“You’ll get used to it”: Pupils’ with Speech, Language and Communication Needs experience of readiness for secondary school

C.M. Peters

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Department of: Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust

University of Essex

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore the experience of secondary school readiness with a group of Year Six pupils with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) in the final term of primary school. Data was collected from six pupils who had an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) for SLCN using visually supported semi-structured interviews. Their individual experiences were analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

The research questions were:

- RQ1: What sense do pupils with SLCN make of their experience of primary school?
- RQ2: What sense do pupils with SLCN make of their experience of secondary school following their induction days?
- RQ3: What are the pupils' perceptions of secondary school readiness?

The findings identified four overarching themes:

- Concept of Self, Family and Life Experience
- Risk and Resiliency and Coping tools
- Language Skills and the Impact on Personal Narratives

- Experiences of the Education System.

The themes and research questions are explored further in the discussion chapter with reference to previous research and psychological theory. Limitations of the research and implications for Educational Psychology practice are also discussed.

This study contributes to the understanding of the phenomena of school readiness from the perspective of pupils with SLCN and also to involving pupils with communication difficulties in research.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1. Chapter Overview

The aim of this chapter is to put the research into context in terms of its relevance and importance at a national and local level. This chapter will outline the concept of primary to secondary school transition with reference to relevant policy and literature. The term transition is used to refer to the move or transfer and adjustment phase from primary to secondary school. This chapter will consider the notion of pupil empowerment and the current initiative in health, social care and education for person-centred practice. It will explore how pupil empowerment has been achieved with perceived vulnerable groups including those identified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN). It will then focus on one particular area of SEN, namely Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) and what the literature tells us about this group of pupils in relation to transition. National and local data for this group will be considered. The chapter will conclude with how this piece of research fits with the local and national context.

1.2. Primary to Secondary School Transition

Primary to secondary transition is a necessary part of the journey through schooling. The majority of pupils in the UK education system make this transition at the age of eleven. This period involves simultaneous changes in relation to different academic and social expectations, new social structures with peers and members of staff, and the need to adapt to a larger and more challenging academic setting (Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm & Splittgerber, 2000; Zeedyk, Gallacher, Henderson, Hope, Husband & Lindsay, 2003). In addition, pupils find themselves repositioned as the youngest in the school, with new peers from potentially different social, economic and cultural backgrounds. Adjusting to these changes can be anxiety provoking and difficult to navigate and the transition period has been associated with mental health concerns (Zeedyk et al., 2003; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008). Educational transitions appear complex and multidimensional. Transition research over the last two decades appears to have focused on three areas: the post-transfer "dip" in educational attainment and well-being; pupils' perceptions of transition; and predictors of poor transitions (West, Sweeting & Young, 2010). These areas of research will be explored in turn.

1.2.1 Effects of Transition on Well-Being and Educational Attainment

Vulnerability during primary-secondary transition is a complex phenomenon and accumulating research highlights that primary-secondary transition can negatively affect pupils' emotional and psychological adjustment (Bloyce & Frederickson, 2012; Poorthuis, Thomaes, van Aken, Denissen & de Castro, 2014) as evidenced in poor attendance, lower grades, and behavioural problems (Anderson et al., 2000; Galton, Morrison & Pell, 2000; Smith, Akos, Lim & Wiley, 2008). There is near universal agreement that the majority of pupils express some concerns and anxieties prior to transition about a range of issues associated with the formal school system and informal system of peer relationships. Rice, Frederickson and Seymour (2011), in a British study using a student self-report measure to explore transition, found the areas of concern expressed by final year primary and first year secondary pupils were broadly similar, suggesting these concerns continued into secondary school. However, transition research indicates that the worries expressed by primary pupils usually dissipate over the first year of secondary school (e.g. Anderson, et al, 2000; Galton, et al, 2000; Gillison, Standage & Skevington, 2008; Rice et al., 2011; Perfitt, 2013). Current research suggests that transition can be problematic for about a quarter of pupils (Lyons & Woods, 2012) with persisting and increasing problems following transition reported as affecting approximately 10% (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005, cited in Lyons & Woods,

2012). Zeedyk et al. (2003), in a Scottish study, found that secondary pupils in Year Seven, reported secondary school to be a more positive experience than they had expected, although worries about peer relationships, especially bullying, and the school system, were more prevalent, than a comparison group of primary pupils. This suggests that worries about some aspects of secondary school life may not come to fruition whilst others may manifest once in this system. Mackenzie, McMaugh & O'Sullivan (2012), in an Australian study of girls, found Year Six pupils to have more positive perceptions about the impending secondary transition than Year Sevens' seemingly negative appraisal of the transition, suggesting expectations are unfulfilled.

Difficulties with secondary school transition have been shown to impact on pupils' emotional wellbeing and academic attainment beyond school years. West, et al. (2010) found a poorer school transition predicted higher levels of depression, low attainment and low self-esteem at age 15, with similar results extending to age 18/19.

Many studies on transition attribute the move from one educational environment to another and the attendant adjustment phase to impact upon academic progress. Galton et al. (2000), in a series of studies across the UK, suggested that about 40% of pupils experience a dip in progress following

secondary transition. They reported the ‘dip’ was associated less with post-transition anxiety than with the degree of enjoyment of school and pupil motivation, suggesting that too much attention is given to the transition process itself and too little to the discontinuities in education such as changes to the environment and curriculum. Braund & Driver (2005) attempted to address curriculum continuity and progression through “bridging” a science curriculum across primary and secondary school. They found that pupils expected science to be harder in secondary school and wanted to leave behind primary school work. West et al. (2010) reported that the role that transition plays in the academic dip is unclear. However, their original data on transition was collected in 1994/5 and school systems have changed since then. Difficulties of adjustment may lie in the developmental aspects of adolescence. It may be that pupils perceive schoolwork to be less meaningful because their cognitive development allows for more critical reflection and schools may be failing to meet these needs. The increased need for autonomy could lead to a more negative perception of authority figures (Bru, Stornes, Munthe & Thuen, 2010) with peers becoming increasingly important and influential during adolescence (Gillison et al., 2008). These findings suggested that whilst transition does have an impact on educational attainment and well-being, it is unclear as to the exact cause of this ‘dip’.

1.2.2 Pupil Perceptions of Secondary Transition

A number of studies that explored pupil perceptions about transition found similar concerns expressed by pupils. These were in relation to bullying (Zeedyk et al., 2003; Rice et al, 2011; Perfitt, 2013), workload (Zeedyk et al., 2003; Rice et al, 2011; Perfitt, 2013), peer relationships (Zeedyk et al., 2003) and getting used to new routines/environments (Zeedyk et al., 2003; Perfitt, 2013). Smith et al. (2008) highlighted the importance of relationships and the social aspects of the transition process. Poorthuis, et al. (2014) argued that secondary school transition is a psychologically sensitive period and that pupils' self-esteem could be influenced by perceptions of social acceptance. Pratt and George (2005) found both girls and boys anticipated the experience of transition as stressful and found pupils' greatest concerns focused on losing and making friends. They suggested the continuity of peer group relations as more important than continuity of the curriculum. However, Zeedyk et al. (2003) suggested that schools were less concerned with social and personal concerns of pupils at transition than with organisational procedures and so might be failing to address the emotional needs of their pupils as evidenced in the reported concerns for peer relationships and bullying.

Some research has suggested that pupil perceptions of transition impact upon the transition outcomes. Rice et al. (2010) found pupils who had greater

concerns about transition went on to like school less, had greater anxiety, lower positive mood and greater social difficulties. Vaz, Falmer, Ciccarelli, Passmore, Parsons, Black, Cuomo, Tan & Falkmer (2015) found pupil perceptions of 'school belongingness' to be stable across transition, but pupils with lower perceptions of belonging pre-transfer continued to demonstrate non-productive strategies to deal with life stressors. Jindall-Snape & Miller (2008) found pupils to be looking forward to a 'fresh start' and making new friends as a result of transition; a finding also reported by an American study (Weiss & Bearman, 2007) for pupils in 'socially difficult situations' in primary school. In summary, the research suggests that having a positive outlook at Year Six aids the transition process.

1.2.3 Predictors of Difficulty and Success with Secondary Transition

Some studies have explored the factors which determine a difficult or positive transition experience. Bailey and Baines (2012) in a British longitudinal study into transition, examined the effect of pupils' pre-transition psychological resources and wellbeing on their adjustment after transition. They identified an increased ability to problem-solve and assert emotional control predicted better post-transition relationships with peers and teachers. Akos & Galassi (2004) suggested that successful adaptation may be due to student resilience, coping with change and receiving support from external networks. Jordan,

McRorie and Ewing, (2010) found those equipped with good social and emotional coping skills appeared to find the transition easier, as reflected by higher academic standards.

Friendship has been identified as an important protective factor against the negative effects of transition (Tobbell, 2003; Akos & Galassi, 2004) as has emotional intelligence (Qualter, Whiteley, Hutchinson, & Pope, 2007; Zeedyk et al., 2003). Older siblings and buddies are seen as potential resources to provide advice and guidance about the new setting and expectations (Evangelou, Taggart, Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons & Blatchford, 2008; Mackenzie, et al., 2012; Dockett & Perry, 2013). Keay, Lang & Frederickson (2015) highlighted peer relationships as a major source of concern during transition, but also a source of support for adjustment and academic progress.

Evangelou et al. (2008) and Zeedyk et al. (2003) suggested that schools need to prepare pupils by telling them how secondary school would be different and providing coping strategies. Evangelou et al. (2008), in a government funded UK wide study, found that successful transition was dependent upon social adjustment, highlighting the importance of friendships new and old, and institutional adjustment, highlighting the importance of pupils understanding what was expected of them and being prepared for the level and style of work, advocating for close links between primary and secondary school, such as

induction days. The authors reported 84% of pupils felt prepared for secondary school and that their family, teachers and friends helped them to prepare. Only 3% of pupils were worried or nervous a term after starting secondary school. 20% of pupils felt that having the 'right attitude' could facilitate transition, which included not being scared and having the confidence to believe in their ability to cope. The same percentage recommended taking advantage of the procedures in place for getting to know the school and to prepare for transition. Findings are based upon questionnaires completed retrospectively in Year Seven which may offer a less reliable account of transition.

The research literature on secondary transition identifies that some groups are more vulnerable than others. These vulnerabilities include younger age (Anderson et al, 2000; Galton, et al., 2000), pupils with lower ability (Anderson et al, 2000; Zeedyk 2003; West, et al., 2010), low-self-esteem (McGee et al, 2003; West, et al., 2010), low socio economic status (SES) (Galton et al., 2000; Anderson et al. 2000; Evangelou et al., 2008) and race (Galton et al., 2000; Anderson et al., 2000; Akos & Galassi, 2004). There have been inconsistent findings related to gender (Anderson et al., 2000; McGee et al, 2003; Akos & Galassi, 2004). West, et al. (2010) found those who were anxious, those who had prior experience of bullying, and those that were less

prepared, experienced greater transition difficulties. The West study was a retrospective account of pupils' transition experience a year later and so may not reflect what pupils felt at the time.

Bailey and Baines (2012) identified a difference in adjustment to secondary school between SEN and non-SEN pupils. The higher that pupils with SEN rated their resilience prior to transition, the greater the difficulty of adjustment, in contrast to non-SEN pupil ratings. The authors suggest that SEN pupils may have underestimated the challenges ahead or lacked the skills to adapt due to previous reliance on support that may have been less available at secondary school.

> *'…the sources of resilience typically available in primary schools may leave SEN pupils less prepared for the substantial change they face in their new secondary school' (Bailey and Baines, 2012, page 61).*

In a study exploring anxiety in pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) during secondary school transition, Hannah and Topping (2012) found individual difference was a significant feature in successful transition. This was also found in the study by Perfitt (2013) exploring the views of pupils with speech and language needs and/or ASD. This supports the work of Keay et al (2015) that, in addition to the universal support available for all pupils, tailored transition packages are required that include planning, information

sharing and minimising difference for successful transition for more vulnerable pupils.

In contrast, Evangelou et al. (2008) found that pupils with SEN or other vulnerable groups achieved as successful a transition as children without special educational needs. However, they identified that pupils with SEN were more likely to be bullied than other pupils. Mandy, Murin, Baykaner, Staunton, Hellriegel, Anderson, Skuse (2016) found no evidence for marked escalation of difficulties during transition for pupils with ASD entering mainstream school. However, it may be that the experience of children with SEN, during transition, has been under-represented in the research. Hughes, Banks & Terrsa (2013) in a systematic review of the primary-secondary transition literature, reported that only 17% of transition studies have focused on pupils with SEN in spite of the growing body of research that pupils with SEN are at increased risk of poorer adjustment outcomes. They concluded that group comparisons of pupils with different types of SEN and typically developing pupils are required.

Research suggests that, with effective universal support programmes, most pupils settle well (Anderson et al., 2000; Galton et al., 2000; Qualter et al., 2007; Evangelou et al., 2008). Vulnerability during transition is a complex

phenomenon with inconsistent findings. Each pupil brings to school individual characteristics that are influenced by family, personal factors and prior learning experiences suggesting a holistic perspective is needed to consider pupils at risk of poor outcomes rather than a medical model identifying deficits (May and Kundert, 1997; Woolfson & Boyle, 2008).

1.3. National and Local Initiatives for Secondary Readiness

UNICEF (2012a, 2012b) present a broad concept of 'school readiness', describing three dimensions: pupils' readiness for school; schools' readiness for pupils; and families' and communities' readiness for school. This sees readiness as dynamic and inter-relational. In the 2013 Government reform of primary education it was stated that:

> '*The single most important outcome that any primary school should strive to achieve is making sure as many of its pupils as possible are "secondary ready" by the time they leave'*
>
> (Department for Education, 2013, p. 3.)

Current literature on 'school readiness' is dominated by early childhood, with little reference to 'secondary school readiness'. The Government updated its primary school progress measure in 2014, possibly as a result of the vagueness of a national standard of being 'secondary ready':

> *'We believe that the single most important outcome for any primary school is to give as many pupils as possible the knowledge and skills to flourish in the later phases of education'*
>
> (Department for Education, 2014a, p. 4.)

The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) in England published a critical report on transition arrangements in their report "Key Stage Three: The Wasted Years" (OFSTED, 2015). It reported that the transition to secondary is too often poorly managed and teaching fails to build on the gains made in primary school. OFSTED criticised school leaders prioritising pupil pastoral over academic needs during transition, particularly of the most able pupils, and recommended that transition focus should be as much on academic needs. This appears to disregard all of the available research on the importance of social and emotional adjustment on academic attainment.

1.4. Pupil Empowerment

Pupil Empowerment is the term used to describe the process of eliciting children's views and involving them in decision making to give them more control over their educational experience. Like transition, the involvement of pupils in decision making has been an area of growing interest nationally. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) enshrines the rights of young people to express their views and the importance of

enabling pupils to have a voice in decisions regarding their life and learning is a central feature within current education policy and practice nationally. Schools are now expected to gather and embed pupil participation into their school systems (DfE, 2014b, OFSTED, 2015).

1.4.1 Person-Centred Planning

The notion of pupil voice in the UK and elsewhere is complex, contradictory and fluid (Cremin, Mason & Busher, 2011). White and Rae (2016) described person-centred planning as an approach to help young people know what they want, and help them feel stronger and more confident. It features strongly in the SEN and Disability Code of Practice (DfE, DoH, 2015) which stipulates that school support should fit around the needs of the child, with the child's strengths and capabilities placed at the heart of assessment, planning and decision-making. This has underpinnings of humanistic and positive psychology and supports the notion that pupil participation in education planning is not only possible, but is also beneficial:

> '*This approach is often referred to as a person-centred approach. By using this approach within a family context, professionals and local authorities can ensure that pupils, young people and parents are involved in all aspects of planning and decision-making.'*
>
> (DfE, DoH, 2015, paragraph 9.25, p.148.).

1.4.2 Pupil Engagement in Research

Davis, Ravenscroft and Bizas (2015), in a European review of transition practice, reported that transition tended to follow medical and child development models. The researchers advocated for pupils as collaborators, designers and leaders in educational process, to ensure that education systems were more considered and enabled pupils to lead processes that resolved everyday life issues.

Harding & Atkinson, (2009) stated that the opinions of pupils with SEN were rarely asked for and the process often tokenistic. They reported that Educational Psychologists do things *to and for* pupils, but infrequently *with* pupils which can lead to those with the severest needs, especially the non-verbal, being omitted from research. Wright (2008) reported that it was common to fail to seek the opinions of pupils with multiple and complex needs as a result of their communication difficulties. Wright (2008) concluded that in order to benefit this group of young people, the focus should be on inclusive research, rather than on research into inclusion:

> '*Such pupils should still be seen as holding valid opinions and having the right to express these. Such pupils are still a valid authority on their own lives, opinions, experiences, feelings and views'* (Wright, 2008, p. 33.).

