and the literature review I proposed that intersectionality provided a useful, ethical context from which to apply these findings in real life case work. This is particularly important given that the findings of both my own research and that of the literature review suggest that stereotyped understandings of the teacher-pupil dynamic, or indeed home educators in general, do not accurately represent the complexity of the home educating relationship.

To facilitate the application of intersectionality when applying the findings to real life cases I constructed the Home Education Learning Relationship Framework (HELRF). As well as supporting the transferability of the findings, the HELRF encourages the EP to explore their own preconceptions in order to avoid ideological or stereotyped assumptions that are effectively oppressive if put into practice. Instead, the HELRF encourages the EP to explore the relationship *as it is experienced* by mothers. Such an approach may help to foster good relationships with home educators by providing tailored support based upon the individual family context. This may help to build healthy connections with the 'State'.

The limitations of the research and the HELRF were also discussed and it is clear that understanding of the learning relationship in the home education context can be developed through further research. With home educators growing in numbers and increasing scrutiny being suggested, it is likely that the need for work in this area will also grow. I hope that this research provides a stepping stone towards providing expertise that can underpin effective and welcome support for home educators when needed.

Word count: 38,527

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Appendices

Appendix A

Complete list of results from each database search and the reasons for each result being included or excluded.

<u>Literature Search Colour Key</u>

Excluded from literature review: Included in literature review:

■	Wrong meaning of home education / home schooling

■ Relationship is an identified aim of the study

■	Non-empirical home education study

■ Significant focus on relationship in the findings but not in the aim of the study

■	Home education research but not relevant to study

■	Papers that met criteria for inclusion but could not be located to review

	SEARCH A	Database = Psych Info	*Terms* = "home education" OR "home schooling" AND mother* *Limiters* = Dissertations only
	Becker, K. (2013). Home schooling and emergent literacy: A narrative inquiry. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A*, *74*,		
	Bouchard, K. (2011). Home schooling and reading difficulties: Parents learning how to teach their child who struggles with reading. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A*, *72*, 1598.		
	Diciro, M. F. (2000, July). An attachment-based model of academic competence and an empirical test with home-educated children. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, *61*, 562.		
	Drury, E. C. (2015). Beyond socialization, tolerance, and cultural intelligence: Sustainable cultural concern among evangelical homeschoolers. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A*, *75*,		
	Finch, D. D. (2013). The experiences of homeschool mothers. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A*, *74*,		
	Jung, J. H. (2010). Contested motherhood: Self and modernity in South Korean homeschooling. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A*, *70*, 3516.		
	Liao, M. S. (2008). Keeping home: Home schooling and the practice of conservative protestant identity. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A*, *68*, 5094.		
	Roh, K. (1997, December). An understanding of higher order thinking in social studies: A naturalistic case study of a Korean middle school classroom. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A*, *58*, 2060.		
	Sun, L. L. (2007). Dare to home school: Faith and cultural experiences of Chinese Christian mothers. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A*, *68*, 2526.		
	Tsai, T. F. (2009). Family social networks: Taiwanese immigrant parents' homeschooling experiences. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A*, *69*, 3443.		
	Zhang, C. (2016). Challenging the tiger mother stereotype? Christian Chinese immigrant home schooling mothers' parenting practices. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A*, *77*,		
	Zur Nedden, N. (2009). Reflections on homeschooling, mothering, and social change: The life history of Wendy Priesnitz. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A*, *69*, 4662.		
	SEARCH B	*Database* = Psych Info	*Terms* = "home education" OR "home schooling" AND relationship* (in abstract only because this term has multiple meanings and I needed to be able to see how it was being used in the research to determine if it was relevant).

	Limiters = academic journals
	Allen, A. (2013). The examined life: On the formation of souls and schooling. *American Educational Research Journal*, *50*(2), 216-250. doi:10.3102/0002831212466934
	Barrett, S., & Heubeck, B. G. (2000). Relationships between school hassles and uplifts and anxiety and conduct problems in grades 3 and 4. *Journal Of Applied Developmental Psychology*, *21*(5), 537-554. doi:10.1016/S0193-3973(00)00053-8
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	Biddle, V. S., Sekula, L. K., Zoucha, R., & Puskar, K. R. (2010). Identification of suicide risk among rural youth: Implications for the use of HEADSS. *Journal Of Pediatric Health Care*, *24*(3), 152-167. doi:10.1016/j.pedhc.2009.03.003
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	Dunsmuir, S., Frederickson, N., & Lang, J. (2004). Building home-school trust. *Educational And Child Psychology*, *21*(4), 109-128.
	Engelhard, G. J., & Wind, S. A. (2013). Educational testing and schooling: Unanticipated consequences of purposive social action. *Measurement: Interdisciplinary Research And Perspectives*, *11*(1-2), 30-35. doi:10.1080/15366367.2013.784156
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	Johnson, U. Y., Martinez-Cantu, V., Jacobson, A. L., & Weir, C. (2012). The Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters program's relationship with mother and school outcomes. *Early Education And Development*, *23*(5), 713-727. doi:10.1080/10409289.2011.596002
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Zhou, H., & Salili, F. (2008). Intrinsic reading motivation of Chinese preschoolers and its relationships with home literacy. *International Journal Of Psychology*, *43*(5), 912-916. doi:10.1080/00207590701838147

	SEARCH C	Database = Education Source	*Terms* = "home education" OR "home schooling" AND relationship* (in abstract only because this term has multiple meanings and I needed to be able to see how it was being used in the research to determine if it was relevant). *Limiters* = academic journals
🟥	Acevedo, M., & Gilchrist, A. (2007). Tuition for children who cannot attend school due to illness in Scotland: experiences of home tutors. *Support For Learning*, *22*(2), 90-95. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9604.2007.00453.x		
🟥	Affleck, G. (1982). Promise of relationship-focused early intervention in developmental disabilities. *Journal Of Special Education*, *16*413-430.		
🟥	Ainley, M., & Patrick, L. (2006). Measuring Self-Regulated Learning Processes through Tracking Patterns of Student Interaction with Achievement Activities. *Educational Psychology Review*, *18*(3), 267-286. doi:10.1007/s10648-006-9018-z		
🟥	Alasuutari, M. m. (2010). Striving at partnership: parent-practitioner relationships in Finnish early educators' talk. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *18*(2), 149-161. doi:10.1080/13502931003784545		
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6	Jung, J. H. (2010). Contested motherhood: Self and modernity in South Korean homeschooling. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A, 70*, 3516.
7	Kidd, T., & Kaczmarek, E. (2010). The Experiences of Mothers Home Educating Their Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Issues In Educational Research, 20*(3), 257-275.
8	Kuusisto, A. (2003). Transmitting religious values in adventist home education. *Journal Of Beliefs & Values: Studies In Religion & Education, 24*(3), 283-293.
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12	McDowell, S. A. (2000). The home schooling mother-teacher: toward a theory of social integration. *Peabody Journal Of Education (0161956X), 75*(1/2), 187-206. doi:10.1207/S15327930PJE751&2_11
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15	Neuman, A., & Guterman, O. (2017). Homeschooling Is Not Just about Education: Focuses of Meaning. *Journal Of School Choice, 11*(1), 148-167.
16	Zhang, C. (2016). Challenging the tiger mother stereotype? Christian Chinese immigrant home schooling mothers' parenting practices. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A, 77*,

Appendix B

A table describing the critical evaluation of each paper included in the literature review:

0-2 criteria met	
3-7 criteria met	

8-10 criteria met	

Studies	CASP	Adapted CASP
Ahmed (2012)	7/10	
Butler et. al. (2015)		8/10
Diciro (2000)		9/10
Guterman & Neuman (2017)		8/10
Jolly et al (2012)	7/10	
Jung (2010)	6/10	
Kidd & Kaczmarek (2010)	6/10	
Kuusisto (2003)	5/10	
Liao (2008)	5/10	
Lois (2006)	8/10	
Lois (2009)	6/10	
McDowell (2000)	7/10	
Mouzourou et al (2011)	8/10	
Neuman & Guterman (2017)	7/10	
Zhang (2016)	8/10	

Appendix C

Adapted CASP for research using quantitative methodology:

SCREENING QUESTIONS	
1. Was there a clear statement of aims of the research? - *What was the goal of the research?* - *Why it was thought important?* - *Its relevance*	Yes Can't tell No
2. Is a quantitative methodology appropriate? - *Is quantitative methodology the right methodology for addressing the research goal?* - *Does it seek to look for relationships between variables?*	Yes Can't tell No
IS IT WORTH CONTINUING?	Yes / No
3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research? - *Has the researcher has justified the research design?*	Yes Can't tell No
4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research? - *Was the sampling procedure made explicit and was it appropriate?* - *Was the sample size stated?* - *Has the researcher explained the recruitment strategy?*	Yes Can't tell No
5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue? - *Is it clear how data was collected?* - *Has the researcher justified the methods chosen and been explicit about these?* - *Have modifications to the methodology been discussed?*	Yes Can't tell No
6. Has the relationship between the researcher and participants been adequately considered? - *Has the researcher critically examined their own role and potential influence in formulating the research question, collecting data and recruiting participants?* - *Has the researcher responded to events during the study and have they considered the implications of any changes in the research design?*	Yes Can't tell No

7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration? - *Are there sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained?* - *Has the researcher discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)* - *Has approval been sought from an ethics committee?*	Yes Can't tell No
8. Was the data analysis appropriate and rigorous? - *Is there a description of the type of data analysis chosen?* - *Are effect sizes reported?* - *Are confidence intervals reported?* - *Is the significance level reported?* - *Are contradictory data taken into account?*	Yes Can't tell No
9. Is there a clear statement of findings? - *Are the findings explicit?* - *Is there adequate discussion of the evidence for and against the researcher's arguments?* - *Has the researcher discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation)* - *Are the findings discussed in relation to the original research question?*	Yes Can't tell No
10. How valuable is the research? - *Does the researcher discuss the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy or relevant research-based literature?* - *Does the researcher identify new areas where research is necessary?* - *Does the researcher consider ways the research can be used?*	Yes Can't tell No

Appendix D

Letter of approval from the Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC).

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**

NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement

Directorate of Education & Training

Tavistock Centre

120 Belsize Lane

London

NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2548

Fax: 020 7447 3837

Kasia Williams

By Email

25th May 2017

Re: Research Ethics Application

Title: How do mothers home educating children with special educational needs experience their relationship with their children and their home?

Dear Kasia,

I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.
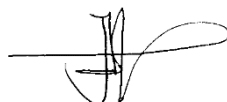
If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Best regards,

Paru Jeram

Secretary to the Trust Research Degrees Subcommittee

T: 020 938 2699

E:

cc.   Adam Styles, Course Lead

Appendix E
Information sheet and consent form for participants.

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**

NHS Foundation Trust

Research Information Sheet

Title of Research: How do mothers home educating children with SEN experience their relationship with their children?