The use of novel activities involving pictures, stories, diaries or drawings may be useful for helping pupils with SEN express their pre/post concerns about secondary school (Hughes et al., 2013). Lightfoot and Bond (2013) used drawings as an aid to explore transition with pupils with Down's Syndrome and Fortuna (2014) gathered the views of pupils with ASD using diaries. As a group, pupils with SLCN are often excluded from participation in research (Wright 2008). Merrick (2011) stated that it was misleading for research to claim to be representative of children at large, but fail to include children with SLCN.

1.5. The Impact of Speech, Language and Communication Needs

1.5.1 The Current Picture

In education, the term SLCN is used to describe any child who needs educational provision to meet their speech and language needs that is "additional to and different from' that made for all pupils. Pupils with SLCN may have difficulties with: paying attention or comprehending language; finding words and expressing themselves; interpreting social context or poor intelligibility (Owen, Hayett, L. & Roulstone, 2004). The Bercow Report (DSCF, 2008) was an extensive review of services for pupils and young people with SLCN. Dockrell, Ricketts and Lindsay (2012) in response to Bercow (2008) suggested the term SLCN as

problematic in reliably identifying pupils with language learning needs as evidenced by the degree of movement in and out of this category. They also highlighted the need for monitoring oral language skills over time and the importance of individual profiling to personalise learning. Mroz (2012) highlighted an emphasis on speech and language skills in the revised National Curriculum:

> '*Literacy includes the key skills of reading, writing and oral communication that enable pupils to access different areas of the curriculum' (OFSTED, 2018, p. 51.).*

The Bercow review (ICAN, 2018) recommended that OFSTED review the extent to which the teaching and monitoring of spoken language is taken into account in its framework for inspection stating that there is no formal reporting of communication after the Early Years Foundation Stage at age 5. Gascoigne and Gross (2017) highlighted the under identification of SLCN across health and education services. Gross (2011) reported that schools are expected to use their available resources to meet the needs of pupils with SLCN. However, the impact of budget cuts has resulted in a reduction of public support services such as Educational Psychologists and Speech and Language Therapists (SALT), and of teaching assistants in schools who might carry out specific programmes of work advised by SALT (Mroz, 2012).

1.5.2 Prevalence of Speech, Language and Communication Needs

A review of the Bercow report (ICAN 2018) highlighted that more than 1.4 million pupils and young people in the UK have SLCN. Children living in areas of social disadvantage were identified as at much higher risk of developing language difficulties, with around 50% of such pupils starting school with delayed language and other identified SLCN (Law, McBean & Rush, 2011; Locke, Ginsborg & Peers, 2002, cited in ICAN, 2018). It reported:

> *'without a shift in approach, children and young people will continue to leave school without basic language and literacy skills. We will continue to have disproportionate numbers of young people with SLCN who are not in education, employment or training, who need mental health support or who are in contact within the youth justice system'* (ICAN, 2018, p. 4.).

Nationally 14.6% of pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) have SLCN as the primary need (with 22.8% on SEN support[1]). 62.8% of three year olds on SEN support have Speech Language and Communication needs as a primary need, which reduces to 14.5% of ten year olds and 8.4% of fifteen year olds (DfE, 2018). These statistics

[1] SEN Support is the process educational settings use to identify and meet the needs of children with special educational needs

suggest the difficulties faced by many of these pupils have been resolved by secondary school, although it could be that these needs have not been identified by the secondary schools or that other needs have become the focus. Lindsay and Dockrell (2012) reported the national data showed pupils who changed category of need from SLCN between primary and secondary school, were over three times more likely to move into learning difficulties than Social, Emotional and Behavioural difficulties (SEBD). The Local Authority in which this piece of research is based currently has 35, 455 pupils and young people identified as having SEND, representing 17% of the schools population (Strategy for Pupils and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disability 2014-2019). There are 6, 650 Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) in total and 775 have a primary category of need of SLCN; this equates to 421 in primary and 354 in secondary (data source: SEN data January 2018).

1.5.3 The link between Speech, Language and Communication Needs and other risk factors

Law, Rush, Schoon and Parsons (2009) detailed the emerging body of literature that suggests early communication difficulties should be considered risk factors for a range of negative outcomes including low literacy levels (Beitchman Brownlie, Inglis, Wild, Ferguson, & Schachter, 1996; Dockrell

and Lindsay, 1998; Dockrell, Lindsay, Palikara & Cullen, 2007), and poor mental health (Lindsay & Dockrell, 2000; Lindsay, Dockrell, Letchford & Mackie, 2002). The Bercow Review links SLCN, social disadvantage and lack of school readiness (Social Mobility Commission, 2017, cited in ICAN 2018).

The relationship between SLCN and SEBD is complex and there have been mixed findings in the research (Dockrell, Lindsay, Palikara, & Cullen, 2007). Pupils with specific language impairment (SLI) frequently experience SEBD alongside their language needs (Botting & Conti-Ramsden, 2000; Savage, 2005). Various studies have shown raised incidence of SEBD in pupils primarily identified with language difficulties (e.g. Lindsey & Dockrell, 2000) whilst others have found incidence of language communication needs in pupils identified with emotional and behavioural difficulties (e.g. Ripley and Yuill, 2005). Ripley and Yuill (2005) suggested language competence was a key factor in developing emotional literacy, including self-regulation and relationships with peers and adults in a school community. Mackie & Law (2009) suggested that pupils with SEBD often had language difficulties that had not been recognised. A meta-analysis of current research reported that 81% of pupils with emotional and behavioural disorders had unidentified language difficulties (Hollo, Wehby & Oliver, 2014, cited in ICAN 2018).

Many of the studies exploring SLCN and SEBD typically obtained information from self-rating scales or questionnaires. Quicke (2003) reported that such scales may not relate to the existing views of the pupils involved and often focus on within-child factors. Where multiple sources have been used, differences in perceptions have been reported (Dockrell, Lindsay, Palikara, & Cullen, 2007; Joffe, Beverley and Scott, 2011). Joffe & Black (2012) attempted to triangulate pupils' views with teachers' and parents' views regarding social, emotional and behavioural functioning in secondary school. They found a relationship between language and communication difficulties and SEBD which extended to pupils not previously identified with a language disorder. This raises the question of how such pupils are supported in secondary school given that staff receive little support from public services as to how to meet the needs of pupils with language difficulties (Mroz, 2012).

The effects of failing to meet the needs of young people in secondary school can be far reaching. Studies of adolescents with SLCN have reported that they are at greater risk than typically developing peers of low attainments (Dockrell, et al., 2007), lower self-esteem (Lindsay & Dockrell, 2000), poorer peer relations and emotional engagement (Conti-Ramsden and Botting, 2008; Lindsay et al, 2007), higher rates of bullying (Savage, 2005), a higher incidence of attention disorders and hyperactivity

(Beitchman, Brownlie, Inglis, Wild, Ferguson, & Schachter, 1996), greater anxiety and depression (Beitchman, Wilson, Johnson, Atkinson, Young, Adlaf, Escobar, & Douglas, 2001), substance abuse (Beitchman, Wilson, Douglas, Young, & Adlaf, 2001), and increased aggressive behaviour (Brownlie, Beitchman, Escobar, Young, Atkinson, Johnson, Wilson & Douglas, 2004). Lindsay, Dockrell and Palikara (2010) found improvements in self-esteem for young people with SLI after they leave school suggesting school can have a detrimental effect to the self-esteem of pupils with SLCN. Young, Beitchman, Johnson, Douglas, Atkinson, Escobar & Wilson (2002), in a longitudinal study found that early language impairment was associated with continued academic difficulties into adulthood. Hughes, Chitsabesan, Bryan, Borschmann, Swain, Lennox and Shaw (2017) reviewed the evidence of language and communication impairment among offending populations and reported language impairment amongst incarcerated young people was between 60—90% compared to 7-9% reported among the general population. Many of these young people were reported to experience co-morbid vulnerabilities in social communication, nonverbal cognition, self-harm and substance misuse.

1.5.4 Negotiating Secondary Transition with Speech, Language and Communication Needs

Rannard & Glenn (2009) found that pupils with persistent speech and language difficulties during a period of transition from one school setting to another are at risk of negative responses from mainstream peers and from teachers who may think they are globally impaired.

> *'Children's progress will depend on the way they perceive themselves and their abilities during this critical period, which in turn will have considerable impact on their successful integration to mainstream school'* (Rannard & Glenn, 2009, p. 378).

Lindsay and Dockrell (2000) found pupils with SLI, at primary school, had lower self-ratings of academic and social competence than a comparison SEN group, and these were found to persist into Year Seven. Dockrell & Lindsay (2007) reported that, for pupils with specific speech and language difficulties, movement from primary to secondary school created a number of challenges in terms of the change of academic pace and social contacts. They concluded that academic progress was adversely affected and whilst pupils were enjoying secondary school, pupils' low levels of literacy and numeracy were of particular concern. The above studies suggest that having SLCN can act as a risk factor with regard to

self-esteem, emotional well-being and academic progress and perhaps it is these areas that determine 'school readiness'.

1.6. Summary

The cumulative evidence from the literature suggests that the majority of pupils experience some degree of pre-transition anxieties, but there is limited information about the intensity and duration of anxiety post transition. There appears universal agreement that pupils experience a post-transfer "dip" in educational attainment, although the role of transition in causing this remains unclear. The evidence relating to well-being is equally inconsistent, and again, the role of transition is unclear. It is still unclear why certain pupils experience problems with transition and how it affects wellbeing in the long term. Evaluating the research is difficult for a number of reasons, which contributes to the lack of a solid evidence base. Firstly, the researchers present a wide variety of perspectives and methodologies which make comparisons and conclusions difficult. In general, qualitative studies report transition to be a more profound experience in its consequences for wellbeing than studies using quantitative methods, which generally present a more favourable picture (Tobbell, 2003; Pratt and George, 2005); however, many of these latter studies are small and unrepresentative. Another difficulty with evaluation of the current research is individual differences with regard to the school itself,

where the transition takes place, and so 'school effects' are not explored. These include formal school policies (preparedness for secondary) and characteristics of the peer group (extent to which transition occurs in friendship groups). A final difficulty with evaluation of the current research is that UK research has tended to be descriptive in nature, either focusing on the experience of transition or the changes in outcome resulting from the transition, but has failed to explore the relationship between these.

A number of studies have suggested that communication difficulties should be considered risk factors for a range of negative outcomes including academic achievement, poorer peer relations and poor mental health at school and beyond. The lower level of communicative ability of pupils with SLCN may be predicted to pose additional demands with regard to secondary transition and the potential discontinuities in the learning and social environment. These pupils are also at risk of losing access to specialist language support on entry to secondary school.

1.7. The Purpose of this Research

Particular themes and vulnerable groups were identified in the transition research. This includes pupils with SEN (Bailey and Baines, 2012; Joffe & Black, 2012) and specifically those with SLCN (Dockrell & Lindsay, 2007). However, there appears to be limited research with regard to

perceptions of pupils about secondary school ‘readiness’ and particularly for pupils with SEN and SLCN. The purpose of this research is to explore what the experiences of such pupils can tell us about the phenomena of secondary school readiness. As a researcher, it was my hope that the concept of ‘readiness’ would be elicited from the pupils themselves through exploration of personal journeys and the meanings that pupils assigned to this experience. This research is important and relevant in terms of the national requirement for ‘person-centred’ practice as it places the pupil as an active participant in the exploration of their transition experience.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter outlines the methodology used to search for and critique existing research related to secondary school readiness, from the perspective of the pupil. As highlighted in the previous chapter, there is a wealth of research regarding secondary transition and so the literature review aimed to focus specifically on the experience of the pupil. Studies that included the perceptions of others alongside the pupils have been included, although the critique focused on the pupil aspects of included studies. Whilst the review aimed to consider all pupils going through primary to secondary transition, it was of interest to determine whether there were any groups of individuals that had been identified in the research as being particularly vulnerable. Unless specified, the term 'pupil' refers to individuals with no additional needs. The term 'transition' refers to the primary to secondary school transition. The intention of the literature review was to begin with a broad question to locate the existing research in this field, before applying more specific inclusion and exclusion criteria in order to identify what is already known about this particular area of enquiry. Therefore, the question being asked in the literature review was:

What is already known about readiness for secondary school transition from the perspective of the pupil?

2.2. Literature Search Strategy

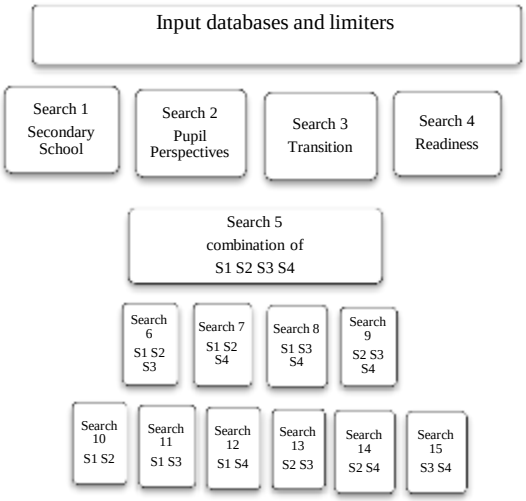
The following databases were searched on 12.12.18 for articles: Psychinfo, Education Source, ERIC, and Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection, as these were considered the most relevant to the literature review question. The search terms applied were the key words taken from the above literature review question. In order to ensure all appropriate articles were detected, a thesaurus was used to identify any further relevant descriptors for the search terms and truncated terms were used to broaden some terms (see table 2.2.1 below). Certain criteria were used to refine the search. These were: written in English, peer reviewed, school age participants, references available and full-text. The period of 2001-2018 was applied as 2001 was the year that the first SEN code of practice was published and this current research is interested in whether particular vulnerable groups, such as pupils with identified SEN, have featured in previous research.

2.2.1 Table to show Search Criteria Terms

Key term	Secondary school	Readiness	Pupil*Perspective*	Transition
Alternative terms	Secondary education High school	Ready prepared* start*	Pupil* experience* Pupil* view* Pupil* voice Student* Perspective* Student* experience* Student* view* Student* voice	Transfer

A search was carried out using each term (and all of the alternative terms) using "AND" to perform searches of all of the possible combinations of the search terms (see diagram 2.2.2 below and Appendix A). This generated a total of 201 articles. The abstracts of these articles were reviewed against the inclusion/exclusion criteria (see table 2.2.3 below). The articles that were subsequently excluded are listed in Appendix B with the reason for their exclusion.

2.2.2. Diagram to show the Organisation of the Search



2.2.3. Table to show the Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion (N=9)	Exclusion(N=192)
• The main focus of the research was individual pupil's perspective through their own words, drawings and experience • The focus of the research was on experience of primary to secondary transition either before, during or after transition • The focus was on readiness for secondary school • Published in English	• The perspectives explored were not those of pupils' (other perspective) • The age of the pupils was not relevant to secondary transition (11-12 years) (other age) • Research where secondary readiness was not the main focus or was not referred to (this was further broken down into the following subcategories) • The focus was education • The focus was behaviour

• Published in a peer-reviewed journal	• The focus was health • The focus of the research was on transition other than secondary (other transition) • The focus was on intervention (intervention) • The focus was on policy or systems (policy/systems) • The focus was on quantitative data gathering through pre-determined questionnaires or survey data (questionnaire/survey based)

2.3. Critique of the Research Papers

The focus of the review was to critique papers that explored the individual perspective of the pupil through their own words, rather than research that gathered data through predetermined questionnaires. Once the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, 9 articles remained. These articles were reviewed for quality using the following evaluation tools:

- For qualitative studies: Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2018)
- For mixed methods (studies using a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods): CASP, 2018 for the qualitative aspect and A checklist for critical appraisal of quantitative research, based on Wilkinson et al. (1999) for the quantitative aspect of the research.

Conducting a transparent appraisal requires identifying and exploring whether the eligible studies are fit for purpose before synthesizing the data (Soilemezi & Lincevicite, 2018). There is little consensus regarding how to assess the quality of qualitative research (Thomas and Harden, 2008). Two different

tools were applied according to the qualitative or quantitative nature of the piece of research in order to provide a robust approach to assessing the validity, results and relevance to practice. The CASP (2018) was developed from guides produced by the Evidence Based Medicine Working Group published in the Journal of the American Medical Association for appraising qualitative research. The CASP contains 10 questions designed to help think about these issues systematically. The Wilkinson et al. (1999) checklist is based upon The American Psychological Association guidelines and explanations of statistical methods in Psychology published in the Journal American Psychologist. This provides guidelines for appraising quantitative research under the areas of: method, results and discussion.

In order to determine the strength of a paper, a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating was applied to each of the components of the checklist according to whether the paper fulfilled this component fully (green), partially (amber) or in the researcher's view did not (red). This approach was adopted as the use of numerical quality scores in systematic reviews has been criticised (Soilemezi & Lincevicite, 2018). Inter-rater reliability was implemented by having another Doctoral student apply the same checklists and RAG ratings to the papers to ensure this was robust and replicable.

The evaluation tools highlighted a number of strengths and limitations for each study, which are outlined below. The completed evaluations and a worked example for each are located in appendix C. The term replicable is used here to refer to the ability be able to repeat the research design. Generalisability refers to the representativeness of the sample in the study to the wider population in relation to the findings. Bias refers to the researcher's role within the research process.

2.3.1. Purpose, Strengths and Limitations of the Research Papers

The included papers all made a case for the need to explore pupil perspectives, most of them citing insufficient evidence having been generated in this area. For example, Tobbell (2003) argued that much of the research into secondary transition used questionnaires which sought to measure aspects of mental health functioning and so invariably offered explanations based on, and limited to, this data. The purpose of Tobbell's (2003) research was for the participants of the transition process (the children themselves), to talk about what had happened to them and how they felt about it. Whilst considered a credible piece of research, there were limitations. The collection of data was through group interviews as opposed to individual experience, and these took place at the end of Year Seven which could be argued to be a less reliable account of the transition experience. Participants were one class of females in

a single school and so generalisability was limited. The research was exploratory with the aim of generating psychological models for understanding the transition process based upon an ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1999) and theory of learning (Vygotsky 1978). Tobbell (2003) acknowledged that the interpretation reflected the researcher's understanding of the data and psychological models applied, and that another researcher might have drawn different conclusions.

Brewin & Statham (2011) aimed to address the reported lack of research exploring the transition experiences for Looked After Children (LAC). Like Tobbell (2003), this was based on the views of the main "stakeholders" (the children), although they also sought views from those who supported them. The findings led to some guiding principles for improving the transition process for this particular group of pupils and implications for Educational Psychologists to facilitate the implementation and monitoring of these principles. Caution should be applied to the findings, however, because of the lack of detail regarding how the data was collected. The strength of this study was that views were gathered both before and after transition.

The aim of Aston's (2008) study was to elicit the views of Year Six pupils from the researcher's Local Authority regarding secondary transition. A

secondary aim was to offer an example of how every child's view can contribute to improving transition. Although questionnaires were used, the aspect of the study reported in this paper focused on an open question asking pupils to comment on transition to secondary school. As a result, only 14% (39) of the questionnaires were used for this part of the study. In addition, views were sought through a range of interactive data gathering activities undertaken during visits to three Year Six classes. Limitations of the research were that analysis of the data was unclear, leading to difficulties with being replicable and there was no reference to potential bias in the analysis of the data in order to achieve the desired aims. The data gathered through interactive data gathering activities was with three classes and so lacks generalisability.

Sancho and Cline (2012) through individual interviews, explored pupils' experiences of secondary school following transition and how pupils viewed a 'sense of belonging'. This provided a snapshot of the transition experience after just a few months at secondary school. Limitations identified by the researchers included the need for longitudinal research to explore the longevity of a 'sense of belonging', as well as contextual information such as family and participants' demographics. The researchers offered recommendations to schools as a result of the research and suggested the need for Educational

Psychologists to support transition work, such as through whole school training regarding the significance of a sense of belonging.

Ganeson & Ehrich (2009) argued that there was limited research from the perspective of the individual for the phenomenon of the transition to secondary school. They carried out exploratory research of sixteen pupils by asking them to complete journals to describe their experiences of being in an Australian high school[2]. Journals were the sole source of data and were kept for the first six weeks, as this was considered the crucial period of transition. A number of recommendations were made to aid transition practices in school based upon their findings. It could be argued that whilst a number of interesting themes emerged, semi-structured interviews, possibly based upon the journals, may have elicited richer information as the interviewer would have been able to follow up on areas of interest. This was an Australian study carried out in a single school and so transferability should be questioned in terms of UK school systems.

Akos (2002) explored pupil perceptions of the transition to a middle school[3] from three elementary schools in America. Although the majority of this

[2] In the Australian education system, students transition to high school at grade 7 (age 11)

[3] In the American education system, middle school is grades 6-8 (ages 11-13)

longitudinal study was questionnaire based, as with the Ashton (2008) study, pupils were invited to write any questions they had about transition before this occurred and again once in their new school. A number of recommendations were made to aid transition practices in school. Limitations were that this was an American study and so transferability should be questioned in terms of school systems. Additionally, there was limited information describing the analysis stage which was carried out by a single researcher and thus issues of being replicable and potential bias are again limitations to the study as with Ashton (2008). The strength of the research was that views were sought pre and post transition.

Dann (2011) identified that little research had looked specifically at the transition experience for pupils with Autism. This research explored the views and experiences of 'key stakeholders' (pupils, parents and teachers) regarding inclusion into secondary phase schooling. Three pupils transitioned to a mainstream school with attached specialist provision for ASD[4] whilst the remaining three pupils transitioned to their local secondary school. Interviews were conducted pre and post transition using talking mats[5] to provide a visual structure to support pupils to answer questions about school. The themes

[4] ASD is the term used here to refer to pupils on the Autistic Spectrum which some researchers may have referred to as ASC in their study

[5] Talking mats are mats to which pictures can be attached and re-arranged as required to aid communication

generated were used to make a number of recommendations for transition and inclusion into secondary school life for pupils with ASD. A limitation to Dann's study is that the results were based upon a small number of pupils, in a limited number of mainstream schools, and therefore the research would need to be extended for the results to have greater generalisability.

Dockrell & Lindsay (2007) employed mixed methods to examine the transition experience for children with SLCN as they entered secondary school. This involved a number of standardised measures used alongside interviewing pupils (and other stakeholders) before and after transition to distinguish factors specific to SLCN, factors general to children with SEN and factors that reflected transition issues for all pupils. The findings were reported with an emphasis on the standardised measures employed and percentage of responses which resulted in a lack of individual pupil voice (number of participants N=67 pre-transition and 47 post transition was likely to be a factor in this). How the interviews were analysed was not described and the researchers were known to the pupils, although there was no reference to potential bias or power relationships. The researchers reported that little attention had been given to the nature of the SLCN pupils' needs and the impact these had on transition to secondary school, compared to pupils

identified with SEN that were not language related and typically developing (TD) pupils.

Fortuna (2014) explored whether the social and emotional wellbeing of pupils with ASD changed during the transition between primary and secondary. The author gathered the views of five pupils with ASD, their parents and educational staff. The author used mixed-methods of data collection stating that having quantitative and qualitative elements enhanced the research. Pupils completed a diary of their school day over three selected weeks in secondary school. The use of prompts and visual supports were used in semi-structured interviews to allow pupils to voice their opinion. Fortuna (2014) concluded that as with everyone else, these students have unique personalities, with their own sets of strengths and weaknesses. The key to good transition was described as: something that should work for all pupils regardless of difficulty, knowing the pupil well, communicating with all involved, recognising the challenges faced by the individual and making reasonable adjustments to enable a positive move to secondary school. One area that was identified by the author as problematic in this research was the imprecise nature of historical recall of their first day at secondary school.

2.4. Synthesis of Findings from the Research Papers

Following a critique of the articles, the findings were synthesised in order to address the literature review question: *What is already known about readiness for secondary school transition from the perspective of the pupil?*

The analytical approach adopted for the synthesis of the included research papers was a thematic synthesis of their findings. The purpose of this was to explore common themes and extract insights that may not be forthcoming in exploring a single study in isolation. It was hoped that it would give some indication of the current thinking in this area and any potential gaps. As suggested by Soilemezi & Lincevicite, (2018) the analytical approach was chosen following numerous readings of the papers in order to determine what type of synthesis would be possible and meaningful. Thematic analysis is a method often used to analyse data in qualitative research (e.g. Thomas and Harden, 2008). Thematic analysis was applied in order to bring the findings of the research together, whilst respecting the context and complexity of each piece of research. This approach identified a number of recurrent themes in the findings of the included research papers.

The included research provided evidence that school structure, peer relationships, sense of belonging, teacher relationships, the learning experience, bullying, growing up and the transition experience were influential in pupil perspectives of readiness.

2.4.1. School structure/discontinuities

One common feature in the findings, which was referred to in eight of the nine papers, was that of school structure and discontinuities between primary and secondary school. Tobbell (2003) and Brewin & Statham (2011) applied an ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1999, cited in Tobbell, 2003) as a basis for generating a psychological model for understanding the systems involved in secondary transition. Tobbell (2003) suggested that the structure of secondary school worked against the development of effective learning relationships and had implications for the organisation of the entire education system. Many of the participants in this study spoke of stress in the first few months because they did not know their way around and were late for lessons. Tobbell (2003) reported that participants experienced multiple difficulties with the organisation of the school which impacted on the learning experience. This included the timetable, length of lessons, multiple teachers and individual working. The notion of feeling lost was viewed as important in the findings and related not just to the physical structure, but to being unprepared for many aspects of secondary school. Summer school was felt to assist with this where it was available. The findings reported that some pupils felt they had been given insufficient information at primary school to prepare them.

Brewin & Statham (2011) likewise reported being physically lost as a commonly cited difficulty for LAC children adapting to the environment. However, in all cases, it was indicated that these difficulties were soon resolved. They found that interacting factors at many levels were important when supporting children through transition and their findings were organised around the levels proposed in Bronfenbrenner's (1979, cited in Brewin & Statham, 2011) framework. All of their participants mentioned difficulties relating to the secondary school setting and the researchers suggested that giving pupils extra support to reduce the multi-factorial difficulties the pupils experience might have led to greater resilience.

Ganeson & Ehrich (2009), through the analysis of journals, found that transition was enhanced when pupils were confident and felt a sense of achievement and success in their new environment. Pupils reported having to learn locations of rooms, and other new routines, including reading a timetable, using a diary and having the right equipment, but that they developed a sense of belonging when they were able to move around the school independently. Pupils also spoke of programmes to help them adapt such as buddy or peer support, which was also advocated by Akos (2002). Akos (2002) found that pupils' questions were dominated by rules and procedures both pre and post transition and suggested that pupils needed to be

made aware of the contextual change of school systems. These findings support Tobbell's (2003) findings that reducing the fear of the new environment could minimise difficulties.

Ashton (2008) found that pupils generally wanted as much experience of their secondary school as possible in preparation for the transition, including details of everyday life such as timetables and how the lunch system works. Pupils were also concerned with finding their way around their new school. Pupils found talking to current pupils and teachers and spending time in their new school to be most useful. The researcher reported that relationships with people who were part of that system were vital to finding out the details of school life and forming realistic expectations. Similarly, Dann (2011) reported that the most important factor for pupils with ASD was to know their environment. This included both knowing the social environment, such as trusting the teachers, and the physical environment, such as knowing where things were. Sancho and Cline (2012) identified 'school context' as a key domain in their findings of exploration of sense of belonging. This included themes such as teaching style and the structure of the school.

One theme identified in the findings by Dockrell & Lindsay, (2007) was termed 'patterns of movement at transfer and preparedness of the secondary school'. In this study similar levels of worry were raised by pupils with SEN,

SLCN and typically developing peers about the forthcoming transition which included the new environment. In post-transition interviews many pupils reported enjoying having different teachers and changing classrooms. However, findings suggested that pupils with SLCN and SEN found aspects of transition more challenging, which was largely related to practicalities of the school day and academic achievement.

2.4.2. Peer relationships

Peer relationships featured in all of the findings of the included studies. Tobbell (2003) reported that participants made multiple references to friendships at secondary school. Tobbell (2003) reported that the number of close relationships reduced at secondary school. Pupil interaction was mediated by their need to conform and belong to particular groups and there was less mixing as a class. Sancho and Cline (2012) found that the relationship with peers was a central feature in all of the accounts in their study. Some pupils saw secondary transition as an opportunity to leave people that they did not have positive relationships with, or to establish better relationships with people. As with the study by Tobbell (2003), there was a sense that being older and in a new context made a difference to how pupils related to each other. Pupil accounts suggested that once friendships were established so was belonging.

Ashton (2008) found 22% of the questions generated by pupils were about friends, and this was the single biggest issue. For some, friends were a source of support, for others the prospect of having to make new friends was frightening and they worried about being lonely. During the interactive activities, pupils spoke about making the right friendship choices and were anxious about falling in with a 'bad crowd'. Brewin & Statham (2011) found LAC pupils were also influenced by peer relationships. Friendships were an important factor in choice of secondary school and it was felt that making new friends was also a positive aspect of transition. Akos (2002) also found that pupils mentioned friends as the top source of help during transition. Ganeson & Ehrich (2009) reported the social aspect of schooling played a pivotal role at this stage of pupils' lives and friendship was vital to successful school and academic life for many pupils. The authors suggested that the tensions caused by transition could be lessened by support from peers and older pupils. They identified that knowing others from primary school helped pupils to feel safe, particularly in the early days. This study found that pupils had not anticipated losing old friends, but that they had made new friends without much difficulty and the larger size of secondary school worked to the pupils' advantage for making friends.

Dann (2011), in contrast to other studies, but in keeping with the nature of pupils with ASD found that social difficulties persisted following transition. However, pupils were noted to have an increased interest in social interaction and, for some, secondary school resulted in their first friendship being formed. Fortuna (2014) also found social issues played a large role in the stress experienced by pupils with ASD following transition. The findings supported the importance of social adjustment such as knowing key members of staff with the opportunity to build relationships with them and learn some of the new social rules in relation to secondary. Dockrell and Lindsay (2007) found that, although increased levels of friendship were high for all children following transition, the SLCN and SEN cohorts reported this less frequently. These studies suggest that whilst peer relationships are seen as vital to pupils, those with SEN including ASD and SLCN find this more challenging.

2.4.3. School as a community/sense of belonging

A sense of school community or belonging was a feature in four of the papers. Sancho and Cline's (2012) study focused on a sense of belonging and unsurprisingly this featured as one of three key domains in their findings. They explored whether pupils' accounts supported a model of belonging as advocated by Hegarty, Sauer-Lynch, Patusky & Collier, (1992, cited in Sancho & Cline, 2012) as being, firstly, valued by the system and, secondly,

fitting in with the system. Some pupils saw the larger size of school as an opportunity to work with and make friends with a larger range of people. Relationships with peers were considered crucial for the pupils' sense of belonging, in particular, relationships with members of their form and opportunities for informal socialising. Many pupils' descriptions of a sense of belonging referenced emotional wellbeing. The pupil accounts suggested that feeling a sense of 'fit' was associated with peer acceptance and to some extent positive relationships with teachers.

One of the themes which emerged in the findings by Tobbell (2003) was school as a community. Tobbell (2003) reported that the number of close peer relationships reduced at secondary school. There was also a change of status from being the oldest to youngest pupils. Pupils felt that secondary teachers did not know them as well as in primary school.

Brewin & Statham (2011) found pupils tended to talk about those they had left behind at primary school. Ashton (2008) also found that pupils spoke about leaving their primary teacher behind. In this study the discussion, amongst a class where the majority of pupils were of Asian heritage, revealed worries about going to a school with children of different ethnic backgrounds. Some pupils were the only member of their primary school going to a particular

secondary school and for these children not knowing other pupils was their main worry. School choice was also a concern with some pupils saying that they had not obtained their first choice of school or that their test results would determine their classes. Dockrell & Lindsay, (2007) found that pupils with SLCN and SEN were less likely to be involved in the decision about which school they would attend, which could be argued to impact upon feelings of belonging.

2.4.4. Teacher relationships

Teacher relationships featured in the findings of five of the studies. In the study by Ashton (2008), pupils were interested in what their new teachers would be like, but several felt sad about leaving their primary teachers behind. This sentiment was shared in the study of ASD pupils (Dann, 2011) which perhaps reflects how pupils with ASD often gravitate towards adults. Dann (2011) found that, following transition, pupils reported that having helpful and understanding staff supported successful transition. Ashton (2008) found that the experience of meeting the new teacher prior to starting had a huge impact on pupils' feelings about secondary school. The pupils were thinking not just about how the teacher would be, but what impression they would make on their teacher.

Tobbell (2003) reported that every participant had something to say about the teachers and what characterised a good teacher. Sancho and Cline (2012), found that pupil accounts included reflections on relationships with both primary and secondary teachers and some pupils cited teachers as an important factor in their sense of belonging. Ganeson & Ehrich (2009) also found that teachers played a crucial role in making transition easier for pupils, including teachers providing opportunities to get to know peers, explaining procedures and supporting learning. They reported that pupils enjoyed having many teachers as they were exposed to more approaches and could access support when required. Ganeson & Ehrich (2009) concluded that teachers need to be sensitive to the needs of newcomers and provide time to adjust.

2.4.5. The learning experience

Five of the included papers reported on pupils' perceptions of the learning experience at secondary school as a factor impacting on their experience of transition. Tobbell (2003) reported that participants experienced multiple difficulties with the organisation of the school which impacted on the learning experience. As this was based on a single class, the difficulties may have been systemic. Applying Vygotsky's theory (1978, cited in Tobbell, 2003), the researcher stated that learning is relationship based and if the relationship had not been established the educational experience would be impaired.