Who is doing the research?

My name is Kasia Williams and I am training to be an Educational Psychologist with the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. I am carrying out this piece of research as a part of my course. I am also a home educator and am aware there is limited research about this area and a need to raise awareness among professionals such as Educational Psychologists.

Would you like to take part in research?

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the information carefully and decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the aim of the research?

This research has two aims:

1. To raise awareness among professionals working with families who are home educating children with special educational needs in order to improve the experiences of these families. These professionals will include Educational Psychologists and others working for Local Authorities such as Elective Home Education teams and Special Educational Needs departments.

2. To progress knowledge in the profession of Educational Psychology by exploring learning and development in the home setting.

Who can take part in the research?

I will be recruiting a small number of mothers to take part in the research. If you would like to take part you must meet the following criteria:

- You must spend over the half the week with your children and conduct the majority of the home education yourself i.e. not employ professional tutors.
- At least one of your children must have special educational needs and preferably an Education Health Care Plan (or older style Statement of Special Educational Needs) and be aged between 7 and 11 years old.

- You must have been home educating for at least one year.

Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part, and it is up to you to decide. You are free to withdraw (stop taking part in the research) at any time without giving a reason. This will not affect any work you are doing with any professional now or in the future.

What does the project involve?

I would like to find out about your experiences by interviewing you face to face. This will take up to one hour and I will make an audio recording of the interview. The recording will be transcribed by a professional transcription service so that I have a written record. I will then analyse each participant's interview, looking for themes, similarities and differences between people.

The results may be used to produce training materials for professionals working with families who are home educating children with special educational needs. The research may also be published in professional journals. After the research is completed I will provide you with feedback on the findings.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes. Data collected during the study will be stored and used in compliance with the UK Data Protection Act (1998). I will ask you to provide me with your name and address and this will be stored using password protection. All paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. I am the only person who will have access to your personal details, however, because I will be conducting the interview at your home I will temporarily make your name and address available to **one** colleague as part of standard health and safety procedure.

The interviews will be recorded with a portable audio device and transcribed by a professional transcription service. The audio recording will not be linked to your personal details and your identity will be indicated by a pseudonym rather than by your name. The data will be kept for a minimum of 10 years.

When writing up my results I will use quotes from your interview but I will give you a pseudonym so that you cannot be identified. However, because there will be a small number of participants there is a small chance that someone in your community may recognise a quote as coming from you. I will endeavour to minimise the chance of this happening as much as possible.

I currently work for Hertfordshire Local Authority as part of my training placement and thus if you live in Hertfordshire there is very small chance that I may have professional involvement with you in the future. Your participation in this research will not impact upon this in any way.

Are there times when my data cannot be kept confidential?

The only circumstance in which confidentiality may be broken is if information is disclosed to me that suggests you or anyone else is in imminent danger. Should this happen then I might have to share that information with others in order to keep you or someone else safe. However, I would always aim to discuss this with you first when possible.

Is there anyone I can contact if I'm concerned about the research?

Yes. If you have any concerns about the conduct of myself or any other aspect of this research project, you should contact Louis Taussig, the Trust Quality Assurance Officer at

What are the benefits and drawbacks of the research?

It is important you are aware of both the benefits and drawbacks of taking part before you decide to do. This research aims to improve the experience of families such as yours and it will allow you to express your feelings about aspects of your experience that are meaningful to you, and to have these listened to. This may help you to identify new ways of thinking and gain a deeper awareness about aspects of your experience.

The research will take up some of your time and it may also touch upon areas of your life which are sensitive and have the potential to raise painful feelings. It may also have less of an impact on services than hoped for and this may be disappointing. Should this be the case I will be able to support you using my skills and training as a psychologist.

How do I take part?

If you would like to take part please read and complete the Consent Form attached and email it back to me. I will then arrange a time to interview you. Or, if you have additional questions please do get in touch with me for an informal, no obligation conversation. My email address is .

Many thanks,

Kasia Williams

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust

Research Consent Form

Title of research	How do mothers home educating children with SEN experience their relationship with their children?
Name of researcher	Kasia Williams

Please read the statements below. Please put your initials in the box next to each one to show that you agree.

1. I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the chance to ask questions.	
2. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time. I understand that I do not need to give a reason for my withdrawal.	

3. I understand I will be required to:
 	
  o Take part in a discussion with the researcher, Kasia Williams, for up to an hour.
  o This discussion will require me to think about my experiences as a home educator in particular:
 	
    - What it's like to be a mother and a home educator
    - How I experience my relationship with my child/children and the factors that influence this	

4. I agree for my interviews to be recorded using a portable audio device and I agree for this to be transcribed by a professional transcription service.	
5. I understand that my data will be anonymised so that I cannot be linked to it and that I will be given a pseudonym.	
6. I understand that as the number of participants in this study is small there is a chance that quotes used in my interview may include details that other's in my community may recognise as coming from me.	
7. I understand that my interview will be used for this research and cannot be accessed for any other purposes.	

8. I understand the findings of this research will be used for training purposes and may be published and be available for the public to read.	
9. I understand that anonymised quotes from my data may be used for training purposes.	
10. I understand that if I disclose information that suggests there may be imminent harm to myself and/or others, confidentiality may be broken.	
11. I am willing to participate in this research.	

Your name…………………………......Signed………………………………

Date…../…../…..

Researcher name ....Kasia Williams............Signed……………………………

Date…../…../…..

Thank you for your help

Appendix F
Recruitment adverts

1. <u>Sent by Elective Home Education (EHE) team to eligible participants:</u>

Dear home educator,

I am a trainee Educational Psychologist (and home educator) currently looking for participants to take part in a research project as part of my training. If you are interested in finding out more please read the enclosed information about the research and how to take part.
The Hertfordshire EHE team has sent this to you on my behalf so your details have remained confidential and will continue to remain so unless you wish to contact me yourself. Please do get in touch using the details enclosed if you have any questions.
Kindest regards,

Kasia Williams
Trainee Educational Psychologist

2. <u>Posted to Facebook groups:</u>

Hello everyone, as well as a home educator I am a trainee Educational Psychologist at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. I am looking for participants to take part in a project exploring the experiences of mothers who are home educating children aged 7 to 11 who have special educational needs (and preferably an EHCP or Statement of SEN). The aim of the research is to capture mothers' experiences so that professionals who work in education and other related professions can gain a better understanding. To take part it is preferable you live in London, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Bedfordshire, Essex or Cambridgeshire. If you take part your personal details will remain confidential and anonymous (further details will be given). If you are interested and would like more information please email me at kwilliams@tavi-port.nhs.uk. Many thanks! Kasia.

Appendix G

Appendix G example of initial noting (semantic, linguistic and descriptive comments and emerging themes)

Emerging themes	Semantic comments	Linguistic comments	Descriptive comments		
T1. Adjusting home ed approach	Having to change original plan/adjust expectations		The relationship is the best it's ever been	5	A Um, now it's the best we've ever had [yeah]. Um, partly
				6	because when I started home educating two years ago I… um, I
T2. Adjusting expectations				7	originally planned a semi structured approach, quickly
			Changing approach from original structured to destructured	8	realised that was not going to work. Looked into
T3. Structured to unstructured	There is a great period of adjustment here – rebuilding relationship	Deschooling – home ed term		9	deschooling [yeah], about getting that… you know, building
				10	that relationship while you get schooling anxiety and stuff
T4. Letting go of school anxiety				11	out of your system [yeah].
T5. Strong home ed identity	Sense of having a strong identity as a home educator			12	That worked really, really well [yeah]. Tried to
				13	reintroduce some structure, went really, really badly
T6. Paradigm shift in parenting	Changing parenting as well as educational approach	Unschooling – home ed term		14	[right], um, so I looked into unschooling and with that I
				15	changed my parenting as well, into a much more gentle

Appendix H

Appendix H full thematic development for each theme and participant

Overarching theme: Empowering Child	
Superordinate themes	*Subordinate themes*
Natalie	
Nurturing confidence and strength	Prioritising confidence Strengths = happiness
Prioritising child's own processes	Valuing individuality Power of play Acceptance and validation
Being on the same level	Parity and fairness Joint venture
Ruth	
Collaboration not control	No need to control Collaboration
Facilitating child's autonomy	Enabling autonomy Play really is learning
Rowena	
Guardian and mentor *(split between this theme and 'Attunement and Connection')*	Mentor/guide Protector
Layla	
Acting as a human bridge	Facilitating separation Empowering child Self as mediator/translator Self as an architect
Wendy	
The whole child	Independence of thought Responding to anxiety Nurturing individuality Centrality of wellbeing Greenhouse keeper
Sarah	
Nurturing for adulthood	Preparing child for independence Mum as carer Holding the future in mind

Overarching theme: Attunement and connection	
Superordinate themes	*Subordinate themes*
Ruth	
Attunement fundamental	Relationships facilitate learning Attunement breeds opportunities Connection is key Observation as a tool
Natalie	

Happy family	Joy
	Warmth
Connection as a tool	Connection as a facilitator
	Knowing child
Layla	
Self as connected to child	Physical and psychological closeness
	Seeing the true child
	Connected through lifespan
	Learning together
Relationship tools	Specialised tools
	Open communication
Being in harmony	The good child
	Commonalities between child and family
	Enjoying small moments
Rowena	
Guardian and mentor *(split between this theme and 'Empowering Child')*	Knowing child
	Celebrating child
Struggles with child	Painful experiences of child
	Battles
Wendy	
Centrality of connection	Learning through talk
	Symbiosis
	Observation
	Success stems from attunement
Sarah	
Engagement and trust	Fostering engagement
	Centrality of safety and trust
	Expert on child
	Assessment and intervention

Overarching theme: The Super Mother	
Superordinate themes	*Subordinate themes*
Layla	
Super parent	Extreme organiser
	Being professional
	Reflective practitioner
	Being 'extra'
Ruth	
Introspection	Deep thinking
	Facilitating healing
	Acquiring expertise
	Humility and reflection
Re-claiming education	Re-defining education
	Parenting as an educational tool
Natalie	
The mind as a source	Thinking and reflecting
	Importance of healing
Mother as the source	Centrality of mum
	Giving

	Primacy of the relationship
	Mum as expert
	Protector
Rowena	
Keeping going	Maintaining compassion
	Physical health barrier
Wendy	
Professionalised motherhood	Flexibility and adaption
	Self-evaluation
	Specialised tools
	Seeking learning
Super nurturer	Holding the family
Sarah	
Developing expertise	SEN as the cornerstone