Ganeson & Ehrich (2009) reported that pupils identified interactive and practical lessons as more meaningful and enjoyable at secondary school. Pupils also reported that the learning style expected by teachers differed from primary school and that experiencing academic success was important to integration. Homework was identified as a concern in the findings, although it was not the level of difficulty, but the volume of work and perceptions of the deadline being unrealistic. Akos (2002) also found that homework and doing well in school were concerns of pupils both pre and post transition.

Dann (2011) found pupils with ASD talked about lessons in primary school as being fun or boring and what teachers did to help, as well as what they hoped would happen at secondary school. Following transition, pupils who had access to a specialist resource or SEN base found transition easier and were happy to attend school, in contrast to pupils who received no additional support. Brewin & Statham (2011) reported that some LAC pupils reported fear of the work being hard or having strict teachers. Dockrell and Lindsay (2007) also reported that before transition, pupils raised worries about harder work. In post-transition interviews both SLCN and SEN cohorts were more likely to report forgetting things in lessons and disliking having several teachers. In contrast, Ashton's (2008) study with Year Six pupils found that

there were few comments about the work at secondary school. The researcher considered pupils to be too preoccupied with the social and environmental aspects of moving school to think about the content of the lessons.

2.4.6. Perceptions of Bullying

Pupil perceptions of bullying were identified in the findings of seven of the included studies. Brewin & Statham (2011) found that many LAC pupils felt fearful or anxious before transition and the most commonly cited fear was of bullying. Sancho and Cline (2012) reported that pupils described initial anxiety about who they would meet at secondary and whether they would be bullied, although most subsequently reported positive relationships with peers. In the study by Ashton (2008), bullying was a worry for 17% of pupils. Akos (2002) found that older pupils and bullies were concerns of pupils both pre and post transition and this tended to be for girls more than boys. The anticipation of being bullied was found to be greater than the actual event (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009), with most pupils expecting to be bullied when they entered high school. Bullying was not a reported concern in Year Seven in this study which the authors suggest may be explained by the peer support programme in place which lessened the potential for older pupils to be potential bullies.

Dockrell & Lindsay (2007) found that in Year Six, pupils raised worries about the forthcoming transition which included issues of bullying. Interestingly,

typically developing peers raised more concerns (42%) than pupils with SLCN (26%) or SEN (19%). This may have reflected a lower level of awareness amongst pupils in the latter groups. Post transition, higher rates of bullying were reported by the SLCN pupils than other pupils. Dann (2011) found all of the ASD pupils perceived some teasing or bullying episodes since moving to secondary school. This may be reflective of their social perception and understanding of bullying. Fortuna (2014) also found bullying was a concern for pupils with ASD. This suggests that the fear of bullying may not be borne out at secondary school, but those with SLCN and ASD may be more vulnerable.

2.4.7. Growing up

A theme that was identified across four studies was that of growing up. Tobbell (2003) reported pupils as being concerned about staff expectations for pupils to act like grown-ups, with nearly all participants struggling with this notion of taking responsibility for themselves. Ashton (2008) identified being treated as an older pupil to be a recurring theme, with many pupils' notes including the words "independence" and "responsibility". Pupils spoke positively about having more freedom and choice and many were looking forward to taking charge of their own equipment and schedules. However, some pupils were worried about managing the organisational aspects of

secondary school. Akos (2002) reported that, although sixth grade pupils exhibited adolescent characteristics, they still needed elementary orientation concerning rules and procedures. Dann (2011) found that ASD pupils liked having choice and control over aspects of their day at secondary school, such as their lunch and break times. This helped pupils to feel a sense of being like other pupils their age. Sancho and Cline (2012) identified 'growing independence and maturity' as a key domain in their findings; pupils referred to increased independence such as when travelling to school, as well as different expectations from adults around them and changes to relationships with peers.

2.4.8. The transition experience

Four of the studies found that pupils' feelings about transition were largely positive. Ashton (2008) reported that pupils spoke positively about all the things they were looking forward to, such as access to new equipment. However, it was noted that there was a danger that, if the high expectations were not met, pupils would be at risk of becoming disaffected. Dann (2011) found all participants had some anxiety around transition. However, despite this anxiety, a generally positive attitude towards transition emerged. Pupils looked forward to new lessons, rooms and equipment. Dockrell & Lindsay (2007) found that, although pupils raised a number of worries about the

forthcoming transition, virtually all pupils anticipated positive aspects of this including new friends, lessons and teachers. In post-transition interviews, many pupils reported enjoying having different teachers and changing classrooms. Akos (2002) reported that 70% of pupils were positive and indicated excitement about the impending transition.

Fortuna (2014) found that pupils with ASD were a heterogeneous group, making it difficult to identify consistent transition strategies. In one case, the change in socio-emotive well-being over transition was for the worse; the remaining four had varying levels of improvement. For Ganeson & Ehrich (2009) the picture was mixed; they found that pupils faced many challenges during transition, such as the new environment and friendships, whilst also experiencing many positive aspects of transition such as making new friends and learning new things. Tobbell (2003) found that, whilst a few participants experienced the transition process as being positive, the majority did not.

2.5. Findings of the Previous Research

The literature review aimed to explore the following question:

What is already known about readiness for secondary school transition from the perspective of the pupil?

The systematic search generated nine relevant studies, none of which explored specifically, secondary school readiness. Two studies took place before transition, four studies explored pre and post transition data and three occurred after transition. The papers suggested that whilst there were many challenges that pupils faced during transition, there were also many positives such as Ganeson & Ehrich, (2009). The review found many commonalities in student experiences of transition. The school environment featured in many pupils accounts and Ashton (2008) suggested that pupils wanted as much experience as possible before transition to support not only greater preparedness but to develop realistic expectations. Peer relationships were another dominant theme regarding transition and the research suggested that the social aspect of schooling is an important factor at this stage of pupils' lives. Five of the identified studies explored the experiences of 'typically developing' pupils (Akos, 2002; Tobbell, 2003; Ashton, 2008; Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009, & Sancho and Cline, 2012). Four studies focused on a particular group, LAC (Brewin & Statham, 2011), ASD (Dann, 2011, Fortuna, 2014) and SEN/SLCN (Dockrell & Lindsay, 2007). The latter papers suggested that most of the needs of these distinct groups of pupils during transition are those of ALL pupils during transition, suggesting that high quality transition support for all pupils should meet most of the transition needs of vulnerable pupils.

2.6. Summary

Exploration of the current research indicated that there is some research that has explored the experience of transition from a pupil perspective and that this has generated a number of common themes. Some studies (e.g. Ashton, 2008) demonstrated that pupils' can be a valuable resource in providing information about their perceptions of the transition experience. However, if we were to consider vulnerable groups in the available research on transition, there was only one paper for pupils with SEN/SLCN, one for LAC and two for children with ASD. There are a lack of studies that have explored pupil experience of secondary school "readiness" and what this means to pupils on the verge of transition. This suggests that in spite of the wealth of research regarding transition, there is a gap in the current literature on the experience of readiness from the perspective of vulnerable groups. The purpose of the current research was to explore the phenomenon of secondary school readiness from the perspective of the pupils with regard to their experiences of primary and secondary school. It focused on one identified vulnerable group, pupils with speech, language and communication needs. The research questions were:

- RQ1: What sense do pupils with SLCN make of their experience of primary school?
- RQ2: What sense do pupils with SLCN make of their experience of secondary school following their induction days?

- RQ3: What are the pupils' perceptions of secondary school readiness?

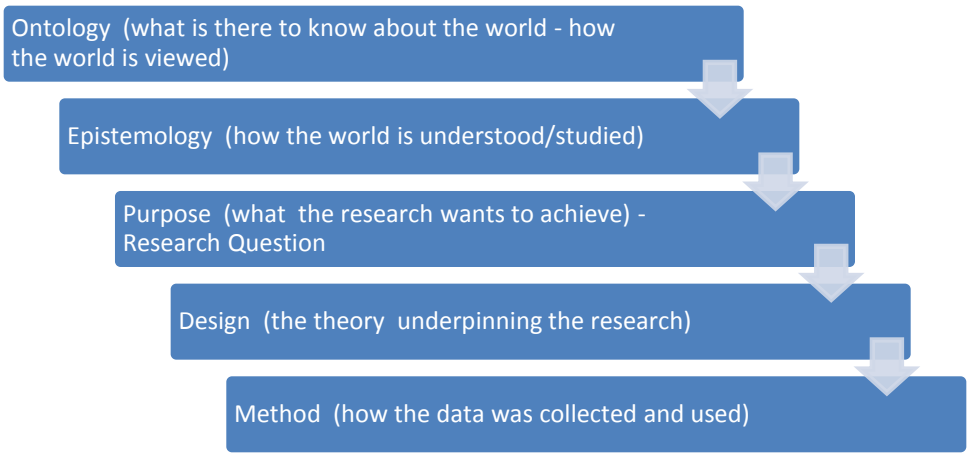
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Chapter Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodology used in this research. It provides a brief history of scientific research and the epistemological and ontological position adopted for this piece of research. This will put into context the choice of research design and research questions. It will detail the method of data collection including the recruitment of participants ~~and outline~~and outline the methodology of semi-structured interviews. It will then explore the method of data analysis that was used, Interpretive, Phenomenological Awareness (IPA), including the benefits and limitations of such an approach. It concludes by considering ethical implications and the trustworthiness of this research. Below is a diagram summarising the organisation of the chapter:

3.1.1 Diagram to show the Organisation of the chapter



3.2. Ontology and Epistemology

3.2.1. Ontology

According to Willig (2008), perceptions and definitions of reality can be seen as a continuum from absolute realism to absolute relativism. Realism asserts that reality is singular, objective and discrete from human thought, culture and belief. Relativism, in contrast, contends that multiple realities exist based upon the meaning each individual makes about their experience. This research adopted an ontological position that sits towards the relativist end of the scale. That is, individuals construct reality by interpreting their experience.

3.2.2. Epistemology

Epistemology can be affected by the ontological position and according to Willig (2008) it too can be understood as a continuum from positivist to

constructivist. The ‘standard view’ of science derives from a philosophical approach known as positivism (Robson, 2002). This seeks to establish objective knowledge of the universal laws of cause and effect through the testing of specific hypothesis and would sit at the realism end of the ontological continuum. At the relativist end, the epistemological position is that of social constructionism where meanings are constructed from interactions between people, emphasising the role of culture, society, discourse and language.

Constructivism sits towards the relativist position, where the person’s individual experience of reality and the individually constructed world is one that can be revealed through research. Within social constructivism, an individual constructs their perceptions of reality based upon their experience of the world and the social interactions within it. There is no single ‘truthful’ narrative, but we have several available to us and we might privilege one over another. This frees researchers to explore multiple interpretations and meanings, which may be generated when viewed in context and in their full complexity (e.g. Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Robson, 2002). An implication of this position is that once the researcher becomes engaged in the process, it is no longer an individual construction, but researcher and participant together form a co-construction. The researcher therefore needs to

be aware of how they construct the world and be transparent about this through reflexivity.

3.3. Purpose of the Research

Based upon the ontological and epistemological position, the purpose of this research was exploratory and was undertaken from a social constructivist perspective, maintaining that everyone has a unique view and perspective on the world. The researcher did not seek to test hypotheses or seek to make generalisable claims from this work, but explored how looking through the lens of the participants contributed new understanding. According to Robson (2002) the purpose of exploratory research is to:

- To find out what is happening
- To seek new insights
- To ask questions
- To assess phenomena in a new light
- To generate ideas for future research

As Robson (2002) asserts, research should provide insight into phenomena that is of local and national importance and be in some sense influential or effective, if it is to be worthwhile. Taking into account national and local initiatives (see Chapter One), current research and gaps in the research as identified in the literature review (see Chapter Two), the purpose of this

research was to explore the perceptions of 'secondary school readiness' of Year Six pupils identified as having SLCN. The research aim was to facilitate messages about personal journeys and the meanings and sense that pupils had of their experience in terms of readiness for secondary school, capturing the moment before transition takes place. The aim was to explore the experience of a small sample of participants in the hope that it would provide some insight into this phenomenon. This is suited to a qualitative approach and it was considered that phenomenology (discussed further in 3.5.1) was an appropriate methodological approach.

3.4. Research Questions

According to Campbell, Daft and Hulin (1982, cited in Robson, 2002, pg. 56), successful research develops from:

- Activity and involvement - the researcher has chosen an area of personal interest and access to participants.
- Convergence - the research allows the coming together of areas of interest, SLCN and person-centred practice.
- Intuition - the research is in an area of need and of current interest.
- Theory - the research aims to provide an exploration of what is going on for the participants in the phenomenon of interest and generate

themes within and between participants that will provide insight into this particular phenomenon.

In keeping with the epistemological position, the research questions were open and exploratory as opposed to closed and explanatory (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin 2009). The research aim was translated into three research questions:

- RQ1: What sense do pupils with SLCN make of their experience of primary school?
- RQ2: What sense do pupils with SLCN make of their experience of secondary school following their induction days?
- RQ3: What are the pupils' perceptions of secondary school readiness?

3.5. Research Design

According to Robson (2002) being 'scientific' means adopting a 'scientific attitude, which refers to research carried out systematically, sceptically and ethically.

- Systematically - there was a clear rationale for the current piece of research and it was carried out with a clear structure and procedures that were adhered to throughout the process including recruiting participants and analysing the data.

- Sceptically - the research was scrutinised by the researcher and other EPs, which led to changes being made throughout the process. Data collected and interpretations made were subject to inspection by others to ensure validity.
- Ethically - the BPS (2018) conduct of conduct was adhered to.

Qualitative methodology was considered appropriate as the research aimed to capture the *meaning* of a particular experience from the individual's own view point. Given the social constructivist position of the research, a phenomenological approach was considered appropriate. The research was concerned with the individual's account of reality rather than an objective reality. The research also incorporated the philosophy of hermeneutics which will be discussed in 3.5.2.

3.5.1. Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to the study of human lived experience. Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre were leading figures in Phenomenological philosophy (Smith, et al., 2009). Husserl's work pioneered the importance and relevance of a focus on experience and its perception. Husserl termed this a 'phenomenological attitude' (Smith, et al., 2009, pg. 12). He developed a 'phenomenological method' which required disengaging from our 'taken for granted experience of the world' in order to

focus objectively on our perceptions of that world and referred to this as 'bracketing'. In developing Phenomenology further, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre each contributed a view of the person as embedded and immersed in a world of objects and relationships, language and culture, projects and concerns (Smith, et al. 2009). Within the epistemology paradigm, phenomenology can be said to adopt an 'in-between position' (Willig, 2008) in that experience is the product of interpretation of the event and therefore constructed (and flexible), but is nevertheless real to the person having the experience. Phenomenology provides the philosophical basis for interpretive research strategies. It focuses on the subjective experience of the individual and is about understanding and describing experience from their perspective.

3.5.2. Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics originates from the Greek word "to interpret" and is the 'art and science of interpretation' (Robson, 2002). Its origins are in the interpretation of biblical texts, historical documents and literary works. Three of the most important hermeneutic theorists are Schleiermacher, Heidegger and Gadamer (Smith, et al. 2009). Schleiermacher saw interpretation as an art, which allowed the researcher meaningful insights which exceeded and subsumed the explicit narrative of the participants. Heidegger attempted to bridge the philosophies of hermeneutics and phenomenology and his formulation of

phenomenology was an explicitly interpretive activity. He stated that the analyst brings their fore-conception (prior experiences, assumptions, preconceptions) to the encounter and cannot help but be influenced by their own prior experience. Gadamer (Smith et al, 2009) stated that the aim was for the stimulus to speak in its own voice and that the researcher's own preconceptions hinder this process. His ideas of reflexivity are important here; reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meaning throughout the research process, and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining outside of one's subject matter while conducting research. This fits with Husserl's assertion for the need of 'bracketing' in research as described above. These concepts will be explored further under the section on validity and reliability.

3.5.3. Participants

The research used a purposive sample of participants to ensure homogeneity regarding the phenomena of interest. The sample represents a perspective, rather than a population (Smith et al, 2009) as the focus was to generate detailed accounts of individual experience related to a specific theme. All participants were Year Six pupils who were about to transition to secondary school and had an Education, Health and Care Plan[6] (EHCP) for SLCN. Six

[6] EHCP is a legal document which details the child's SEN and provision required to meet those needs

participants were deemed a large enough sample size to elicit the detail and diversity of data required, whilst remaining manageable in terms of analysis. Although the research did not aim to make generalisable claims, the homogeneity of the participants enabled the researcher to gain insight into the phenomenon of secondary readiness for pupils with SLCN.

3.5.4. Table to show the ethnographic representation of the participants

Participant Number and code	Pseudonym (names changed to protect anonymity)	Ethnographic description
Participant 1 (P1)	Keith	Male, White, English
Participant 2 (P2)	Mollie	Female, White, English
Participant 3 (P3)	Alice	Female, White, English
Participant 4 (P4)	Ellie	Female, White, English
Participant 5 (P5)	Cassie	Female, White, English
Participant 6 (P6)	Harry	Male, White, English

Pen Portrait: Participant 1

Keith is an only child and lives with both parents. The family moved to England from Spain when he was in Year 3. Keith loves food and can offer an opinion about this. He enjoys art, the 'BFG' and Thunderbirds. Keith had put a lot of time and effort into preparing his visual aids to discuss. Keith came across as confident and great fun to talk to during the interview and his interview lasted the longest. Keith presented as having clear language, but difficulties with word finding, often resulting in long pauses. He spoke about personal experiences such as his return from Spain, and how worried he had been about joining the English school system. He shared intimate moments about his life such as his dog dying. He appeared to enjoy and appreciate the

time to share his views and I felt that I gained a true essence of him. Keith was a wonderful storyteller and did impersonations, such as of a chicken, and used imagery, such as wearing 'James Bond invisible goggles' in a science lesson which served to bring his experiences to life. Keith had one taster day along with other pupils who were joining the secondary school and attended a meeting along with his parents, primary and secondary school staff to discuss his transition.

Pen Portrait: Participant 2

Mollie lives with her parents and older sister. She has a stepbrother and step sister, but they do not live with her. She spoke fondly of her grandparents whom she sees regularly. Mollie had cancer when she was in nursery, but has been seven years in remission. Mollie is actually aged twelve as she was held back a year due to her cancer. She can have sporadic memory loss and her stability is compromised. Mollie will not be attending the same secondary school as her sister. Mollie presented as having significant language needs and it took some effort and tuning in to her speech to understand her at times. She had put a lot of time and effort into her visual pre-interview material which helped with the conversation and understanding her speech in context. She began the interview by asking if she could show her 'talent' which was to bend both her thumbs 180 degrees forwards and backwards. Mollie has a love

of animals and came across as a huge dog lover, speaking with enthusiasm and knowledge about pugs. Mollie was interesting to listen to and would add impressions and humour to her accounts. She spoke of how she likes to tease others, especially her grandfather. Mollie was very sociable and appeared to enjoy talking about herself. Mollie plays the guitar and enjoys board games. She said that she wants to be a scientist when she grows up. She spoke of an imaginary friend that is sometimes in her dreams. Mollie had two induction days, one with her peers and an additional one for her which was accompanied by a support assistant from her primary school. The latter was the week before the interview.

Pen Portrait: Participant 3

Alice lives with her mum and older sister. Her sister attends a different school to the one Alice will be going to. Alice joined her current school in Year Three. Alice was initially reluctant to enter the room, but once I had introduced myself by my first name she seemed to relax. She sat and volunteered how nervous she felt. We spent a few minutes chatting and I noticed that her speech was much clearer than I had anticipated. Alice loves horses, describing them as her 'world' and she goes horse riding. Alice kept saying 'boo' and "pranked" in her interactions with me which suggested that she was enjoying herself. She became very frustrated if she was

misunderstood or did not understand a question posed to her. Alice left the room at one point to bring some additional work that she had done about her new school and seemed really keen to share this. She took charge of the session wanting to run quickly though the visuals she had brought with her, and was heavily reliant upon these to guide her. She would frequently say 'we'll get to that' for topics that she had raised, but then moved on and did not return to these unless reminded. At the end of the interview, Alice fed back that she liked being the teacher and me the student. Alice had two inductions, one with her peers and one accompanied by her mum and a member of staff from her primary school. These both occurred the week before the interview.

Pen Portrait: Participant 4

Ellie lives with her mum and dad and has two older brothers who both attended the secondary school that she will be going to. She joined her current school in Year Three. Ellie was very quiet and seemed nervous as she came into the room. She was very reliant upon her visuals and needed lots of prompts to say more. Ellie also needed time to process the information and would make clicking sounds with her tongue during this time. Her chosen topic of conversation was about friends and Ellie was able to speak at length about them. Ellie also expressed a love of animals and sports. Ellie shared how scared and upset she had been on her first day at her current school and

conveyed a sense that she would need ‘looking after’ at her secondary school. At the end of the interview, she shared that she had enjoyed being the teacher and felt I had been a good student. Ellie had two induction days on the Thursday and Friday of the week prior to the interview.

Pen Portrait: Participant 5

Cassie lives with her mum and older sister. Cassie presented as having very poor language skills, but was very enthusiastic. She could generally make herself understood, but would express frustration when she was not understood. Her pre-interview visual aids helped to remind her of things to talk about and to help me understand what she was saying. Her understanding of what I was asking was more limited. Cassie would take charge of the agenda, saying ‘and that’s it’ when she felt that a topic had been covered. In spite of her weak language skills, she appeared to enjoy taking about herself.

Cassie came across as a very sociable pupil and appeared to embrace school life seeing this as an opportunity for new experiences. Cassie showed clear understanding of her school day and often spoke as if reciting the instructions that she had heard from school staff. She would often raise her voice and speak in a very high pitched tone when emotive topics were discussed. Cassie expressed emotional turmoil for having discovered that the class she had experienced during her induction was no longer going to be her class. She had

learnt this through a letter sent to her mum. This change of plan had unsettled her and left her feeling unwanted. She also expressed concern for another pupil who she considered had been unfairly excluded from the Year 6 celebrations and showed empathic skills towards him. Cassie had two induction days on the Thursday and Friday of the week before the interview. This was with a member of staff from her primary school.

Pen Portrait: Participant 6

Harry is an only child and lives with his mum and dad. Harry joined his primary school in Year 3. Harry came across as very confident during the interview. He presented with good language skills, but poor attention and listening skills. This made the interview difficult as Harry found it increasingly difficult to concentrate and would complain of becoming 'bored'. He often spoke quickly and would become frustrated if he was not understood. He described himself as an active person and Harry found it very difficult to sit still, often getting up and moving around whilst he was talking.

Harry expressed a love of sports and spoke in long narratives about his sporting achievements. He often used actions to demonstrate what he was saying. Harry shared how he had struggled to read and write when he first came to this school. Harry also spoke of the school's behaviour system and how he got yellow and red cards for his behaviour. Harry said that only one other pupil from his primary school would be going to his secondary school,

but he did not seem concerned about this, explaining how he had already made lots of new friends. Harry had his induction days the Thursday and Friday of the week before the interview along with other pupils that would be joining the school.

3.5.5. Recruitment of the Research Participants

The research took place within a large East of England Local Authority, in which the researcher was employed as an EP, and primary schools across the Local Authority were contacted to seek out pupils who fitted the selection criteria (Year 6 pupils with an EHCP for SLCN). A total of nine primary schools responded to confirm such pupils attended. These schools were sent a letter to the head teacher via email outlining the research and asking if they would be prepared to contact the parents of the identified pupils on the researcher's behalf (see appendix D). A total of six schools agreed and a letter to the parents (appendix E), an information sheet for adults (appendix F), a pupil friendly information sheet (appendix G) and consent forms for the parent and the pupil (appendix H) were sent to the schools, via email, for distribution. The researcher also sought permission to carry out the research on the school premises.

The recruitment of participants was initially problematic despite it being a large authority. The research originally planned to recruit pupils from language units across the Local Authority as these pupils would not only have SLCN but would be undergoing transition from a specialised facility to a mainstream secondary school. However, this generated only one response. This pupil was later recruited to pilot the interview schedule. Due to the difficulty with recruiting participants from a more specific group, the participant criteria was altered to pupils with SLCN in mainstream schools. It was felt that this change would not negatively impact on the capacity to answer the research questions.

3.5.6. Table to show the recruitment process

Step 1	Primary schools were emailed in the local authority seeking out pupils that fitted the criteria
Step 2	Nine schools emailed to confirm that they had pupils that met this criteria
Step 3	The researcher sent a letter to the head and information form detailing the research
Step 4	Six schools agreed to participate in the research and make contact with the parents of the individuals involved on behalf of the researcher
Step 5	The researcher sent the following documents to the school to pass on to the parent/carer on their behalf: Letter to the parent, information form detailing the research for the parent, information form detailing the research for the pupil, consent form for parent and pupil to complete. Invites were offered to meet with parents if this was desired prior to interview
Step 6	One parent was met with and it was agreed that this pupil would participate as a pilot to the interview schedule for the research. Consent form was signed and a visual aid was left for completion
Step 7	A pilot interview was carried out and feedback sought from pupil, parent and school
Step 8	Six further parents and pupils agreed to participate from a total of five schools. Consent forms were returned and a visual aid was sent to the schools for completion at home or at school prior to the interview commencing
Step 9	Dates were set with each school for the researcher to visit to interview the 6 pupils and for a private room to be made available for this to take place
Step 10	On the day of the visit, the pupils were asked to have their completed visual aid tool available, were given a briefing and asked to confirm assent to the interview and for this to be audio recorded.
Step 11	Six interviews took place and were audio recorded.

3.5.7. Sample size

The sample size was dependent upon the number of pupils and parents willing to participate. A total of six pupils agreed to participate in the study. Smith et al, (2009) recommend between four and six participants are used in Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis research, which shall be discussed in detail in the data analysis section.

3.6. Data Collection

Data collection requires organisation, flexibility and sensitivity (Smith et al, 2009). However, there is:

> *'No such thing as a "perfect" data collection event, and no version of events which is "the truth"*. (Smith et al, 2009, p. 55.).

As the participants were identified as having SLCN, a methodology was required that was accessible and included non-verbal communication. Becoming more aware of non-verbal communication signals (one's own and participants') can help enrich understanding of participants and their meanings. According to Ellingson (2017), most of the communication we have is nonverbal, often without conscious thought. Studies with pupils with SLCN have suggested that young people with speech and language difficulties may respond unreliably to questionnaires due to their weak language skills (Snowling & Hayiou-Thomas, 2006). However, recent studies have found that

young people with SLCN can provide realistic insight into their difficulties (Joffe et al 2011). Owen, Hayett, L and Roulstone, (2004) demonstrated that semi-structured interviews supported by visual materials was an appropriate method of collecting data from children with SLCN and such studies are a valuable, informative and worthwhile process. The research required a method of data collection that, as far as possible, facilitated the participant to tell their experience of primary and secondary school and explore concepts and feelings of readiness for secondary school. It was felt that semi structured interviews would elicit a richer picture of the participant's unique experience than either structured interviews or questionnaires.

3.6.1. Semi-structured interviews

Individual semi-structured interviews are the preferred means of collecting data according to a review of IPA studies by Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005). These can be described as a 'conversation with a purpose' informed by the research question (Smith et al, 2009). Both interviewer and interviewee are active participants in the research process.

> *'The participant is the experiential expert and therefore should have some freedom in taking the interview to the thing itself'* (Smith et al, 2009, p. 58.).

Good research interviewing requires accepting that the course and content of an interview cannot be laid out in advance. Questioning should be based on attentive listening to what the participants say, including the specific words used to convey meaning. An important aspect of this is to probe to find out more about the interesting or important things that are said. This style of interviewing is an integral part of the inductive principles of phenomenology (Smith et al, 2009). The research situation treats the interviewee as the expert and puts the researcher in the position of learner. The task is to bring understanding to the researcher about the phenomena of interest.

Smith et al., (2009) emphasised the importance of rapport between the interviewer and participant. This was important for the current research given the participants' age and speech and language difficulties and that the researcher was unknown to them. By spending the early part of the interview having the participant talk openly about themselves, not only allowed for rapport building, but sought to provide the message that they would be given space to talk and be heard. A secondary aim of the research was that the participants would have their stories heard and support an emancipatory aspect of the study. It was important to communicate that there were no right or wrong answers and that participants could take their time in thinking and talking.

3.6.2. The Interview Schedule

Good qualitative interviews embody spontaneity and not everything about them can be planned (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The interview schedule aimed to explore the phenomenon under investigation whilst allowing for flexibility, sensitivity and responsiveness to the participants' replies. It allowed the researcher to concentrate during the interview on what the participant was actually saying (Smith & Osborn, 2007) and for the participants to bring what they felt important, providing the opportunity for new and unexpected phenomena to arise. The interview schedule was developed in line with the recommendations of Smith et al., (2009) to have between six and ten questions (see appendix I). Having a schedule allowed for thought to be given to the questions, ahead of the interview, and for the researcher to anticipate potential difficulties that might be encountered. The wording of the questions was carefully considered, given the participants' speech and language needs. The questions developed were based upon the research questions, piloted with a Year Six pupil who attended a language unit for SLCN, and also discussed with the teacher of the language unit to ensure accessibility. The questions were amended following the pilot. For example, it was felt that there were too many questions and some of these contained a judgement value such as describing a 'good' and 'bad' day. Some of the language in the questions was simplified, for example, removing the word 'experience' from the question

‘Can you tell me about your experience of school?’ The visual aids were also simplified from a scrapbook with many headings to three pages. The recording device proved to be distracting for the pilot participant during the interview process, and so was concealed once switched on for the actual interviews.

This demonstrates how the approach used was iterative: ideas were developed and changed after a pilot interview and during the interviews. The schedule began with general questions aimed to develop rapport and form a basis on which to develop later questions. The approach adopted allowed for ‘moments of silence’ (Pietkiewicz& Smith, 2014) in order to elicit rich information, including non-verbal communication, and to allow both researcher and the participant time for reflection.

A visual aid, which aimed to support participants to respond to the three main areas of exploration was completed by the participants beforehand and brought with them to interview (see appendix J). This comprised of three headed sheets titled ‘all about me’, ‘all about my primary school’ and ‘all about my secondary school’. This was deliberately open ended so as not to prejudice what the participants chose to record. The participants were asked to complete these in whichever way they preferred (e.g. drawings, words, and computer images) and parents and schools were asked to ensure that it was purely the work and views of the individual. As suggested by Merrick & Roulstone

(2011) these were not seen as sources of non-verbal data, but were to support verbal interaction and build mutual understanding between the participant and interviewer. Drawings are advocated for research with children, particularly with SLCN as they provide an alternative avenue for self-expression, but also support a less threatening power dynamic as they enable the participant to set the agenda. Having a visual can also reduce pressure to maintain eye contact and support with attention and memory during the interview.

The purpose of the 'all about me' visual aid was twofold. Firstly it would provide an opportunity for rapport building and for the participant to talk about something they knew very well, themselves. Secondly, it would provide the researcher with context and provide an insight into the participants' world which may provide useful information for follow up questions or as part of the interpretation stage. The second and third visuals aimed to elicit the participants' views and experiences of their primary school and their secondary school, following induction. It was hoped that these would help to answer RQ1 and RQ2. The final area that was of interest to the researcher was the participants' perceptions of readiness for secondary school in order to answer RQ3. The researcher hoped that by drawing the participants' attention to their primary experiences and their secondary experience to date, the

participants' may begin to compare and contrast these experiences in order to consider how ready they felt for the move to secondary school.

3.6.3. The Interview Process

The following guidelines were used during the interview, incorporating the work of Flick (1997, cited in Robson, 2002):

- The interview was held at a familiar place where the pupil felt comfortable (their school).
- The pupils brought completed visual material (appendix J) to aid their communication during interview.
- There was an introduction and briefing phrase, which was read out by the researcher (appendix K). The pupil was asked if they had questions.
- There was a warm up phase using neutral questions to build rapport.
- The main body of the interview was led by the pupil whenever possible. This was supported by the visual aids that participants had made. Additionally some pupils brought transitions books that they had made to also talk about.
- The pupil was able to end the interview at any time. One pupil (Participant 3) cut short her interview before readiness for secondary school had been fully explored.
- The pupil was able to ask questions at any time, ask for questions to be repeated and given the option to refuse to answer a question if they

chose to. Participant Three appeared to take the idea that she was the teacher and the interviewer the learner in earnest. She began to ask her own questions such as 'what's my favourite food?' and clearly communicated through verbal and non-verbal means when she did not wish to answer a question.

- The interviews aimed to be approximately 60 minutes in length, as suggested by Robson (2002). However, this could be more or less, depending on the needs of the participant. The recorded aspect of the interviews (not including the rapport building, briefing and debriefing stages) ranged from 26 minutes 39 seconds (Participant 5) to 53 minutes 9 seconds (Participant 1).
- Pupils' narratives were uninterrupted where possible. Pupils tended to give short answers to questions, but longer narratives when they led the conversation.
- Probes were used to encourage a pupil to expand on a response, such as, "Anything else?" and non-verbal responses such as, "mmm".
- The interview included time for the pupil to process the information and formulate their responses and reflections.
- The interview was recorded with a digital recorder, which based upon the pilot interview, was placed out of sight once the interview began to avoid distraction. This was because it had proved to be a distraction to the pilot interview pupil when left out on the table. In subsequent

interviews, once the device was explained and switched on, it was concealed behind a soft toy.

- There was a wind-down phase, with opportunity for the pupil to ask question and discuss their experience of the interview, noting the importance of ending positively.
- A closure and debriefing statement (appendix K) was read to the pupil.

3.6.4. The Interview Transcription

The six audio-recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher in order for full immersion with the data to take place.

3.7. Data Analysis

According to Smith et al (2009) successful analysis of the data requires the researcher to apply:

> *'The systematic application of ideas and methodical rigour, but they also require imagination, playfulness, and a combination of reflective, critical and conceptual thinking'* (Smith et al, 2009, p. 40.).