Overarching theme: Threats: Past, Present and Future	
Superordinate themes	*Subordinate themes*
Layla	
Being under attack	Not being taken seriously
	Feeling fearful
	Managing judgement and blame
Defence systems	Polarising
	Protection
	Strategic war
	Momma bear
Struggle to meet own needs	Own needs are hidden
	Valuing self
	Experiencing great distress
	Sacrificing self
Natalie	
Trials and tribulations of the other	The difficulty with difference
	Finding the right support
Trauma	Professionals blind and dangerous
	Memories of a dark past
Rowena	
Fear and worry	Fear and worry
	Critical self
Scars	Cruelty of education system
	The past is still present
Negative impact of culture	Cultural pressures
Isolation	Not fitting in
	Being judged
	Child as isolated
	Collaboration is tricky
	Loss of relationships
Dark times	Dark times
Ruth	
The other	Remembering injustice of the school system
	Rejecting hegemony

	Disapproval and rejection
Fear	Flight/fight Fear and turmoil
Wendy	
In the wilderness	Isolation Past anguish and collapse Resisting reality Feeling inadequate Negative impact
Defending against ignorance	Professional ignorance Protection and trust Congruency with professionals
Sarah	
The past in the present	Losing confidence in professionals Painful memories
Not being good enough	Guilt and expectation Feeling limited Difficulty meeting everyone's needs
Embattled	Fight/flight Discounted and judged No source of reliable support
Offering up of self	Merging of selves Dissolution of the self Exhausting pressure Sacrificing self

Overarching theme: Growth and Transformation	
Superordinate themes	*Subordinate themes*
Rowena	
Evolving	Coaching self Tension in personal beliefs Growth
Layla	
Finding strength	Challenging cultural hegemony Re-defining motherhood Absolution/reassurance Vindication Gaining wisdom Professional knowledge empowering
Ruth	
Survival skills	Developing confidence Endurance and bravery
Personal empowerment	Great fulfilment Freedom from oppression
New identity	Finding tribe Personal transformation Reflecting on old self Helping others Mum as the source

Natalie	
Becoming enlightened	Evolution Taking light into the world Liberation and inspiration
Wendy	
Fulfilment	Future for self Enjoyment Confidence Giving self Reclaiming self and values Connecting to tribe
Sarah	
Growing in strength	Prioritising own needs over society Relishing progress Own personal coach Growing in strength From discord to harmony

Overarching theme: Issues of Control	
Superordinate themes	*Subordinate themes*
Wendy	
Issues of control	Structure is difficult Issues of control
Sarah	
Tensions in control	Having control Trapped Rigour vs. spontaneity

Layla: summary of thematic development	
Superordinate themes	**Subordinate themes**
Being under attack	Not being taken seriously Feeling fearful Managing judgement and blame
Finding strength	Challenging cultural hegemony Re-defining motherhood Absolution/reassurance Vindication Gaining wisdom Professional knowledge empowering
Defence systems	Polarising Protection Strategic war Momma bear
Being in harmony	The good child Commonalities between child and family Enjoying small moments
Relationship tools	Specialised tools Open communication
Self as connected to child	Physical and psychological closeness Seeing the true child Connected through lifespan Learning together
Super parent	Extreme organiser Being professional Reflective practitioner Being 'extra'
Struggle to meet own needs	Own needs are hidden Valuing self Experiencing great distress Sacrificing self
Acting as a human bridge	Facilitating separation Empowering child Self as mediator/translator Self as an architect

Layla

Development of subordinate and superordinate themes
from emerging themes

BEING IN HARMONY

THE 'GOOD' CHILD

AT79. Teaching style suits both mum and child

AT101. Child does independent learning tasks

AT127. Feeling lucky that child follows instructions

AT97. The child sticking to rules makes him 'easy'

AT102. Mum has some sense of time to herself

AT113. Mum finds time to nap

COMMONALITIES BETWEEN CHILD + FAMILY

AT35. Seeing positive characteristics in child similar to one's own

AT31. Child's characteristics are represented in the style of the family (touchy feely)

AT108. Mum shares interests with child.

ENJOYING SMALL MOMENTS

AT37. Happy with relationship

AT116. Mum values sharing time with child simply for pleasure.

AT119. Tootling about

AT123. Reading together

AT124. Having moments of letting go and having fun

SUPER PARENT

EXTREME ORGANISER

AT160. Great planning and thought

AT122. High levels of organisation

AT104. Mum timetables a lot of activities in the week

AT98. Having a routine

BEING PROFESSIONAL

AT46. Mum as manager of professionals

AT8. Mum sees herself as a teacher

AT143b. Being a teacher

REFLECTIVE PRACTIONER

AT40. Time breeds wisdom

AT88. Valuing self-reflection and learning journey

AT89. Learning about what works is a roller coaster ride

AT90. Questioning ideas and approaches, being open to learning is fulfilling for mum

AT71. Balancing and calculating response to child's needs

AT162. Exploring options

AT45. Being reasonable

AT94. Depressive position with regard to child

AT163. Looking for best fit

BEING "EXTRA⚡"

AT132. Dual personality

AT169. Being a super-parent

AT171. More-ness

AT58. Living a kind of 'super' normality

AT107. A calling

RELATIONSHIP
TOOLS

SPECIALISED
TOOLS

AT141. SEN 'strategies' essential to a good relationship.

AT144. Facilitating communication with SEN tools.

AT143. SEN 'tools' reduce tension in the relationship

AT2. Getting the right diagnosis

AT3. Professional life providing communication tools (signing)

OPEN
COMMUNICATION

AT149. Open communication with child

AT10. Facilitating communication basis of good relationship

AT147. Pre v. post language was different

SELF AS CONNECTED TO CHILD.

PHYSICAL + PSYCHOLOGICAL CLOSENESS

AT33. Child velcroed to mum

AT36. Physical closeness being healing for child

AT38. Good relationship is based on good emotional connection

AT32. Physical and psychological 'attachment' as one.

AT106. Eating together as a family

AT117. Being with child

AT53. Mum is ever-present for child, both psychologically and physically

AT93. Being in a bubble with child

AT148. Increasing closeness

AT110. Intimacy, ease and sense of humour in relationship

SEEING THE TRUE CHILD.

AT25. Mum has greater insight about child

AT70. Mum can see child

AT153. Child needs to be known

AT4. Coming to understand child for who they are

AT152. Compassion

AT128. Explanation rather than punishment

LEARNING TOGETHER

AT107. Mum and child engage in learning activities together. Learning is done together there is often no separation.

AT112. Learning through discussion

AT82. Mum and child on a learning curve together

AT111. Mum exploits any moment together as an opportunity for learning

CONNECTED THROUGH LIFESPAN

AT1. What has happened in the past is important to now

AT11. Mum has distinct role in child's life from early on

ACTING AS A HUMAN BRIDGE

EMPOWERING CHILD

FACILITATING SEPARATION

AT67. Managing boundary between self and child

AT54. Facilitating child's social skills

AT154. Facilitating independence from mum

AT120. Attending groups. Ensuring child gets out and about is important to mum.

AT61. Working towards the bigger

AT65. The future involves accepting child for who he is now.

AT66. Empowering child

AT28. Pride in child

AT39. High expectations of child are important in the role of mum

AT164. Keeping in mind child's potential

AT68. Mum has to balance a fine line between ensuring child has skills to PFN and yet is also able to be them self. Very complicated.

SELF AS MEDIATOR / TRANSLATOR

SELF AS AN ARCHITECT

AT55. Scaffolding for child

AT52. Mum as mediator between world and child

AT51. Interpreter for child

AT150. Mum is an explainer the world to child

AT64. Architect of their future

AT69. Life view of child

AT63. Opening doors for child.

AT161. Being an architect and builder

AT105. Mum facitlitates learning through orchestrating topics/subjects like school

AT151. Mum is a harnesser of opportunities for learning

AT109. Mum utilises technology usually used for pleasure and exploits the learning potential

BEING
UNDER
ATTACK

NOT BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY

AT18. Disempowered by others

AT23. Others feel they know best

AT6. Fobbed off by professionals

AT5. Mum treated like a child

AT13. Services are inhuman

AT137. Being treated like a child by the LA

FEELING FEARFUL

AT158. Fear for child

AT175. Fear of persecution

AT174. Hiding own ideas from public view

AT17. Society is a threat to child

AT22. Fear of misinterpretation in interview

MANAGING JUDGEMENT + BLAME

AT133. Professional life affords protection from blame by LA

AT81. Having to justify home ed style to community

AT80. Feeling judged by home ed community

AT136. Feeling of being judged by professionals behind closed doors

AT140. Being blamed by others and blaming oneself

AT138. Time before diagnosis difficult. Questioned competence

DEFENCE SYSTEMS

POLARISING

AT72. Polarising – good and bad emotions felt to extremes

AT91. The LA is a wolf. Good v. evil

AT44. Viewing the system as infantile

A 7. Rejection of professionals as us ul

AT47. Zero tolerance approach to professionals

AT15. Division between services and num

AT14. Services are incompetent

STRATEGIC WAR

AT24. Strategic war against services/others

AT195. Strategic game dealing with professionals

PROTECTION

T145. Protecting self from being dged by members of the public.

T134. Relationship with child otected from the LA

MOMMA BEAR

AT20. Momma bear

AT115. Protector

AT21. Saving child's life

AT16. Protector of child

AT43. Strength and rebellion

AT49. Being relentless – never giving up

AT74. Sucking it up

AT12. Needing to be a fighter to get right support

STRUGGLE
TO MEET
OWN NEEDS

OWN NEEDS ARE HIDDEN

AT59. Conversation with others allows needs to come out

AT75. Awareness of needs

AT185. Difficulty thinking of own needs

AT188. Learning about own needs – a journey

VALUING SELF

AT76. Trying to retain sense of self

AT125. Relief and happiness at self-care steps

AT50. Appreciating being able to talk to someone about experiences

EXPERIENCING GREAT STRESS

AT95. Humour as a coping mechanism

AT191. Having sole responsibility

AT168. Harsh on self

AT183. Stress

AT187. Strudel pastry

AT114. Physical tiredness

AT73. Being at breaking point, becoming so thin there is no strength left

AT57. Bloody hard work

AT60. Futility

AT48. Tiredness

SACRIFICING SELF.

AT190. Sacrificing self

AT172. Child defines mum

AT156. Mum changing life to suit child

AT165. Doing right for child is everything

AT103. Taking into account everyone's needs

AT129. Prioritising family needs

AT62. Giving up self

AT159. Putting child first

AT130. Life is shaped by family needs and what works for the family

AT186. Contradictions – what is bad for mum is good for child

AT77. Conflict between own needs and child's family

AT157. Considering others

CHALLENGING CULTURAL HEGEMONY

AT177. Challenging cultural hegemony

AT176. Rebellious

AT29. Rejection of society's definition of what is a successful person

AT178. Redefining a successful person

AT30. Reformulating strengths of child according to values different from the norm

AT179. Redefining education for her child

AT34. Valuing emotional intelligence/wellbeing

FINDING STRENGTH

VINDICATION

AT92. Feeling vindicated – importance of official recognition

AT170. Providing justification

AT146. Not needing to explaining child to the world

GAINING WISDOM

AT19. Wisdom and knowledge facilitate power

AT184. Challenges leading to transformation in mum

REDEFINING MOTHERHOOD

AT42. Redefining motherhood

AT9. 'Teaching' is already fundamental part of motherhood

AT194. Strength of women

AT192. Taking on the world

AT193. Feminist

AT41. Traditional (feminine) concepts of motherhood aren't helpful.