3.7.1. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

The transcripts were analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This methodology subscribes to relativist ontology, recognising that the meanings people ascribe to events are products of

interaction between them and the social world. This qualitative approach was used as it allowed the analysis of personal experiences, the meaning of the experience to participants and how participants made sense of that experience (Smith, 2011). IPA is primarily an interpretive approach and the anticipation was that it would provide a rich descriptive account of the phenomenon (secondary school readiness for pupils with speech and language needs). Smith et al., (2009) outline three philosophies on which IPA is based: hermeneutics, idiography and phenomenology.

> *'IPA is a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences. IPA is phenomenological in that it is concerned with exploring experience in its own terms'.* (Smith, et al., 2009, p. 1.).

Phenomenology describes experience as being constructed through interpretation. We create our own reality based upon the sense we make of our experiences. This enables the experience to be expressed in its own terms, rather than predefined category systems.

> 'IPA is also interpretive and informed by hermeneutics. It takes the premise that human beings are *"sense making creatures"'* (Smith, et al., 2009, p. 31.).

IPA attempts to understand a person's inner word whilst understanding that one can never truly know another person's experience and their own

understanding of that experience. The analytical process is described as a double hermeneutic as firstly the participants make meaning of their world, and, secondly, the researcher tries to decode that meaning to make sense of the participants' meaning making (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The researcher's sense making is described as 'second order' as they only have access to the participant's experience through the latter's account of it.

IPA is considered idiographic in that it is interested in what the experience for a given person is like and what sense this person makes of what is happening to them. The aim is to reveal something about the unique experience of each individual rather than generalise human experience.

IPA is about developing an understanding, in terms of trying to understand the experience of someone, and in terms of understanding the phenomena in question through analysis and illumination. The process requires the researcher to engage in an interpretative relationship with the transcript (Smith & Osborn, 2007). This begins with the detailed examination of each case, generating emergent and subordinate themes (summary themes). The homogeneity of the participants allowed the researcher to analyse not only individual experience, but also to make comparisons across the participants to explore emerging convergent and divergent themes arising from the narratives (superordinate

themes). The aim was to have a set of master themes that captured something of the essence of the phenomenon under investigation, both on an individual case basis, and across the homogenous group (see stages of IPA in appendix L).

3.7.2. Rational for using IPA

Other methods of data analysis were considered (see table 3.7.3) but it was felt that IPA was the most appropriate based upon the ontological and epistemological position on which the research is based and for the research questions.

3.7.3 Table to show the advantages and disadvantages of different methodologies

Methodology	Advantages	Disadvantages
IPA	Focus on personal meaning making in a particular context. Individually constructed, participants as experts on the situation. Inductive, growing meanings. Small sample size leads to richness of data. Systematic approach to data analysis.	Importance of language, ability to tell narratives. Onus on the researcher in interpreting, issues of power and bias. Not generalisable due to small sample size.
Grounded theory	Developing a theory grounded in the data from the research. Fosters creativity. Opportunity to conceptualise. Systematic approach to data analysis.	Typically interviews with 20-30 participants to "saturate" categories and detail a theory to develop an explanatory level account. Limited generalisability.
Discourse analysis	Lends itself to "what" and "how" type questions. Looks at real conversation. The researcher can arrive at a novel way of categorising issues. Smaller participants' accounts to analyse. Systematic approach to data analysis.	Looking beyond what people are saying to explore thinking and feeling. Focus on how verbal accounts are linguistically and socially constructed. Issues of power and bias. Aims to deconstruct and unpick, not generalisable due to small sample size.
Narrative	Individually constructed, aims to	Importance of language, ability of

analysis	hold data together in story-like form. We make sense of our lives through story. Explores social interaction of interviewer and interviewee in how story is told.	participant to tell narratives. Onus on researcher in interpreting the representation. Risk of providing only descriptive accounts rather than theorising. Not generalisable due to small sample size.

IPA has become an important methodology in psychological research and EP research (Heffereon and Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). The reasons for using IPA were as follows:

1. IPA is phenomenological. This was consistent with the research aims and research questions of exploring how individuals made sense of their lived experience. IPA was created for this purpose (Smith et al., (2009).
2. IPA is idiographic. This was consistent with the research focus on providing the individual experience and not seeking to make generalisations or theories. IPA was suited to the researcher's epistemological position of social constructivism. IPA provided a detailed insight into an individual's unique experience of a particular phenomenon (secondary school readiness).
3. IPA is interpretive. The research was to explore the lived experience of school for pupils with speech and language needs and explore the phenomena of secondary readiness from their perspective. IPA allows for in-depth analysis of the narratives provided by the participants and the meanings that the researcher draws from these.

There is a need in research to be sensitive to peoples' own understandings as seen from their own frame of reference, or socially constructed world.

4. Case study is valuable in its own terms, in evidencing the complex psychological processes that occur, for example, for a pupil during their transition from primary to secondary school. In IPA the researcher interprets the participants mental and emotional state from what is said.
5. It allows for research into several individuals that have shared a similar experience. For the purpose of this research, the phenomenon being explored was how six pupils with SLCN made sense of their own experiences of secondary readiness as they prepared to leave primary education.

3.7.4 Criticisms of using IPA

In choosing IPA, the criticisms and limitations were acknowledged and attempts were made to address these:

1. IPA is dependent on language. Interpretation is based upon the words and narratives used by the participant, which in turn as based upon their experience and understanding of it. This understanding is dependent upon many factors including context, culture, language

and life experience, family and environmental influences and cognitive ability. Whilst the researcher acknowledged that IPA with participants with SLCN might be a challenge, this in itself was not a justifiable reason to exclude this group from this type of research analysis. Interpreting meaning can go beyond the language used, to include the non-verbal responses in order to gain understanding of an experience (Ellison, 2017). Visual aids were used to negate potential language difficulties and act as a tool for the participants to support their oral language skills.

2. There is an assumption that an interviewee is the expert on his or her own experiences and can 'tell it like it is' and have understanding of themselves (Holloway & Jefferson, 2008. Pg. 298). This research took the ontological stance that every person is uniquely positioned as expert on their life and commonalities such as experiences and background did not mean that participants would derive the same meanings from similar events. IPA involved the interpreter in the process of double hermeneutics to attempt to 'tell it like it is' based upon interpretation that remained close to the data obtained.
3. In question and answer interviews, the interviewer sets the agenda, and in principle remains in control of what information is produced. The interviewer is imposing on the information in three ways: by

selecting the theme and topics, by ordering the questions and by wording questions in his or her language. (Holloway & Jefferson, 2008). Unlike some other qualitative methods, IPA privileges the interviewee to share their experience and talk about experiences of interest and of importance to them, leading the interview.

4. Current theories of language and communication stress that an account can only be a mediation of reality and there are no guarantees that different people will share the same meanings when it comes to making sense of an interviewee's account (Holloway & Jefferson, 2008). This was negated in the use of a reflexive diary in order to 'bracket' off potential researcher biases and allow for transparency in the acknowledgement that there will always be a degree of subconscious interference and bias in any form of interpretation. Additionally, analysis of the data was monitored by other Doctoral students to ensure it was a 'reasonable interpretation' of the data.
5. IPA is seen by some as being incongruent with cognition (Willig, 2008). The interpretive aspect of IPA is cognitively driven as are the analysis of themes and the organisation of the rich data produced. Interpretation of participant accounts and cross case analysis is organised into overarching themes which allow tentative suggestions

about why these experiences occur and convergent and divergent themes are explored across cases in exploration of the phenomenon.

6. Data collection of semi structured interviews means that language is the means by which participants attempt to communicate their experience to the researcher. It assumes language provides participants with the tools necessary to capture the experience.

> *'The words we choose to describe a particular experience always construct a particular version of that experience'.* (Willig, 2008, p. 67.).

As noted by Merrick (2011), with regard to including children with SLCN in research, there is a risk of omitting certain children unfairly. Language is the tool by which individuals make sense and connect in the world, and so to use data gathering that does not allow for the freedom of expression denies the participant their voice.

3.7.5 Procedures for Data Analysis

IPA analysis is dynamic and iterative, involving moving back and forth through a range of different ways of thinking about the data, rather than taking a linear approach. The research followed the prescriptive stages of analysis outlined by Smith et al., (2009) as it was considered to offer a flexible but robust approach. It followed certain processes such as moving from

descriptive, linguistic and contextual explorations, to interpretation, to the development of themes. These themes were clustered, checking back with the transcript as the primary source material. Each reading of the transcripts allowed for new insights and for the researcher to stay close to the data. Only after one transcript was fully explored did the researcher begin to explore the next, being mindful to bracket what they had discovered and treat each participant as a unique individual. With the completion of analysing all of the transcripts, the researcher considered a wider, shared experience across the research participants and considered what are termed 'superordinate themes', checking back with each of the transcripts (Smith et al., 2009). See appendix L for a detailed description of each of the stages which is outlined in the table below:

3.7.6. Stages of the IPA Process (Based on Smith et al., 2009)

Stage 1 Transcription and initial listening and reading	•The audio-recorded interview was listened to alongside the reading of the transcript.
Stage 2 Initial notes	•Initial notes were made exploring first descriptive and then linguistic and conceptual aspects of the interview as it was read and heard several times.
Stage 3 Emergent themes	•The transcript and initial notes were explored again and additional comments were added identifying emergent themes.
Stage 4 Subordinate themes	•The emergent themes were explored for connections in order to develop subordinate themes on further reviewing the data.
Stage 5 Repeat of stages 1-4 for all participants	•Stages 1-4 were repeated with all six participants.
Stage 6 Superordinate themes	•All six interviews were looked at for connections in order to develop superordinate themes across any of the interviews.
Stage 7 Overarching themes	•Overarching themes were created from the superordinate themes.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

An ethical attitude as advocated by Josselson, (2008) involves consideration as to how best to honour and protect those who participate in a study whilst maintaining standards. Those people who agree to talk to us about their lives become our "participants". The researcher has a dual role of relationship with the participant, and is in a professionally responsible role to the research community.

> *'Interpersonal ethics demand responsibility to the dignity, privacy and well-being of those being studied, and these often conflict with the scholarly obligation to accuracy, authenticity and interpretation'* Josselson, (2008, p. 538.).

Before the research was undertaken, a research protocol and application for ethical approval was submitted to the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust's Research Ethics Committee, to whom the University of Essex have delegated responsibility for the ethical permission process. Full ethical approval was granted (see appendix M). Ethical approval was also sought from the Principle Educational Psychologist of the Local Authority in which the researcher works, who in turn sought advice from personnel within the Information Governance Operations team to ensure that issues such as consent, anonymity and data subject rights were adhered to in line with the law.

This research adhered to the Code of Ethics (2018) of the British Psychological Society, of which the researcher is a member. These are a set of guidelines for conducting psychological research and highlight that ethical principles should pervade all professional activity.

> *'Behaving ethically requires ethical awareness – noticing what ethical issues are raised by a course of action makes it more likely that ethical practice will follow'. (BPS, 2018, p.2.).*

This code is based on four ethical principles, which constitute the main domains of responsibility within which ethical issues are considered. These are: respect, competence, responsibility and integrity. These four areas and associated standards are outlined below with regard to the current research.

3.8.1. BPS Ethical Principle One: Respect

Respect for the dignity of people is one of the most fundamental and universal ethical principles and provides the philosophical foundation for many of the other ethical principles. In applying these values, psychologists should consider: privacy and confidentiality; respect; communities and shared values within them; impact on the broader environment, issues of power, consent, self-determination, and the

importance of compassionate care, including empathy, sympathy, generosity, openness, distress tolerance, commitment and courage.

The Data Protection Act (1998) states that all data gathered must remain anonymous and confidential. The Local Authority data protection policy was followed. The audio files were deleted from the voice recorder following upload to a password protected computer. The electronic data was kept for one year on a secure memory stick before being fully deleted and paper documents shredded. All completed consent forms were stored in a secure, lockable place, which only the researcher had access to. Participants, parents and schools were informed of the secure systems for storing and disposal of data. Information was presented in such a way as to preserve anonymity through the use of pseudonyms. Parents and participants were informed on the information sheets, that the researcher would only breach confidentiality if the participant made a disclosure that raised safeguarding concerns, of which participants were reminded at the time of the interview. The Local Authority Child Protection Procedures were adhered to, including presentation of the researcher's Disclosure and Criminal Barring enhanced certificate and Local Authority identification badge at each of the host schools.

Informed consent was sought before interviews were conducted and was gained by the parents and participants. This included an explanation of the overall purpose of the investigation, the main features of the design as well as risks and benefits from participation. The researcher aimed to be transparent about the research aims, the procedure for participation and how the findings would be disseminated. Schools and parents were invited to contact the researcher to seek further information if required. Josselson, (2008, pg. 540) stated that informed consent is "oxymoronic" in narrative research as we are unable to fully inform a participant at the outset about what he or she is consenting to, since much of what will take place is unforeseeable. Merrick (2011) suggested that children need to try something before forming an opinion. The term 'assent' is used when children are willing to participate in research even though they may not fully understand its purpose (Merrick, 2011). The consent form gave a list of statements that participants and parents were consenting to and recorded the date, name and signature of both the participant and the parent given that participants were less than sixteen years of age. Before each interview, it was ensured that the participant was aware of the purpose of the interview and had access to their additional visual support. They were reminded that they could end the interview or request a break at any time.

The researcher respected individual, cultural and role differences, for example by attempting to allow the participants to lead the interview.

3.8.2. BPS Ethical Principle Two: Competence

Competence refers to the ability of the psychologist to provide specialist knowledge, training, skills and experience to a requisite professional standard (BPS, 2018). Supervision and self-reflexivity were used to ensure that the research was conducted competently. The researcher had access to individual and group research supervision to consult over any potential ethical issues. Throughout the planning, implementation, analysis and write up stages of the research, individual research supervision was accessed. Robson (2002) found that both individual and group research supervision have helped researchers to become more reflective, to debrief and to raise awareness of potential biases. A reflexive journal (appendix N) allowed the researcher to think about their own reactions to the research and make possible certain insights and understandings. The researcher monitored their own performance and additional supervision would have been accessed to address any underlying concerns, which could have impacted upon professional competence.

3.8.3. BPS Ethical Principle Three: Responsibility

Psychologists enjoy professional autonomy as a result of their acknowledged expertise, and responsibility is an essential part of autonomy. Psychologists must accept appropriate responsibility for what is within their power, control or management including the avoidance of harm. Throughout the interviews, the researcher remained mindful of potential risks or harm. The participants were a vulnerable group and care was taken to make participants feel at ease and ensure that they had access to materials to help them engage in the interview process. They were told that they did not have to answer a question. The researcher made clear to participants that engagement in the interview was a single event and no further follow up visits would be conducted unless the nature of the interview required a follow up visit to ensure the wellbeing of the participant. A debriefing statement was read to participants (see appendix K). The debriefing process employed included asking participants for feedback from the interview, invited and addressed any questions from the participants and explored whether they required any further support from the researcher or a member of staff at that time. The researcher ensured that adults from the setting where the interview took place were available immediately after the interview, should this be required by the participant.

In general, participants will only tell researchers what they want to tell and control what to share. Children have a particular deference to adult authority and eagerness to please which makes them vulnerable to controlling influences (Merrick, 2011). The experience of this group of pupils was the tenet of this research and their emotional and psychological wellbeing, physical health, dignity and personal values and beliefs were considered throughout. It was important to provide a place where the participants felt safe to talk about life experiences that were going to be recorded for research purposes. The potential emotional impact of the interview was considered as any interview may have unintended negative and positive consequences for participants. Experiencing painful feelings in an interview, while potentially distressing, may also be a sign of comfort in the interviewer relationship promoting self-reflection for the interviewee (Josselson, 2008).

3.8.4. BPS Ethical Principle Four: Integrity

Acting with integrity includes being honest, truthful, accurate and consistent in one's actions, words, decisions, methods and outcomes (BPS, 2018).

The researcher maintained professional conduct throughout the research process. The information letters sent out to settings, parents and participants accurately outlined the professional and academic affiliations and qualifications of the researcher. The researcher ensured that the interviews were only undertaken with participants who were not known to the researcher and in schools where the researcher had no professional involvement. Prior to the interviews, contact with participants was only made through the settings they attended. Participants were informed that should they need a follow up visit then this would be arranged through the setting. The researcher provided, on the information form, a university contact number should the participants, their parents or associated settings have any questions or concerns that they wished to raise about the research and the researcher.

Brinkmann & Kvale (2017) highlighted the importance of the integrity of the interviewer as the main instrument for obtaining knowledge. The art and the skill of the interviewer is to elicit as much information from the participants about their experience without offering interpretations or imposing one's own relevancies which would destroy the interviewee's meaning frame (Holloway & Jefferson, 2008). Any interview situation creates power issues between researcher and participant, in that the

researcher has ultimate control of the situation; the researcher initiated the situation, determined the topic, posed questions and decided what answers to follow. It was important to acknowledge the potential difference in terms of age, gender, race etc. between the researcher and participants and the impact this may have had on participants' responses. Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) highlighted the need for the researcher to avoid being associated with the class teacher to minimise positions of power. It was also noted that children may have ways of communicating dissent, such as switching the topic of the conversation, looking away or silence (Merrick, 2011).