AT7. *Reclaiming* authority as a parent

ABSOLUTION / REASSURANCE

AT131. Knowing child's problems are not her fault gives confidence

AT96. Seeing difficulties with child as like any other child provides reassurance

AT139. Reassurance from professionals was very helpful.

AT142. Early diagnosis benefitted the relationship

PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

AT56. Using language of professionals

AT87. Professional life gives mum knowledge about child

AT135. Professional knowledge/research helped mum feel confident

Rowena: summary of thematic development	
Superordinate themes	**Subordinate themes**
Scars	Cruelty of education system The past is still present
Negative impact of culture	Cultural pressures
Fear and worry	Fear and worry Critical self
Dark times	Dark times
Guardian and mentor	Mentor/guide Knowing child Protector Celebrating child
Isolation	Not fitting in Being judged Child as isolated Collaboration is tricky Loss of relationships
Evolving	Coaching self Tension in personal beliefs Growth
Struggles with child	Painful experiences of child Battles
Keeping going	Maintaining compassion Physical health barrier

Rowena

Development of subordinate and superordinate themes
from emerging themes

STRUGGLES WITH CHILD

PAINFUL EXPERIENCE OF CHILD

T165. Feeling disrespected by child

T1. Child is controlling

T214. Child as Jeckell and Hyde

T177. Feeling child is possessive over her

T108. Tolerating child's aggressive behaviour

T2. Child restricts mum

T176. Feels attacked by child sometimes

T111. Child feels 'full on'

T4. Hard being at home with child

T47. Disappointment child doesn't do things she feels he 'should'

T166. Feeling child doesn't care about her wellbeing

T63. Child labelled as 'horrible'

T50. Loss of connection with child causes pain for mum

T42. Mum's emotional wellbeing impacts on relationship

BATTLES

T6. Battling with child

T156. Little battles

T7. Tension in values between child and mum

T201. Picking your battles

T161. Role of 'mum' barrier to learning

T44. Ongoing battle with child over screen time

T88. Relationship is up and down

T167. Overwhelmed and frustrated with child at times

T155. Self-care (sensory) tasks are difficult

T160. Independence is difficult to facilitate at home

T80. Hard to overcome barriers to being child-led

T138. Tension between academics and no academics

NEGATIVE IMPACT OF CULTURE

CULTURAL PRESSURES

T43. Internalised cultural expectations leading to criticism of self

T51. Deviating from parenting rules makes Mum feel bad

T153. Role of mother not seen as contributing

T162. Identity like a domestic slave

T189. Father has more control over child?

T190. Gender roles defining nature of relationship

T152. Feeling criticised for not 'contributing to society'

ISOLATION

NOT FITTING IN

T179. Not fitting in to home ed groups

T59. Mixed feelings about home educators

T38. Identity as home educator developed over time

T39. Feeling different from other HE's

T65. Difficulty connecting with mothers who are different from her

T182. Feeling different to other home educators

T181. Can't relax at home ed groups

CHILD AS ISOLATED

T132. Exclusion from services due to lack of diagnosis

T119. Feels child (and others) is excluded and isolated from society

T124. Police incident highlighted child's isolation
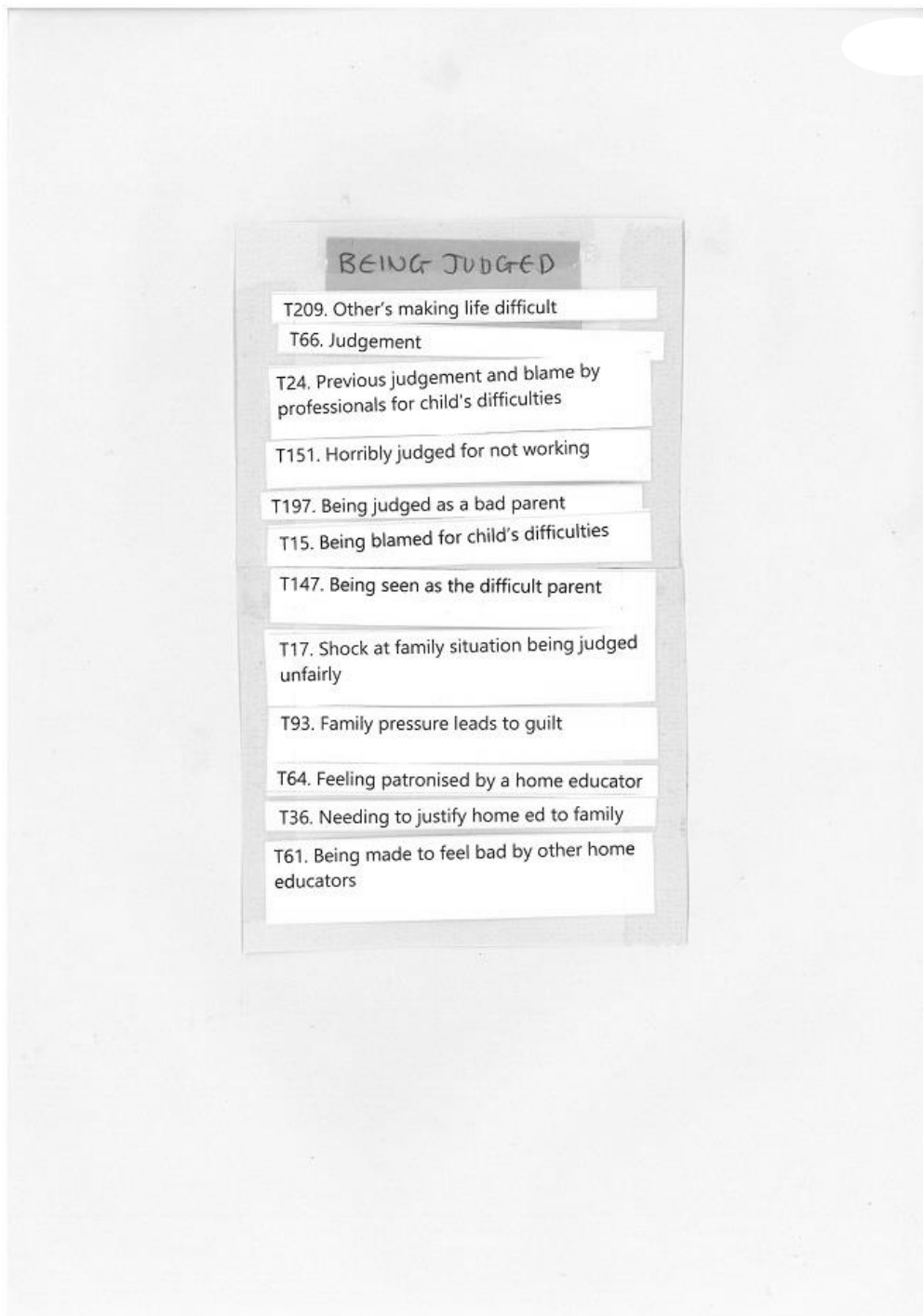
T127. State creating child's isolation

LOSS OF RELATIONSHIPS

T62. Being rejected by others due to child

T30. Huge negative impact on relationships with wider family

T33. Destruction of family

T178. Losing friendships

T32. Isolated from family

T35. Her child's SEN has broken family ties

T34. Family reactions are important to the experience of being a mum

COLLABORATION IS TRICKY

T210. Collaborating with others is difficult

T208. Ex's personal problems interfere

T9. Sharing responsibility with dad provides relief

T141. Relationship with dad has opened up other opportunities

T83. Sharing of responsibility with Dad

Isolation continued:

BEING JUDGED

T209. Other's making life difficult

T66. Judgement

T24. Previous judgement and blame by professionals for child's difficulties

T151. Horribly judged for not working

T197. Being judged as a bad parent

T15. Being blamed for child's difficulties

T147. Being seen as the difficult parent

T17. Shock at family situation being judged unfairly

T93. Family pressure leads to guilt

T64. Feeling patronised by a home educator

T36. Needing to justify home ed to family

T61. Being made to feel bad by other home educators

SCARS

CRUELTY OF EDUCATION SYSTEM

T114. police are more supportive than education

T115. Feels police are on her side

T148. Lack of provision profound barrier

T120. State failing child

T135. Frustration that child's needs are not recognised

T145. Attacked by a school

T67. Handicapped by the State's expectations

T13. Feeling naive about systemic power

T131. Services don't understand child

T21. School punished child for having SEN

T16. Angry at school system for not supporting child

T211. Picking the best of bad options for child

T55. Lack of help affected role as mum

THE PAST IS STILL PRESENT

T195. The past is important

T116. Historical injustice of the school system impacts on her relationship now

T27. Memories of others not understanding situation still strong

T26. Memories of past rejections are still painful now

T25. Social exclusion from the past remains important now

T144. Past experiences dominate current experience of motherhood

T143. Terrible treatment by schools dominates mum's experience

T23. Stress of LA difficulties negatively impacted on family relationships

T81. Protecting child from own educational fate as a child

T75. Childhood experiences influence present

DARK TIMES

DARK
TIMES

T117. Struggling as a mum

T149. Resentment towards situation

T118. Huge sense of injustice

T133. Desperate to get help

T150. Simple enjoyments are now 'luxuries'

T137. Mum and child's problems define life

T136. Mum is embattled by problems

T53. Profound sense of injustice

T60. Experiencing/evaluating others using extremes

T31. Sadness and anger

T3. Exhaustion

T170. Worn down by repeated small things

T107. Sadness at child's experience of rejection

T125. Sadness at child's isolation

T173. Relentless difficulties

T203. Splitting of experience

T171. Wanting a break

T204. Highs and lows

T52. Extreme pressures from both child and state

T158. General struggle

T159. Lack of laughter

T54. Loss of privacy

EVOLVING

TENSIONS IN PERSONAL BELIEFS

T40. Mum's own personal values also drive choices for child

T79. Following own values is difficult

T198. Strong feelings about 'right' parenting

T163. Struggling to understand reasons for child's behaviour.