Integrity was required by the researcher during the analysis of the participants' experience. It was the researcher's responsibility to report what the text said to them as there was no further involvement of the participant in the interpretation phase. Prior to analysing the data, the researcher recorded their own powerful recollections of the interview experience through a reflexive journal which helped to bracket or compartmentalise these during analysis of the data. This type of reflexive thinking is vital to ensuring the integrity of the research, acting as a safeguard in the process of fair interpretation and reporting.

3.9. Validity and Reliability of the Research

Qualitative research uses words rather than numbers in its analyses and focuses on understanding human action through interpretation rather than prediction and control (Kim, 2015). Whilst acknowledging the importance of validity and reliability in scientific research, these constructs do not fit with the epistemology or research design of this research. Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Robson, 2002) discuss the value of qualitative research findings using concepts such as *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability.* They suggest that reliability pertains to the consistency and trustworthiness of research findings.

3.9.1. Reliability: Credibility and Trustworthiness

Robson (2002) stated that credibility is the extent to which a study has been carried out in a way that can be considered by other researchers as respectable, sensitive and appropriate. Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) stated the importance of transparency of procedures via which the conclusions are made. Findings should be as accurate and representative as possible. Reliability in flexible methods involves being thorough, careful and honest in carrying out the research, and being able to demonstrate this. To demonstrate the credibility and trustworthiness of this research, there is a data trail from transcript to emergent themes, subordinate themes and cross case analysis to superordinate

and overarching themes (see table 3.9.3). The full transcription of all six interviews is also available digitally on request.

3.9.2. Validity

Validity is not just about methods used, but moral integrity and quality control throughout the stages of knowledge production. It is about,

> *'The extent to which our observations indeed reflect the phenomena or variables of interest to us' (*Pervin, 1984, cited in Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

One important aspect of this is the flexible and adaptive nature of the research, such as piloting questions to ensure that they captured the phenomenon of interest. The aim of this research was to produce an in-depth examination of the phenomenon, rather than generating a theory to be generalised to the whole population. As qualitative studies do not have standardised evaluation criteria, the researcher used Yardley's (2007) principles for validity as, advocated by Smith et al., (2009), for evaluating the quality of IPA research. Yardley (2017) considered validity as being broken down into four components: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, coherence and transparency, and impact and importance. These are outlined below in relation to the current research. Yardley (2017) explained that these criteria for validating qualitative

research are intended to be extremely flexible and not prescribe a particular approach, but to help researchers to reflect on and justify the methods used.

(i) Sensitivity to context

> *'Qualitative analysis must, crucially, be able to show sensitivity to the data – for example, by not simply imposing pre-conceived categories on the data but carefully considering the meanings generated by the participants' (Yardley, 2017, p. 295.).*

Yardley (2007) highlighted the importance of establishing what gaps there are in pre-existing research theory and literature to formulate research questions that bring something new to the field of study. The research questions and methodology in this study derived from a thorough exploration of the existing literature and theory concerning secondary school readiness for perceived vulnerable groups such as those with SLCN. Sensitivity to content is reflected in the data itself and the nature of the voice given to each of the participants to reflect their lived experience of transition and readiness. The use of IPA as a methodology allowed sensitivity to context by analysing the data from the perspective of the participant and use of verbatim extracts of the interviews to highlight the points being made, to ensure it was the participant's' voice being heard. Sensitivity to context also pertains to the relationship between the researcher and participant. The use of reflexivity and being able to 'bracket'

one's preconceptions, thoughts and feelings was an important aspect of this (see section 3.9).

(ii) Commitment and rigour

> *'Commitment and rigor can be demonstrated by in-depth engagement with the topic, including thorough data collection, displaying expertise and skills in the methods employed, and undertaking a detailed, in-depth analysis'. (Yardley, 2017, pp 295-296.).*

Commitment was demonstrated by the degree of engagement on the part of the researcher, for example, in the data collection phase by conducting and transcribing semi-structured interviews in order to generate rich accounts of the phenomenon under investigation. The analysis of this data using IPA highlights the commitment on the part of the researcher as this required immersion into the data in order to produce the depth of understanding and interpretation required. Rigour was demonstrated in the literature review, carried out systematically, to ensure the piece of research was adding something new to the field of enquiry. Rigour was applied in the selection of the participants, in keeping with the homogeneity criterion deemed necessary for the validity of IPA studies according to Smith et al., (2009). Rigour was also ensured at the data collection stage through the use of a semi-structured interview, which facilitated participants to talk in

depth about their experiences, in order to allow detail to emerge. In interview situations a degree of co-construction of data occurs and it was important that the researcher's own value judgments did not impact upon those of the participants. This was managed by having insight into the possible co-authoring and the bracketing off of the researcher's own experiences through the use of a self-reflexive diary. Objectivity is an expression of fidelity to the phenomena under investigation. Smith et al., (2009) highlight the importance of reflexive objectivity and one's own contribution to the production of knowledge. Rigour was also sought during the data analysis stage by the researcher seeking feedback through anonymised excerpts of transcripts and the associated notes and themes with fellow EPs. The aim was not to seek agreement, but to ensure the themes generated were reasonable interpretations based upon the data provided. Any concerns raised by colleagues were discussed.

(iii) Coherence and transparency

> *'Transparency means that the reader should be able to see clearly how the interpretation was derived from the data' (Yardley, 2017, p. 296.).*

Transparency and coherence were ensured throughout the recruitment of participants, data collection, analysis and discussion of this research through clear structures and processes being set out and adhered to.

Transparency was also made clear through the data trail at each stage of the analysis for each individual participant and themes generated were checked back with the original data for each participant at each stage of analysis. Only when this was complete was an attempt made to explore any overarching themes or superordinate themes across the participants. Examples of the analysis at each stage are included in table 3.9.3 below to demonstrate coherence and transparency.

Yardley (2007) stated that the researcher's reflexivity throughout the research is paramount to transparency and an important part of qualitative methodology is epistemological reflexivity (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). Qualitative research relies on the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the data and so it was imperative that the researcher was aware of their presumptions, biases and interpretations, to ensure the data presented was a near representation of the participants' lived experience. No frame is ever neutral but by making notes after interview, to reflect upon impressions of the interaction, this can be 'bracketed' to allow immersion in the participant experience (e.g. Holloway & Jefferson, 2008). This was achieved through a reflexive journal (see appendix N for an extract from this). Phenomenological approaches stress the importance

of reflexivity. That is, an awareness on the part of the researcher that they have an impact upon the research process.

(iiii) Impact and importance

> '*Importance refers to the requirement for all research to generate knowledge that is useful – whether in terms of practical utility, generating hypotheses, or even changing how we think about the world'. (Yardley, 2017, p. 296.).*

The impact and importance of this research was considered in terms of promoting greater understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (secondary readiness) and promoting ways of gathering the views of pupils with SLCN. The research aims and questions were born out of perceived gaps in the existing literature. As Robson (2002) asserts, research should provide insight into phenomena that is of local and national importance and be in some sense influential or effective if it is to be worthwhile. The researcher was aware that a small-scale study using individual stories had limitations in terms of generalisation but that, nevertheless, we could learn from it. The merit of this sample size was that individual accounts of the phenomenon would not be lost, so that a rich picture would emerge of the lived experience of a specific group of pupils' perceptions of secondary school readiness rather than just that of disparate individuals. The research

aimed to move from exploration of separate phenomena from each participant's own unique experience, to exploring convergent and divergent themes between participants to further our understanding and practice.

3.9.3. Table of data trail for the data analysis

Data Analysis Stage	**Appendix Content**	**Appendix**
Stages 1-3: reading, initial notes and emergent themes	An interview transcript excerpt (Participant 1, Keith) with initial notes and emergent themes	X
Stage 4: Subordinate themes	Subordinate themes for P1 (Keith) with reference to the corresponding emergent themes, excerpts from transcript and initial notes	R
Stage 5: repeat stages 1-4 for all 6 participants	Subordinate themes for P2 (Mollie) with reference to the corresponding emergent themes, excerpts from transcript and initial notes	S
	Subordinate themes for P3 (Alice) with reference to the corresponding emergent themes, excerpts from transcript and initial notes	T
	Subordinate themes for P4 (Ellie) with reference to the corresponding emergent themes, excerpts from transcript and initial notes	U
	Subordinate themes for P5 (Cassie) with reference to the corresponding emergent themes, excerpts from transcript and initial notes	V
	Subordinate themes for P6 (Harry) with reference to the corresponding emergent themes, excerpts from transcript and initial notes	W
Stage 6-7: Superordinate and overarching themes	Overview of the data trail for the four overarching themes	O
	Overarching and Superordinate Themes with extracts	P
	Overview of the data trail for superordinate	Q

	themes	

3.10. Summary

This chapter has provided a brief outline of the epistemological and ontological position adopted for this research and put into context the choice of research design and research questions. It has explained the method of data collection, including the recruitment of participants and the method of data analysis that was used. It has highlighted the use of IPA as an appropriate methodology and considered the benefits and limitations of such an approach. Ethical implications and the reliability and validity of this research were also explored. The aim of this research was twofold. Firstly, to be emancipatory by privileging the stories told by the participants as a result of their lived experience, thus having impact and importance at an individual at a personal level. Secondly, to have an impact and be of importance to those working with such pupils, be it settings, Educational Psychologists or other professionals. The findings of this research are reported in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

4.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter outlines the study's findings in answer to the following research questions:

- RQ1: What sense do pupils with SLCN make of their experience of primary school?
- RQ2: What sense do pupils with SLCN make of their experience of secondary school following their induction days?
- RQ3: What are the pupils' perceptions of secondary school readiness?

The aim of this chapter is to provide an organised, detailed, plausible and transparent account of the meaning of the data (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). In keeping with IPA, this chapter provides an overview of the analysis by describing the big picture or overarching themes and corresponding superordinate themes that emerged during cross case analysis. Analysis explores the particular meaning of the experience and significance to the individual, followed by an attempt to make sense and offer an interpretive account of the material, grounded in the data. To protect anonymity, pseudonyms were given to each participant, and to any names referred to in the interview including primary and secondary schools. Verbatim quotations

were used to illustrate the findings; details are provided regarding which participant (P1-6) the quotes originate from and where in the transcript they can be found (e.g. 20P1 is the 20th utterance of Participant One). This allows the data to be traced through the analysis from initial notes on the transcripts, through clustering and thematic development, into the final structure of themes. The chapter concludes by drawing the findings together through cross case analysis to consider the phenomenon under investigation.

4.2. Overview of the Overarching and Superordinate Themes

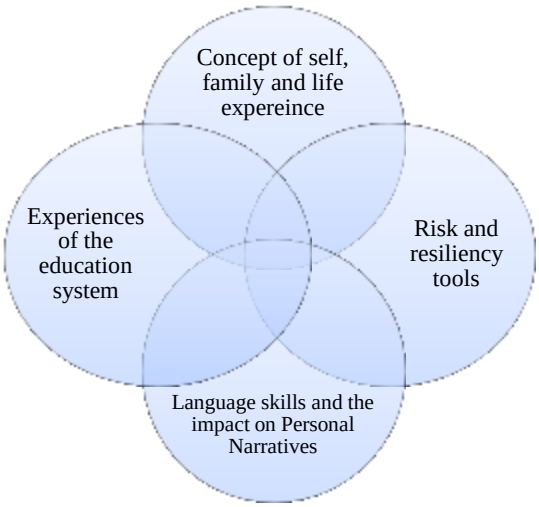
Individual case analysis generated 207 emergent themes in total ranging from 26 to 43 themes per participant which were clustered into 21 subordinate themes (see appendix O). Through analysis of the subordinate themes across the six participants, 9 superordinate themes emerged. The superordinate themes aimed to hold the complexity of the findings, but supported psychological formulation into four overarching themes (see table 4.2.1. below). Organisation of the data attempted to give meaning by reflecting the individual experience whilst attempting to encapsulate this across the group to assist with understanding of the phenomena. As Smith et al. state (2009) organising themes in more than one way can be creative and push the analysis to a higher level. Some emergent themes were felt to be more dominant, not necessarily in terms of the quantity of data, but in terms of the strength of

expression and so warranted becoming a subordinate theme for that participant. For example, the emergent theme of friendships would fit under the subordinate theme of relationships, but for some pupils (such as Ellie) the strength of feeling and complex nature of the topic warranted a subordinate theme in its own right. Similarly, some subordinate themes could have been placed into more than one superordinate theme and the superordinate themes that emerged were meaningful to more than one overarching theme. This highlights the complexity of human experience and the interlinking of different concepts across themes as demonstrated through table 4.2.1 and diagram 4.2.2.

4.2.1: Table of Overarching theme with description of corresponding Superordinate themes

Concept of Self, Family and Life Experience	• **Concept of Self** refers to the participant's view of who they are, their identity and what is important to them. • **World View/Personal constructs** refers to how participants view and make sense of the world around them and is reflected in the language that they use. • **Attachment** refers to the participant's view of who they are in relation to others. Their sense of belonging to a particular community.
Risk, Resiliency and Coping tools	• **Emotional Intelligence, Vulnerability and Resilience** refers to the participant's ability to express and manage their emotions, perceived vulnerabilities and how they address these. • **Defence Mechanisms** refers to the participant's ability to protect themselves from perceived threat and cope with demands placed upon them. This includes perceptions of power and control.
Language skills and the impact on Personal Narratives	• **Impact of Language on expressing views** refers to how motivation and emotions impact upon how participants express themselves and how having language needs impacts upon how they perceive their interactions with others and interpretation of what is said to them. • **Sharing the Lived Experience** refers to how the participants choose to share their lived experience through words, actions, sounds and silence. It also reflects how they base their understanding on the direct experiences they have.
Experiences of the Education System	• **School as a System** refers to the building blocks of the school experience including the building itself, what life at school looks like and the learning and social aspect of school life. • **School as a Journey** refers to the participant's perception of school based upon their experiences, comparisons of primary and secondary schools and judgements about these. Feelings of readiness for secondary school and seeing this as part of a journey of growth and new experiences.

4.2.2: Diagram to show the inter-relationship between themes



4.3. Overarching Theme: Concept of Self, Family and Life Experience

This theme captures how participants saw themselves, the essence of what made them unique and how they positioned themselves in relation to family and others. It also encompasses how the individual's life experiences have impacted upon their thoughts, beliefs and feelings about the world.

4.3.1 Keith's Experiences

Keith identified himself as being unique and associated with this was him asserting himself as an expert on certain topics, such as food, returning to this when he critiqued the school dinners at the two schools:

> *I I have we had spaghetti bolognese and that spaghetti bolognese is better than this one (hand to mouth whispers) not joking. (454P1)*

The concept of control and feeling empowered in Keith's world emerged as he spoke about his relationship with his father:

> *Yeah. Yeah, My dad didn't know how to err connect it to the X-box but I did it so I just saw the symbol onto the X-box and to the (pause) controller so that worked. (62P1)*

This view of the world was also communicated in the importance of ownership of objects, which emerged a number of times:

> *Oh yeah at home I have all the Thunderbirds and the Tracey Island. (84P1)*

Keith had clear criteria about who he considered a friend, and it was these pupils he trusted to share intimate details of his life, such as the death of his dog. He revisited friendships when talking about the residential trip and the reliance he had on his friend:

> *Erm that, well we were blindfolded and we had to erm I didn't know where I was going and I was like "aaaw help, where's John" (laughs) and I eventually got to him I was like "ah" (laughs).(138P1)*

Keith's desire to present as unique and impress may have reflected a fear of being forgotten or unnoticed by those around him, suggesting it is important what others think. Presenting himself as the expert on certain topics may have been to compensate for his being a novice of the secondary school experience. Keith's need for ownership may be interpreted as maintaining a sense of control and the need for some kind of belonging, such as feeling contained in the world of Tracey Island and what this might signify to him about

relationships. Keith's portrayal of the father and son relationship suggested this was valued. His concept of friendship was based on trust and Keith gave some indication of his reliance on friendships at difficult times. His experience of overcoming obstacles and seeking out the help when he needed it may have contributed to his feelings about secondary school. The meaning behind the secondary school bolognese being better may reflect his feelings about readiness, seeing this as a natural progression to move on to something superior.