T164. Some behaviours seen as result of SEN

T37. Valuing child-led learning

T73. Honouring child's interests

T199. Rules and boundaries important

T41. Tension between child-led and mum-led learning

T46. Having rules at home is important

T112. Needing to assert control over child

COACHING SELF

T194. Needing to reassure self

T77. Finding ways to reassure self

T86. Taking one day at a time

T10. Finding a role as a mum that feels manageable

T49. Releasing self from blame for child's problems

T78. Building confidence by focussing on positives

T196. Past experiences are validating

T57. Trying to grow from negative experiences

T139. Easy to forget the positives

T140. Remembering child has done loads

T11. Tapping into own strengths for teaching

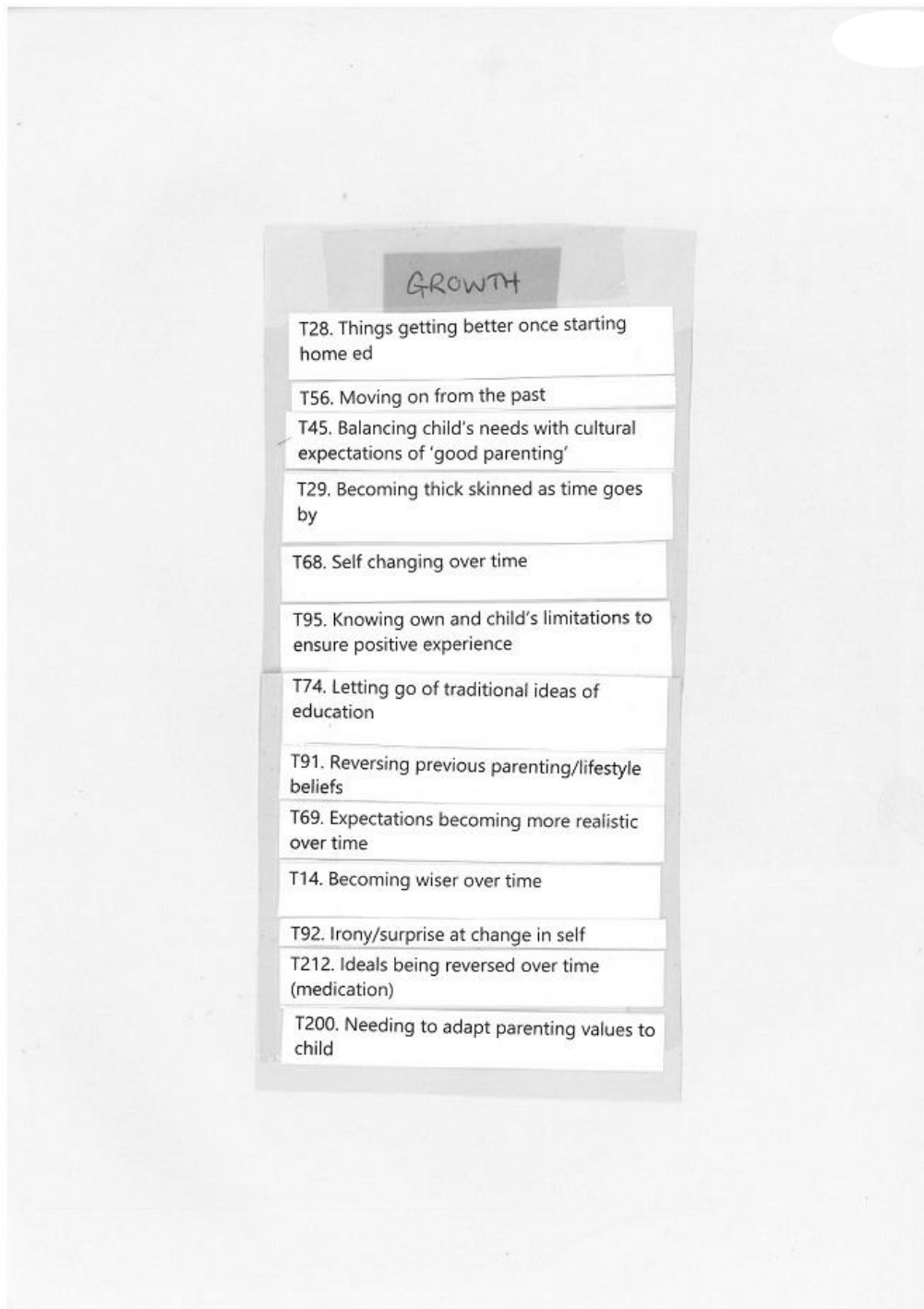T175. Remembering child doesn't intend to hurt

T186. Different expectations of what is social success

T193. Knowing child's triggers reduces self-blame

T192. Knowing solutions to child's difficulties

Evolving continued:

GROWTH

T28. Things getting better once starting home ed

T56. Moving on from the past

T45. Balancing child's needs with cultural expectations of 'good parenting'

T29. Becoming thick skinned as time goes by

T68. Self changing over time

T95. Knowing own and child's limitations to ensure positive experience

T74. Letting go of traditional ideas of education

T91. Reversing previous parenting/lifestyle beliefs

T69. Expectations becoming more realistic over time

T14. Becoming wiser over time

T92. Irony/surprise at change in self

T212. Ideals being reversed over time (medication)

T200. Needing to adapt parenting values to child

FEAR + WORRY

FEAR AND WORRY

T184. Worrying child is doing something wrong

T8. Fear of battles over work with child ending in mum's death

T5. Fear home ed has made child reliant on mum

T128. Spending lots of time worrying about the future

T123. Thinking about child's future role in society

T126. Fearing child's future

T121. Great fear child will end up in criminal justice system

T129. Uncertainty is very worrying

T48. Hope's for child being dashed

T87. Fear of future

T183. Constantly monitoring child

T180. Needing to supervise child at groups

T207. Professionals putting mum at serious risk

CRITICAL SELF

T110. Blaming self

T100. Pain not being able to help child

T187. Feeling like not coming up to scratch

T85. Lack of confidence in self

T84. Not feeling competent/having right skills long term

T76. Doubting competence

T169. Guilt at behaviour towards child

T109. Blaming marriage for child's behaviour

GUARDIAN + MENTOR

MENTOR/GUIDE

T99. Needing to deliver difficult messages to child

T102. Facilitating child's socialisation

T122. Role is to keep child out of the criminal justice system

T12. Role is to socially integrate child

T130. Needing to do the right thing for child

T82. Wanting to instil value of education

T157. Mum as explainer/persuader to child

PROTECTOR

T142. Keeping child safe from reality

T97. Sadness about own health drives mum to protect child

T19. Mum as protector

T20. Fighting for child when in school

T22. Fighting to get a proper school placement for child

T18. Aim of statement was to protect child from the school system

T206. Fighting the system for the child

T146. Being brave and bold with the LA

KNOWING CHILD

T134. Mum understands child's learning needs

T104. Mother's intuition facilitating support of child

T103. Motherhood affording intuition

T213. Mum sees all sides of child

T191. Greater knowledge of child

CELEBRATING CHILD

T105. Pride in child

T106. Admiration of child's strength

T90. Pottering Together

T89. Times of harmony

T205. Excited to see child

T185. Child can exceed expectation sometimes

T98. Child is experienced as very sociable

T188. Actively avoiding use of fear to control

KEEPING GOING

(photocopy of original was unclear so I typed this superordinate theme

for the purpose of the appendix)

MAINTAINING COMPASSION

T168. Losing temper causes loss of compassion

T174. Trying to be a compassionate mum

T202. Letting some 'bad' behaviour go

T175. Remembering child doesn't intend to hurt

PHYSICAL HEALTH BARRIER

T70. Health problems making motherhood harder

T96. Health journey

T71. Big physical toll on mum

T94. Physical health restraining goals

T72. Improving health facilitates activities

T8. Fear of battles with child ending in mum's death

Ruth: summary of thematic development	
Superordinate themes	**Subordinate themes**
Survival skills	Developing confidence Endurance and bravery
The other	Remembering injustice of the school system Rejecting hegemony Disapproval and rejection
Introspection	Deep thinking Facilitating healing Humility and reflection Acquiring expertise
New identity	Finding tribe Personal transformation Reflecting on old self Helping others Mum as the source
Fear	Fight/flight Fear and turmoil
Attunement fundamental	Relationships facilitate learning Attunement breeds opportunities Connection is key Observation as a tool
Facilitating child's autonomy	Enabling autonomy Play really is learning
Personal empowerment	Great fulfilment Freedom from oppression
Re-claiming education	Redefining education Parenting as an educational tool
Collaboration not control	No need to control Collaboration

Ruth
Development of subordinate and superordinate themes
from emerging themes

Redefining education

T259. reconstructing definition of 'success'

T117. Progress taking a different form

T277. Thinking outside the box

T109. Broadening view of education absolute necessity

T108. Signing up to home ed processes important

T98. Rapid adaption required

T107. Letting go of school conditioning

T260. Rejecting societal definition of success

T231. Reconceptualising the nature of learning

T3. Structured to unstructured

T2. Adjusting expectations

T4. Letting go of school anxiety

T1. Adjusting home ed approach

T167. Re-defining learning as a life skill

T171. Redefining learning

T244. Beliefs about learning

T100. Reclaiming ownership of education from LA

T48. Free from arbitrary markers like academics

T46. Age appropriateness no longer matters

T50. Trusting the process

T166. Rejection of arbitrary milestones

T243. Structured learning difficult to generalise

Re-claiming education

Parenting as educational tool

T192. Modelling sorry.

T174. Modelling values for children to learn

T181. Family problem solving

T203. Family relationships teach life skills

T170. Learning and life are integrated

T20. Synthesis of parenting and education philosophy

T175. Parenting as teaching

T8. Parenting and education linked

T188. Providing language

T143. Talking to develop self-awareness

T185. Discussion as learning

T142. Talking as a tool

T200. Teaching values through modelling

INTROSPECTION

Deep thinking

T272. Developing tools for *thinking*

T229. Questioning leads to insight

T267. Challenging self

T68. Huge amount of thinking

T53. Calculating responses based on child's need

T180. Investigating (thinking)

T176. Needing to be conscious

T34. Lots of self-reflection

T60. Always reviewing and reflecting

T138. Weighing up the options

T273. Being experimental

T251. Reflecting on difficulties of the past

T59. Subtlety in approach

T144. Trial and error

Acquiring expertise

T141. Needing specialist knowledge

T133. SEN requires extra thought

T112. Consulting home ed experts

T61. Understanding SEN aids approach

FACILITATING & HEALING

T145. Role of psychotherapist

T103. Mum facilitates healing

T102. Healing time

T116. Giving child time

T78. ~~Mum psychologist~~ Tackling anxiety

T252. Slow and gentle

T186. Acknowledging feelings

T183. Thinking about what is under the surface

Humility + reflection

T274. Humility

T239. Modesty

T275. Being able to admit when wrong

T193. Apologising to children is important

T63. Huge restraint

T191. Very humble

T228. Questioning own judgements

T179. Holding yourself in check

T214. Questioning self

T69. Managing own expectations

T65. Restraining own emotions

T24. Pull to old parenting habits

T25. Empathy is harder than anger

Survival skills

Developing confidence

T55. Working around problems

T89. Turning anger into something helpful

T26. Strong belief and commitment to approach

T206. Self-belief

T283. Can-do, positive attitude

T216. Strength and doubt

T156. Huge persistence

T90. Authority gives confidence

Endurance + bravery

T256. Facing fears

T282. Having faith in an intangible process

T115. Needing patience and faith

T124. Overcoming fears

T285. Acceptance of uncertainty

T114. Sitting with the unknown

T129. Tolerating frustration

T73. Putting on a good face

T198. Developing thick skin

T196. Bravery

personal Empowerment

Great fulfillment

T279. Fulfilled/excited by challenge

T64. Great sense of achievement when things work

T288. Meaningful role

T265. Collaborative living is hugely rewarding

T280. Mum love of learning

T118. Enjoying child's growing autonomy

T255. Seeing the 'real' victories

T254. Joy at child taking steps forward

T263. Feeling of personal accomplishment

T218. Spontaneous acts of affection

T258. Being mum = fulfilment

Freedom from oppression

T40. Leaving the system facilitates mum's parenting

T287. Being able to do what feels right

T290. Being able to change things

T286. Empowerment is everything

T281. Freed from oppression

T284. Empowering self through knowledge

T264. Freedom and control breeds satisfaction

T41. Relief/freedom

T43. Freedom facilitates child-led approach

new identity

Finding tribe

T5. Strong home ed identity

T248. Finding a tribe for self and children

T111. Seeking reassurance important

T88. Support group supportive

T99. Comfortable with home ed terminology

T125. Using home ed community as mentors

T86. Building connections

Personal transformation

T278. SEN prompting questioning of what really matters

T39. Profound difficulties bred change

T6. Paradigm shift in parenting

T270. Motherhood drove change in self

T266. Transformation of self

T269. Reversal, undoing values

Helping others

T262. 'Making a difference'

T91. 'Saving' others from the system

T85. Publicising story

T87. Supporting others

Reflecting on old self

T38. Disconnection stressed child

T37. Being on opposite sides bred disconnection

T32. Sadness at being angry with child in the past

T33. Taking school's side not child's

T31. Regret at past parenting

T29. Authoritarianism a disaster

T271. Old self military

T261. Negative memories of past self

T268. Old judgemental self

Mum as the source

T289. Being fully responsible

T132. Child's future rests on mum

T137. Singularly responsible for child's fate

T15. Mum's approach defines the relationship

Remembering injustice of system.

T30. Merging of school and authoritarianism

T28. Authoritarianism normalised/ingrained

T169. Protecting children from own fate

T292. Mainstream appearing more absurd over time

T291. Values growing in distance from mainstream

T168. Drawing on own experiences

T92. Experience drives strong conviction

T81. Re-living pain of past hurts

T82. Memories of injustice

Rejecting hegemony

T276. Rejecting compliance

T199. Rejection of hegemony

T84. System is mad/inhuman

T83. Anger at corrupt and abusive system

T211. Frustration with society

T194. Challenging parenting hypocrisy

T178. Flying in the face of mainstream

T165. Rejection of values of national curriculum

T190. Going against the parenting grain

The other

Dissapproval + rejection

T246. Heartbreak at child losing friends

T247. Rejection by old friends

T205. Difficult others

T213. Prioritising child in public takes confidence

T197. Fearing what people think

T212. Overcoming fear of public disapproval

T210. Juggling child's needs with societal needs

T235. Others only see the surface

T18. Managing 'other's' projections

T208. Becoming a target to blame

T209. Being an minority leaves you open to blame

T19. Reassuring outsiders

T177. Being seen as permissive

T35. Charged on bad parenting

Facilitating child's autonomy

Enabling autonomy

T173. Prioritising intrinsic motivation

T45. Child's autonomy fosters skills

T127. Supporting child to problem solve

T126. Giving child responsibility for engaging

T128. Giving options

T134. Facilitating independence key concern

T240. Celebrating autonomous development

T119. Mum as facilitator

T74. Being one step ahead

T51. Enabler/opener

T13. Belief in intrinsic motivation

T16. Negotiation as a tool for SEN

T122. Monitoring child's trajectory

T121. Like tending a plant

T120. Scaffolding next stage

T136. Having the future in mind

T241. Not imposing learning

Play really is learning

T242. Spontaneous learning is deeper

T230. Searching for value in child's activities

T227. Finding meaning in child's interests

T232. Valuing unconscious processes

T172. Deep learning stemming from taboo activities

T234. Looking beyond appearances (youtube)

collaboration not control

No need to control

T184. Mediating not punishing

T49. Mum relinquishing control
T52. No coercion
T189. Letting go of control
T27. Child led philosophy is key to relationship
T195. Trusting children will do the right thing

T12. No reward or punishment

T7. Gentle parenting

T220. Power battles reduce connection

collaboration

T21. Family as a team
T223. Equality in the relationship

T10.Emphasis on mutual respect

T14. Journey to mutual trust and respect

T202. Compromise supports relationship

T187. Seeking consensus
T23. Teamwork
T201. Compromise
T11. No hard/fast rules at home
T9. Collaboration with child

T22. Empathic approach
T221. Child knows mum has his back

Fear

Fight/flight

154. Mummy tiger
162. Frightened to death
60. LA as all-powerful
161. Preparing to flee the country

157. Calculating moves with the LA
158. Living in fear of LA

51. Fear of child being forced back to school

59. Powerless in face of LA

53. Fight/flight mode

50. Feeling powerless in face of LA

52. Mum would abandon entire life to
tect child

Fear and turmoil

T135. SEN brings extra fear for future

T131. Fear of screwing up child

T215. Off-piste is a hard place to stay

T207. Wishing for more confidence

T67. Exhausting being so conscious

T113. Feeling fully responsible

T106. Worrying

T110. Going against convention is terrifying

T130. Not knowing what to do

T79. Facing dilemmas alone

T71. draining

T70. Coping with extremes of emotion

T66. So hard

T62. Egg shells/land mines

Attunement fundamental

Relationships facilitate learning

T47. Sibling is learning partner

T250. One to one friendships more helpful

T249. Friendships key to development

connection is key

T219. Connectedness is important

T101. Reconnection with child

T217. Connection = comfort and trust

T95. Identifying with child

T96. Self in child's shoes

T94. Mum being an Aspie

T253. 'One-ness'

T54. 'Feeling' child

T44. 'seeing' true child

T226. Sharing in child's activities

T222. Communication lines open

T58. Listening to child

T204. Relief that child is not just 'badly behaved'

Attunement breeds opportunities

T224. Trust and communication support change

T225. Connection creates windows of opportunity

T77. Attunement facilitates decisions

T236. Connection facilitates delving into child's mind

T238. Intimate knowledge of child's brain

T75. Feeling child's needs

T56. Gut instinct as a tool

Observation as a tool

T76. Careful observation

T104. Mum engages and observes child

T105. Learning about child

T123. Re-evaluating the meaning of child's behaviours

T237. Observing for progress

T245. Observing skill development

T233. Master of observation

Natalie: summary of thematic development	
Superordinate themes	**Subordinate themes**
Prioritising child's own processes	Valuing individuality Power of play Acceptance and validation
Happy family	Joy Warmth
The mind as a source	Thinking and reflecting Importance of healing
Becoming enlightened	Evolution Taking light into the world Liberation and inspiration
Trauma	Professionals blind and dangerous Memories of a dark past
Mother as the source	Centrality of mum Giving Primacy of the relationship Mum as expert Protector
Nurturing confidence and strength	Prioritising confidence Strengths = happiness
Connection as a tool	Connection as a facilitator Knowing child
Being on the same level	Parity and fairness Joint venture
Trials and tribulations of the other	The difficulty with difference Finding the right support

Natalie
Development of subordinate and superordinate themes
from emerging themes

BEING ON THE SAME LEVEL

PARITY AND FAIRNESS

T59. Issues of control = relationship break down

T98. Not better than children

T39. Fairness in house

T44. Listening to views is important

T101. Enjoying parity

T28. No hierarchy

T24. Checking things out with children

JOINT VENTURE

T78. Mum and child in unison

T30. Joint exploration with children

T77. Mum and child on parallel journey

T198. Beautiful entwinement with child

T27. Learning together.

T25. Interactive/collaborative

T118. Symmetry and togetherness

T29. Explicitly doesn't feel like a teacher

PRIORITISING CHILD'S OWN PROCESSES

VALUING INDIVIDUALITY

T89. Mum values uniqueness of people

T179. Prioritising individualism

T22. Individualising

T100. Not wanting child to be a copy of self

POWER OF PLAY

T180. Valuing the power of play to lead to discovery

T177. Protecting love of learning

T129. Play as therapy

T21. Finding teaching solutions that are enjoyable for child

ACCEPTANCE + VALIDATION

T37. Love = supporting children to be themselves

T40. Not needing to change children

T86. Validating child

T13. Non-critical

T71. Allowing TV, computer and sleeping choices

T14. No pressure leads to development

T85. Acceptance, not teaching

T12. Accepting child for who they are

T17. Not pointing out mistakes

T16. Giving child time

NURTURING CONFIDENCE AND STRENGTHS

PRIORITISING CONFIDENCE

T102. Nurturing children's self respect

T84. Belief that being accepted leads to confidence

T72. Prioritising confidence

T69. Autonomy = recovery and confidence

T18. Promoting self-esteem

STRENGTHS = HAPPINESS

T34. Belief in strengths

T111. Personal strength necessary

T33. Finding strengths key to happiness

HAPPY FAMILY

JOY

T123. Joy and laughter

T96. Joy in confidence growing

T113. Joy and pride in children

WARMTH

T23. Warmth and respect

T38. Powerful love

T5. Family style (warmth) promoting homeliness

T1. At ease with a 'homely child'

CONNECTION AS A TOOL

CONNECTION AS A FACILITATOR

T191. Having a social nature

T90. Connection with others reduces son's anxiety

T93. Facilitating development through relationships

T193. Being sustained by talking to others

T189. Finding 'heart' friends

T130. Connection as therapy

T127. Cup filling

T125. Physical connection is important

T4. Being responsive to child's needs

T6. Being able to trust mum

KNOWING CHILD

T124. Connection fosters discovery about child

T122. Connection and learning opportunities are linked

T80. Interactions breed deep understanding of child

T8. Observing child with interest

T199. Joy in watching and witnessing children

T68. Detailed observer

T133. Being 'with' child

T119. Entering child's world

T126. Observations provide evidence

T52. Witnessing child's stress

T7. Child feeling 'known' by mum

T70. Intuition

T11. Sensitivity

THE MIND AS A SOURCE

THINKING + REFLECTING

T140. Evaluating self's performance

T87. Seeking creative solutions

T136. Solution finding

T135. Constant thinking

T146. Always mulling ideas

T137. Reflective practitioner

T35. Humility

T99. Humble self

T75. No hypocrisy

T79. Seeking knowledge and information

T176. Aiming for rigour

T9. Having hypotheses

IMPORTANCE OF HEALING

T97. Mum as healer

T110. Nurturing mental health

T197. Seeking ways to cope with emotions

T76. Tuning into feelings is healing

T144. Self as needing to express emotions

T196. Exploring not supressing emotions

T195. Importance of emotional hygiene

T194. Emotionally 'filled up'

T148. Finding time for self

T131. Putting own feelings aside

TRIALS AND TRIBULATONS OF THE 'OTHER'

THE DIFFICULTY WITH DIFFERENCE

T185. Very hard accepting and coping with differences in other families

T186. Putting up with others to help daughter

T184. Being left out

T182. Clash of styles with others can be tricky

T183. Disapproval from other home educators

T32. Difference between mum and dad good

T188. Disappointment at home ed community

T114. Comparison with others validates own choices

T187. Feeling insulted

T128. Home ed friendship difficulties

T31. Dad brings laughter

FINDING THE RIGHT SUPPORT

T190. Benefitting from meeting others with same parenting values

T153. Helpful finding professional information that matches values

T83. Getting ideas from other mums

EVOLUTION

T105. Reacting against upbringing

T107. Questioning origins of self

T168. Old self v. new self
T104. The past influencing the present

T82. Developing approach over time

T106. Putting right the past

T175. Motivated by disappointment

T141. Phoenix from the flames

T67. Dad transforming/recovering from trauma

T92. Successes inspire mum to keep going

T47. Finding strength after trauma

T192. Adversity leading to deeper self knowledge

T160. Journey of healing own mental health

T178. Own educational history influencing decisions

T109. Values rooted in self's history

T162. Relief to get rid of obstacles to full focus

T161. Needing strength to let go of old life

T163. Clash of old and new life

T48. Strength required to deregister

BECOMING ENLIGHTENED

TAKING LIGHT INTO THE WORLD

T88. Taking son's story 'out there'

T152. Driven to share learning

T150. Sharing knowledge and message

T151. Wanting to take her light out into the world

T171. Determination to forge career for self

T45. Having strength in convictions

LIBERATION AND INSPIRATION

T149. Self as incredibly fulfilled

T147. Inspired by new learning

T159. Finding a purpose
T166. Turning the brain on

T134. liberation

T142. Allowing self permission to follow own interests

T143. Mum has passion for learning

T145. SEN as a project for self

T174. Desire to be at the cutting edge

T173. Academic self

T169. Finding meaning

T91. Hitting the jackpot

T103. Relativist thinking

MOTHER AS THE SOURCE

CENTRALITY OF MUM

T112. Coaching self to coach children

T139. Self as laying foundations for children

T181. Accidental gatekeeper to friends

T94. Mum as an orchestrator

T73. Mixture of personal beliefs and child's needs guides approach

T26. Approach stems from personality

T95. Recruiting volunteers

T108. Erring on side of nurture

PRIMACY OF THE RELATIONSHIP

T58. Stress drove a wedge in the relationship

T116. Relationship more important than fitting in

T115. Primacy of mother-child relationship

T36. Being a loving parent is as important as teaching

T117. Following the norm shouldn't trump all

GIVING

T120. Generosity

T132. Mum gets bored

T121. Patience

T138. More in more out

MUM AS EXPERT

T3. Understood child from an early age

T62. Mum knowing better than professionals

T172. Expert by experience

T165. Developing new expertise

T164. Immersing self in psychology/the brain

PROTECTOR

T10. Holding back feelings to protect child

T81. Protecting son from Dad's anger and fear

TRAUMA

PROFESSIONALS BLIND AND DANGEROUS

T60. No help after accident

T61. Professionals misinterpreting child

T63. Professionals not understanding

T154. Desperation to be understood

T156. Feeling schools don't understand brain injury

T157. Ignorance of professionals is dangerous

T57. Ludicrous advice

T50. Professionals blind to child's problems

T56. Confusion over professional's advice

T155. Frustration with professionals

T54. Professionals wield power

T49. Professionals disempowering mum

T53. Professionals causing mum to question reality

MEMORIES OF A DARK PAST

T158. Guilt/sickness at self-growth after child's trauma

T41. Sadness at memory of the past

T64. Self as misunderstood

T46. Self as lost and weak after son's accident

T55. Questioning what is real

T66. depression

T42. Past helplessness

T43. Sadness at not responding to child

T167. The past as a reflective tool

T51. The pain of losing a child to stress

T65. Isolated and unheard

Wendy: summary of thematic development	
Superordinate themes	**Subordinate themes**
Fulfillment	Future for self Reclaiming self and values Enjoyment Confidence Connecting to tribe Giving self
Issues of control	Issues of control Structure is difficult
Centrality of connection	Learning through talk Symbiosis Observation Success stems from attunement
Super nurturer	Holding the family
Professionalised motherhood	Flexibility and adaption Specialised tools Self-evaluation Seeking learning
Defending against ignorance	Professional ignorance Protection and trust Congruency with professionals
In the wilderness	Isolation Resisting reality Feeling inadequate Past anguish and collapse Negative impact
The whole child	Independence of thought Nurturing individuality Responding to anxiety Centrality of wellbeing Greenhouse keeper

Wendy
Development of subordinate and superordinate themes
from emerging themes

FULLFILMENT

FUTURE FOR SELF

T170. Having wider goals

T64. Mothering SEN child inspiring future

career

T65. Seeing a future for self

T172. Frustration at lack of support

*

ENJOYMENT

T31. Remembering halcyon days of early years

T63. Enjoying children

T78. Finding humour

T14. SEN expressions of affection

CONFIDENCE

T4. Empowerment through profession

T167. Having confidence in home ed

GIVING SELF

T171. Altruistic self

T61. Biologically driven to nurture

RECLAIMING SELF + VALUES

T139. Choosing cultural tropes that suit

T150. Home ed = being herself

T151. De-registering brought more peace

T149. Relief not needing to be everything to everyone

T165. Being able to live to values

T152. Home ed = stress reduction for mum

T50. Reclaiming family life and control through home ed

CONNECTING TO TRIBE

T107. Being with mums with similar experiences helpful

T158. Finding tribe helps both mum and child

T70. Seeing other grown-ups is important

T159. Connecting with others with same values

T156. Finding tribe

T155. Finding right village

T69. Dual purpose of socialising

ISSUES OF CONTROL

STRUCTURE IS DIFFICULT

T32. Difficult to achieve consistency

T133. Formal work is more difficult to get child to do

T39. Seeking teaching support

T38. Feeling not able to meet child's needs

T6. Tutor relieves stress of teaching

T33. Tutors take pressure off

ISSUES OF CONTROL

T72. Non-coercive

T121. Invitations not expectations

T130. Mum and child each need to experience control to be happy

T128. Making child feel in control is helpful

T52. NOT the 'controlling mother'

T135. Prioritising focus for child

T142. Maintaining leadership with children

T129. Child following mum's lead is important to her

T102. Discipline is important (telling off)

T126. Feels extrinsic motivators are needed

T57. Challenging negatvie notion of 'control'

IN THE WILDERNESS

ISOLATION

T17. Isolation caused by SEN

T95. Two lives – inside and outside

T20. Neglected by the system

T18. Past self-excluded

T15. Not being understood

T92. Mum as 'unseen' and thus isolated

RESISTING REALITY

T89. Wanting to resist reality at times

T2. Desire for child v. reality

FEELING INADEQUATE

T109. Not knowing how to handle child is terrible

T37. Feeling lacking in specialist knowledge

PAST ANGUISH + COLLAPSE

T154. Mum victimised by school process

T49. Loss of privacy = loss of mental health

T43. Remembering family hugely distressed

T41. Sadness at loss of togetherness

T46. Family togetherness important after trauma of separation

T44. Family is living with the consequences of trauma

T47. Togetherness as healing

T21. Past self needing to heal

T19. Past self physically and mentally crushed

T96. Negative experiences breed fear

T42. PTSD

T16. Being 'in the dark'

T153. School as a torture trap

NEGATIVE IMPACT

T91. Having to be on the ball all the time

T88. exhaustion

T87. irritation

DEFENDING AGAINST IGNORANCE

PROFESSIONAL IGNORANCE

T53. Managing professional's lack of knowledge about home ed

T54. Needing to enlighten professionals

T26. Managing inappropriate expectations from others

T28. Professional knowledge increased expectations of mum

T55. Staying calm in the face of old tropes (socialisation)

T27. Professionals and family in fantasy land

T23. Mum knowing child's needs better

T9. Frustration not being afforded authority

T147. Professionals causing doubt in self

T101. Picking up the pieces of other's incompetency

T51. Fear of judgement based on stereotype

PROTECTION + TRUST

T98. Needing extra trust in others

T97. Fear that child's needs won't be understood by 'others'

T99. Battling with Dad and others to use the right techniques

T162. Element of protection of child

T25. Need to protect child

T157. Trusting people

CONGRUENCY WITH PROFESSIONALS

T29. Being trusted was helpful

T111. Professional advice changed way of interacting

T148. Diagnoses providing clarity

T30. Congruency with professionals helpful

T105. Feeling trusted and listened to by paediatrician

PROFESSIONALISED MOTHERHOOD

FLEXIBILITY + ADAPTION

T117. Re-calculating expectations

T136. Conflicted aims

T86. Adaption becomes second nature

T85. Adaption is key

T145. Being flexible in approach to children

T143. Finding compromise that meets

T75. Needing creativity

T115. Professionalising of motherhood

T3. Professional and mum roles merging

SPECIALISED TOOLS

T100. Developing a library of communication techniques

T132. 'tools' facilitate formal work

T66. Needing to use multiple specialised approaches

T127. Life being shaped by systems

T84. Taking extra care with child

T83. Utilising SEN tools (whiteboard) to support communication

SELF EVALUATION

T125. Self critical

T131. Holding self responsible for child's response

T124. Holding self responsible for child's response

T112. Reflecting on impact of own behaviour on child

T80. Self-evaluation based on child's responses

T81. Being reflective

T90. Reflecting on own feelings

SEEKING LEARNING

T106. Learning, learning, learning.

T103. Reading to gain knowledge

T110. Putting bits of knowledge together

T104. Learning from books and conferences

T76. Extensive thinking

T94. Huge amount of work behind the scenes

T5. Open to learning

T36. Openness.

SUPER NURTURER

HOLDING THE FAMILY

T141. Balancing academia with wellbeing

T93. Mum props child up

T68. Meeting multiple needs, having multiple roles

T45. Dealing with the impact on siblings

T22. siblings needs influencing choices

T40. Family is thought of in totality (siblings)

T67. Varied and rich activities

CENTRALITY OF CONNECTION

LEARNING THROUGH TALK

T161. Fostering dialogue with children about social issues

T34. Discussion as learning

SYMBIOSIS

T12. Sustaining life = heightened attunement

T10. Intricate awareness leading to merging of self with son

T1. Symbiosis as dependency

T119. Child and mum are like one

T168. A shared experience with children

T169. Lives entwined

T118. Putting self in child's shoes

T73. Activities are done together

T11. Self as physical 'carer' in past

OBSERVATION

T13. Hypervigilance supports educating son

T114. Tracking increases skill to support child

T113. Honing tracking and observation of child

T77. Child's interactions provide insight

T146. Extensive observation of child

SUCCESS STEMS FROM ATTUNEMENT

T8. 'Knowing' child supports successful interactions

T123. Waiting for relaxed moments to do structured learning

T122. Being in tune necessary to capitalise on moments

T74. From knowing child stems successful approach to learning

THE WHOLE CHILD

INDEPENDENCE OF THOUGHT

T163. Escaping cultural hegemony

T35. Supporting children to think for themselves

T56. Questioning 'norms'

T166. Nurturing philosophical and ideological thinking

T164. Fostering critical thinking

T160. Valuing independence of thought

NURTURING INDIVIDUALITY

T71. Needing to tailor learning

T60. Helping children's individuality to flourish

T48. Belief – child's needs come first

T58. Wanting children to be themselves

T79. Enjoying idiosyncrasies

T137. SEN influences focus

RESPONDING TO ANXIETY

T108. Learning child anxious, not naughty

T120. Designing learning to lower anxiety

T116. Anxiety driven behaviours not penalised

CENTRALITY OF WELLBEING

T138. Wellbeing biggest priority

T140. Money won't buy you happiness

GREENHOUSE KEEPER

T144. Greenhouse keeper

T59. Self as greenhouse keeper

T134. Future proofing

T82. Planning ahead

Sarah: summary of thematic development	
Superordinate themes	**Subordinate themes**
Embattled	Fight/flight Discounted and judged No source of reliable support
Nurturing for adulthood	Preparing child for independence Mum as carer Holding future in mind
Guardian of child	Protector and defender
Not being good enough	Guilt and expectation Feeling limited Difficulty meeting everyone's needs
Developing expertise	SEN as the cornerstone
Offering up of self	Merging of selves Dissolution of self Sacrificing self Exhausting pressure
Tensions in control	Having control Trapped Rigour versus spontaneity
Growing in strength	Prioritising own needs over society Relishing progress Own personal coach Growing in strength From discord to harmony
The past in the present	Losing confidence in professionals Painful memories
Engagement and trust	Fostering engagement Centrality of safety and trust Expert on child Assessment and intervention

Sarah
Development of subordinate and superordinate themes
from emerging themes

TENSIONS IN CONTROL

HAVING CONTROL

T109. Feeling in control of something is important

T174. Placid and compliant = goodness

T108. Important mum can control her home

T119. Child doing as mum says = being a good boy

RIGOUR V. SPONTANEITY

T188. Applying rigorous standards to decision making about child

T81. A reluctant manager

T93. Needing to carefully plan

T184. Learning from things that don't work

T168. Winging it

T94. No spontaneity

TRAPPED

T11. Imprisoned by the tasks

T192. Loss of control over life

T190. Tied to house and children

T107. Loss of control

T104. The controlling mother

T114. Trapped in the home

T111. Not being able to meet child's needs = being out of control

T113. Financially trapped by circumstances

T191. Needing extensive support to be freed

GROWING IN STRENGTH

PRIORITISING OWN NEEDS OVER SOCIETY

T146. Going against the educational grain is scary

T145. Fearing getting into trouble

T142. Challenging taboo

T100. Important to do what's right for family

T186. Not following the crowd

T29. The extreme becoming normality

T185. Learning to leave behind 'normal'

T136. Accepting constraints

T131. Sadness and acceptance of child's future

T99. Trying to fit in

T147. Living in the shadow of cultural stereotypes

RELISHING PROGRESS

T61. Joy at child being happy

T60. Child lost and now found

T154. Joy in seeing child surpass what was thought possible

T157. Being able to step back represents huge progress

T155. Joy seeing child make leaps and bounds

OWN PERSONAL COACH

T137. Can-do attitude

T102. Good enough is okay

T46. Importance of not taking things personally

T12. Just carry on

T18. Self as mental health practitioner

T17. Extreme self-sufficiency

T101. Role to ensure basic needs and happiness

GROWING IN STRENGTH

T173. Reflecting on great change in child emphasises development

T149. Bolstered by home ed experience

T148. Gaining confidence over time

T152. Reflecting on child's development validates choices

T56. Criticism increasing determination

FROM DISCHORD TO HARMONY

T118. Developing harmony over time

T58. Home ed changed relationship

T125. Stress led mum to shouty and horrible

T59. Child less stressed = change in relationship

T47. Adversity increased closeness

OFFERING UP OF SELF

MERGING OF SELVES

T2. Extensive time together

T5. Difficult to separate

T1. Closeness
T9. Child's eyes
T6. All thoughts are for child

T3. As one with each other

T169. Intense experience

T151. Engaging in experiences with child

T57. Seeing aspects of self in child helps relationship to work

T106. Child's needs and her own personality drive mum's actions

T62. Child happy = mum happy

T167. Mum is child's mind

SACRIFICING SELF

T77. Needing to sacrifice reputation to help child

T55. Sacrifice NOT selfishness

T196. Putting up with bad things so as not to lose support

T52. Willing to take a risk to help child

DISSOLUTION OF SELF

T22. Extremely harsh on self

T20. Struggling self makes it all harder

T13. Futility in thinking about self

T15. Unable to care for self

T19. Not thinking = a coping mechanism

T189. Acceptance of lost self

T96. Giving all to children

T203. Loss of memory of old self

T4. No time to self

T116. Needing to be the 'good parent'

EXHAUSTING PRESSURE

T199. Physical toll
T200. Extremely limited rest

T201. Relentless tasks

T25. Child's happiness is solace for hardship

T202. Living with exhaustion

T182. Limited in time

T126. Past self exhausted, tired and stressed

T8. Draining

T23. Weight of responsibility

EMBATTLED

FIGHT/FLIGHT

T37. Anger at school incompetence

T54. Anger at other's responses

T177. Having to have great control over own emotions

T178. Coping with injustice

T14. Anxiety and panic attacks

T115. Peaks of huge anger and frustration

DISCOUNTED + JUDGED

T65. Judged as overprotective

T195. Needing to justify self to others

T193. Being made to feel like a child

T53. Being labelled as selfish and mad

T36. Not being taken seriously by school

T67. Being discounted by professionals

T105. Other's threatened by mum

T70. Others amazed at mum's competence

NO SOURCE OF RELIABLE SUPPORT

T21. Loneliness

T181. Not knowing anyone else in a similar position

T16. Lack of support

T76. Other's incompetence makes it harder to give up role

T82. Help going wrong can make things worse

T83. Helpers not understanding impact on family

T198. Fear of support being withdrawn

T197. Tiny amount of support is vital to sustain

T24. No one to ease pressure

GUARDIAN OF CHILD

PROTECTOR + DEFENDER

T48. Mum child's sole defender

T176. Anger at child being accused of laziness

T38. Needing to defend child in the past

T42. Instinctive reaction to protect and comfort child

THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

LOSING CONFIDENCE IN PROFESSIONALS

T34. Feeling like not getting the full story from school

T35. School mismanaging child

T110. LA barrier to meeting child's needs

T172. Wary of professionals

PAINFUL MEMORIES

T64. Sorrow and sadness at past

T28. Remembering how ill and stressed child used to be

T27. Remembering past unhappiness restricting life

T41. Past memories still extremely painful

T40. Deeply upsetting remembering acts of cruelty toward child

T51. Crisis leading to a turning point

T33. Being prevented from understanding

T63. Not being believed

NOT BEING GOOD ENOUGH

GUILT + EXPECTATION

T91. Guilt

T194. Being made to feel bad about asking for help

T30. Society saying your child's behaviour is down to you

T95. Guilt being a given

T98. Society leads to pressure on self

T97. Cultural expectations leading to evaluation of self

T31. Child's unhappiness leading to feeling incompetent

FEELING LIMITED

T163. Not feeling competent to develop child

T156. Wishing he had access to more services

T164. Feeling own skills are limited

T179. Anger and sadness that child can't access services

T112. Finances restrict activities

DIFFICULTY MEETING EVERYONE'S NEEDS

T87. Needing to be a different mum for each child

T88. Becoming 'normal' mum was difficult

T89. Always letting one child down

T92. Not feeling able to meet sibling's needs

T71. Less understanding of sibling

T86. Sadness at impact upon sibling

T84. Holding sibling's needs in mind

T175. Holding in mind siblings needs

T90. Whole family outings miserable

NURTURING FOR ADULTHOOD

PREPARING CHILD FOR INDEPENDENCE

T170. Facilitating child's independence

T144. Goal is to empower child

T139. Focusing on confidence

T80. Safely allowing child to stand up for himself

T79. Managing tension between protecting and allowing child to protect himself

T103. Belief children need to learn disappointment

T138. Giving child experiences

T135. Tension between helping child and seeing them upset

T130. Helping child to adapt to different carers

MUM AS CARER

T128. Child 100% reliant on mum

T161. Child has expectations about relationship with mum

T160. Child will do more 'work' for others

HOLDING FUTURE IN MIND

T132. Planning for the future

T165. Keeping in mind child's options

T166. Laying foundations for child's future

T133. Predicting child's mental state in the future

T129. Needing to fight to protect child's future

T127. Fear of future leading to change in approach

ENGAGEMENT + TRUST

FOSTERING ENGAGEMENT

T122. Strong routines foster child's understanding

T183. Needing to find activities meaningful to child

T143. Good wellbeing foundation to trying new things.

T141. Following child's interests unquestioning

T162. Importance of engaging child to process of learning

T150. Belief in individualising approach for child

T159. Importance of child being 'ready' for new things

T140. Giving child control over life

CENTRALITY OF SAFETY + TRUST

T123. Mum makes the world safe and understandable for child

T158. Trust in mum facilitates new experiences and skills

T121. Trust enables child to follow mum's lead

T124. Mum gives the world meaning for the child

T120. Trust and safety vital to good relationship

T44. Home as a safe space for both child and mum

T85. Losing sense of safe space (carers)

EXPERT ON CHILD

T75. Sole carer leads to expertise

T74. Intricate knowledge of child's non-verbal communication

T66. Mum knows how to support child

T72. Knowing the signs

T43. Expertise and competence communicating with child

T39. Explaining child's behaviour to school

T68. Mum as expert

T69. Deep connection leads to instinctive understanding of child

ASSESSMENT + INTERVENTION

T50. Observing and recording child's behaviours to learn more

T73. Detailed observation of child

T187. Putting self in child's shoes as part of the decision making process

T49. Mum as detective

T134. Putting self in child's shoes

T10. Scanning the environment

DEVELOPING 'EXPERTISE'

SEN AS THE CORNERSTONE

T45. Understanding that SEN drives behaviour

T7. SEN drives the nature of the relationship

T78. Teaching carers how to care for child