4.3.2 Mollie's Experiences

Mollie expressed a clear understanding of who she was, which went beyond school:

> *Yeah. My favourite colour is pink because it's a light colour. I want to be a scientist when I leave school. (36P2)*

There appeared to be a blurring of reality and fantasy at times for Mollie such as when thinking about why she wanted to be a scientist:

> *Erm make things alive and make potions. (40P2)*

Mollie frequently positioned herself in the role of "teacher" for example when talking about fictional characters and books she had read, such as when talking about King Kong:

> *Yeah you don't know what happen to him? (208P2)*

Her sense of fun emerged as Mollie described how she enjoyed teasing the children, her teacher at school and her grandfather at home:

Erm. Play in the garden and watch err and watch TV and (pause) erm and tease my Granddad. (52P2)

The importance of ownership was communicated by Mollie a number of times and this was reflected by another recurrent theme of being "special" as Mollie spoke about school life. For example, having a computer of her own at school and one to one support:

I like to play games with my friend err err my one to one and me. (100P2)

Mollie conveyed a strong sense of belonging to her current school saying that she had been there "a long time". The importance of things belonging to Mollie seemed to reflect her need to feel that she belonged, as communicated in her sadness at leaving the current school community:

Yeah. I'm going to miss them. (426P2)

The concept of friendship was referred to a number of times both in terms of current and future friends. It appeared bittersweet as she spoke of losing friends as well as her readiness to make new friends:

Erm ready to meet new friends. (380P2)

There appeared a contrast between her expressing readiness to face challenges in her world such as making new friends and a protective fantasy world. This

seemed to reflect a contradictory state of being a young child faced with entering a grown up world where independence was expected.

4.3.3 Alice's Experiences

Alice shared her experience of horse riding with her mum and complained that her horse was too slow and she tried to make it go faster. This preoccupation with pace was referred to when talking about how she was treated by family members.

> *Erm (long pause) my mum, my sister, Lucy always rush me, at dinner time. (130P3)*
> *Yeah Lucy always rush me and I don't like it. My mum always not rush me. (138P3)*

The prevailing theme was Alice's identity as a prankster, for example, when talking about how she made her friends happy:

> *(pause) Make make jokes. (70P3)*

The concept of friendship appeared important to Alice and was referred to when she spoke about school:

> *And (tapping table) (GULP) (pause) and (tapping table) and I got friends Nina, Nadia, Tricia, Stacey. (32P3)*

Alice showed a sense of belonging which she associated with the people in that context:

Erm I do erm English with Mr Pledge, erm he's a great teacher (pause) and mm (gulp) and erm tt they some Nina and Stacey in this class, my class.(102P3)

The use of names appeared to signify importance to Alice. For example, she named her horse, important people in her life and her current and next school. Conversely, Alice did not use names when these were deemed unimportant, such as, her sister going to a 'different school' and when talking about where her friends were going to secondary school:

No them going, most friends Gilroy Secondary, somewhere like that. (50P3)

There appeared to be a complex dynamic between Alice and her friends. Alice distinguished between the friends at her current and new school, switching between calling her new and old friends her 'best' friends suggesting this was dependent on her need. Her interactions with others may have been reflective of how she felt about herself, taking on a dominant persona to control relationships, thus maintaining a level of self-esteem. Attempts at control over aspects of her life were reflected in her observation that her sister rushed her, whilst she attempted to control the pace of her horse.

4.3.4 Ellie's Experiences

The concept of friendship was the predominant theme in Ellie's account. She spoke about how she met her best friend on her first day of school:

> *Yes when I first came here erm Alice came up to me gave me a hug in the office cos I was crying. (96P4)*

As the conversation progressed, Ellie referred to 'other best friends' suggesting that this was not an exclusive position:

> *Yeah and I've got three best friends which is Alice, Nadia who is in my class and Lilith who's got, who's at my old school and we're going to the same secondary school.(52P4)*

Ellie said that playing with her friends was the most important aspect of school:

> *Err tt we go out and get some food err (pause) and sometimes we play mums and dads which is with Nina and Stacey and one of them plays as a dog and a pussy cat and me and Alice like to play as twin sisters. (66P4)*

There appears to be a lot of pretending going on which may show how Ellie copes with the demands of the wider world by rehearsing scenarios through role play with friends. Ellie spoke about her brothers' experience at her new school:

> *And two of my brothers went there, well one of them now kind of still going there but he's home schooled because they stopped their help in Year 10.(132P4)*

Having a history with others seemed important as she described the induction to secondary school:

> *It was nice (pause) err all of my old friends were there and I got to be in the same tutor group as my best friend called Ophelia. (134P4)*

Ellie made reference to being 'special', for example Year Sevens having their own playground and that she had been assigned an older 'buddy' at secondary school:

> *Erm I have friends that are going to Gilroy school. Err I know people that are from Gilroy school (pause) which are big because I'm having a buddy there. (170P4)*

Interpretation of her account showed how Ellie viewed her worlds as 'old' and 'new'. Ellie's concept of best friend was based upon her current situation and need, making this fluid. Her friendships seemed to reflect family life and the dynamics and support systems within this. Although Ellie and her friends played 'mums and dads' no-one assumed the role of parents and this is reflected in the lack of conversation about her own parents. She referred to her brothers' school experiences and this may have influenced her ideas about the school.

4.3.5 Cassie's Experiences

Cassie positioned her identity within the school community and experiences. Cassie conveyed a sense that she was in a special position being in Year Six and gave examples of barbeques and parties occurring that week:

> *I Know. It's just when Year 6 are leaving. (32P5)*

The importance of school clubs to Cassie indicated how school was part of her social life and she described the fun bit of school as being with her friends. Cassie said the best aspect of school was playing outside and school appeared to be a place where she experienced freedom:

> *We go anywhere. (102P5)*

Family was a recurrent theme. Cassie described the moment that her mum received a letter from her new school changing the arrangements for Cassie:

> *Like Miss Howard in our um changing class. My mum got a letter (raised voice) to say I'm not in Row class I'm in like a different class (upset) and I need to walk, then I can stay there for a bit longer for clubs. (270P5)*

Cassie presented as having a strong sense of belonging to her current school and this contrasted with the concept of being excluded elsewhere, which also featured heavily:

> *This is so silly (heightened emotion) leaving one person out of class assembly. (166P5)*

Cassie shared her own experience of feeling excluded through her new school changing the class that she was joining. This generated a strong emotional reaction from Cassie:

> *It's like there be nine or seven. There is nine in Row class and now they can't fit me in (upset). (252P5)*

Cassie demonstrated a sense of pride in being part of her current school and this appeared to provide her with opportunities to explore the wider world. Her

desire to join clubs suggested it was the social aspect of school that she valued. Cassie took pleasure in Year Six privileges and perhaps saw this as a rite of passage. However, she was able to advocate strongly on behalf of another Year Six pupil she perceived as being unfairly excluded. Cassie appeared bewildered and distressed by the information that she was no longer in a particular class and her strong sense of belonging may well have made this even more distressing.

4.3.6 Harry's Experiences

For Harry, the dominant theme was experiences and identity as a sportsman:

> *Running I'm not that fast and swimming I'm really good at swimming. (10P6)*

Harry judged himself in black and white terms as to whether he was good or bad at something. This was not just with regard to sports, but learning and behaviour in school:

> *And then I was good in there, but then I went "woowoowoo" (twirling hand above head like a propeller) and I was a tiny bit bad in Year four. (116P6)*

Harry described himself as an active person with a love of climbing and being outdoors. When asked how his friends would describe him he said:

> *He, he sometimes he plays rough, sometimes he doesn't play rough. (26p6)*

Harry said that only one pupil would be going to his new school from his current school, but did not seem concerned by this as he had already made new friends:

> *I made a lot of friends already. (292P6)*
> *That's a lot lot of friends. (294P6)*

Harry's sense of achievement and expertise was through his sports. Harry conveyed a sense of belonging to his current school, whilst also expressing some excitement about being part of the secondary school, in relation to joining sports clubs. There was little reference to his family although Harry said that he was tired on Mondays which may suggest that he had a busy weekend and perhaps school was seen as an intrusion into his own pursuits. It may also have reflected some underlying anxiety about returning to school.

4.3.7. Cross Case Analysis: Concept of Self, Family and Life Experience

The first part of the interview schedule was 'tell me about you' and so it is unsurprising that an overarching theme became: Concept of Self, Family and Life Experience. The participants' sense of identity runs through their accounts with some commonalities such as being an animal lover being referred to by four of the six participants. An interesting concept that emerged strongly from four of the participants was how they saw themselves as special or unique in some way. This was presented in a number of ways, for example,

their unique attributes as a person, or the privileges available to those leaving primary or entering secondary school. For example:

> *Err (long pause) the Year Seven playground is kind of small (pause) and Year Sevens have assembly that's different to other years. That we have our own assembly Year Sevens. (236P4)*

In spite of having language needs, all six participants had opinions about a range of things that they were keen to share and 'wanting to be known' was a strong underlying theme across all six participants. It suggested that participants valued the time to talk about themselves, and perhaps this was not as widely available in school as was needed. Another interesting aspect was the assumption that their world and experiences were known to others and required little explanation. Although parents and family were referred to in some cases when talking about life outside of school, this was not a predominant theme. A strong theme that emerged across all six participants was a sense of belonging, both to their current and their future school and the use of "we" and "they" and names emphasised their attachment to people and places:

> *(Laughs) Yeah I thought everyone was starting in Year 3 and Alice was tt she didn't have any friends either there so then we started to be best friends and we were we were in the same class together. (120P4)*

Conversely, feelings of exclusion and not belonging contributed to feelings of distress:

Then I need a class there be eleven people in my new class. (254P5)

A strong theme that emerged across all six transcripts was that of friendship, both in terms of friendships at the current school and new and old friends they would be meeting at their next school:

Playing with my….making new friends. (334P5)

Friendships had not been a direct research question and the schedule did not have questions about relationships in it. This highlights how the phenomenological principles were upheld by allowing participants to discuss the experiences that they thought were relevant in relation to the questions being asked and guiding research questions.

4.4. Overarching Theme: Risk, Resiliency and Coping tools

This theme captures how participants coped with their life experiences such as health issues, social isolation, and disengagement. It also described the resources the individuals seemed to use to cope in the face of adversity such as positive thinking, support systems and avoidance.

4.4.1 Keith's Experiences

Keith showed a propensity to talk about and share difficult emotions, for example, the death of his dog and the first day at his current school:

Erm well I was but I was like really afraid and worried. (334P1)

In contrast, Keith appeared to find managing success far more difficult, for example, when his art work was praised by a secondary school teacher:

I know I was like "really?" (laughs). (188P1)

Keith communicated vulnerability in a number of ways, such as sharing intimate detail of the loss of his dog, joining the English education system in Year Three and being blindfolded on the Year Six residential trip. Keith used humour as a coping mechanism for talking about these difficult topics:

Mm and and when when I came back to England and to this school I was like "ooh this is different" (laughs) erm and I didn't know how to spell or do anything or write.(312P1)

Keith expressed control in terms of withholding and sharing information with others, such as withholding how the games controller worked to his dad and sharing his dog dying with those he perceived as close friends. Keith described experiences where he felt he had no control, such as finding the grave of his dog. Familiarity seemed to support Keith, for example, he felt worried and afraid until he became familiar with his current school:

Erm mm until I got used to this school. (336P1)

Keith said that he would 'get used to' secondary school and showed a desire to know the 'nuts and bolts' of how things worked. For example, knowing how the game controller worked and having a map to navigate the new school

building. Keith's account demonstrated resilience in managing difficult emotions and he had developed a number of coping tools including the use of humour and learning how things worked in order to mask feelings of insecurity. His difficulty accepting compliments highlighted his lack of belief in himself. Having a sense of control seemed important to Keith and he conveyed the notion of literally being 'in the dark' not only when blindfolded, but for other life experiences such as having to adjust to a new education system. It is perhaps these life experiences that supported Keith to embrace new experiences as he felt he would "get used to" them. This appeared to be his containing mantra.

4.4.2 Mollie's Experiences

Mollie communicated a range of emotions including pride, happiness and sadness. Mollie sought comfort in familiarity and being part of the school community:

> *I've been in here a long time. (130P2)*

Her need to belong also generated feelings of loss, for example, towards leaving her current school and the end of her guitar lessons:

> *Yeah on guitar lessons I was very good. I go there every Tuesday err it's my last day of it. (86P2)*

Mollie expressed conflicting feelings of shyness, with wanting to meet new people at secondary school. She conveyed a sense of helplessness, needing other children and adults to look after her at school. This contradicts with her presentation of the self as a teacher in areas that she felt secure with:

> *Erm (pause). All the children would look after me. (272P2)*

Mollie appeared to have developed a number of defence mechanisms to avoid talking about some things, often saying "I can't remember", whilst being able to recount other topics at length.

> *Since I went to nursery because I had cancer when I was four and can't remember. (134P2)*

Mollie seemed to use structure as a coping tool and the concept of routine appeared frequently in her account, for example:

> *My favourite days of the week are Fridays as looking forward to a day off and Sundays because I go to see my grandparents. (48P2)*

Mollie communicated dissonance between herself as the teacher and being part of her current school community, with her vulnerabilities, feelings of loss and reliance upon others to navigate new experiences.

4.4.3 Alice's Experiences

Alice expressed a range of emotions when talking about her school experiences including happy, sad, scared, nervous and excited. There were

occasions when Alice was either unwilling or unable to talk about emotions, for example, when asked about her first day at her current school:

> *Err gulp mmm mmm (shook head) don't know. (158P3)*

The most prominent theme to emanate from Alice was a desire for power and control. The concept of victim and perpetrator was communicated throughout Alice's account, with Alice assuming both roles. For example, when comparing lunchtimes at the two schools, Alice raised the issue of bullying:

> *Erm food and you can sit with other friends and don't get bullied there and this school get bullied and all that. (210P3)*

Alice assigned herself the role of 'prankster' in her friendships which seemed to be about control. Alice assumed control during the interviews, through the use of the pace of her speech, the topics she would talk about, and by silence. Alice spoke about her sister always rushing her, but did not see her own demands to "move on" a conversation in the same way. The description of her horse as "slow" and "sleepy" and how she tried to speed him up seemed to reflect her need to have control over the pace of things. This may reflect Alice not feeling that she had control over her world and was attempting to assert this, and may be associated with her perception of being bullied. Alice seemed impatient when she was not understood and presented a notion of it being *her* world and it was up to others to be able to keep up and follow.

4.4.4 Ellie's Experiences

Ellie shared a range of emotions, such as feeling happy and excited about her new school, but had felt 'scared' on her first day at primary school and of a science experiment during the secondary induction:

> *Yeah I was kind of scared of the fire (nervous laugh). (160P4)*

Ellie saw herself as needing to be looked after by others, describing her first encounter with her best friend at her current school:

> *And we and she looked after me. (98P4)*

Ellie conveyed a sense of helplessness adopting the persona of a small child who needed looking after and expressed reliance upon others to help her adapt to secondary school life:

> *Yeah and I've got friends who can show me around. Tell me where the classes are because I'll get confused because it's big and there a stair with loads of classes. (180P4)*

Ellie's coping tools seemed to be her support network of people around her and the need for familiarity and routine. She appeared to base friendship on need, replacing the best friend who was her current support system with her "best" friend from her previous school who would be attending the same secondary school and therefore be her new support.

4.4.5 Cassie's Experiences

Cassie shared a range of conflicting emotions as well as her compassion for others. There was confusion and frustration when plans changed, such as on the last day of primary school and when she was moved classes in her new school. She communicated feelings of distress through the pitch of her voice raising and her struggle to express herself:

> *No I'm in a different class now and they can't (swallow) fit me in (raised voice with emotion) in Row class in erm and then I'm the only Year 7 in there. (232P5)*

Cassie appeared to have developed some coping tools to help her to navigate school life. For example, she liked to know what was happening and when, and not knowing caused upset. She was often preoccupied with the days that things happened on:

> *Yeah last Fri, Mon, Friday we have a look in both classes. Not in ICT. Last Thursday we looked at a newspaper then went home. (308P5)*

Cassie showed a desire for stability and change appeared to lead to feelings of distress suggesting she had little resilience to cope with the unexpected:

> *I don't know I didn't been in my new class yet. (26P5)*

She liked to have clear rules and instructions to follow and appeared to have internalised these, repeating them almost verbatim:

> *You need to line up to get your band and one of these things this pass, and you can get money and a hat you need to wear. (184P5)*

Cassie showed a sense of control over what she was willing to share, and clearly and confidently communicated when she had finished talking about something by saying, "that's it". Her adherence to rules allowed her to cope with new experiences but led to feelings of helplessness when plans changed.

4.4.6 Harry's Experiences

Harry expressed a range of feelings including being tired after the weekend. With the expression of emotion, there was also a sense of vulnerability such as admitting to feeling scared when first joining his school in Year Three:

> *(deep breath) First in Year Year Three I couldn't read a any books, I couldn't write (pause). (106P6)*
> *I was very scared (laughs). (108P6)*

There was also a sense of bravado with Harry, which may have been a defence mechanism to support feelings of wellbeing. When topics were of interest to him, such as sport, he provided long detailed narratives enthusiastically, but expressed frustration or boredom when talking about things he perceived to be less interesting:

> *That's iiiiiit (communicating frustration), football, basketball, tennis, erm rounders…err wait I want…, cricket, swimming that's a sport. (254P6)*

4.4.7. Cross Case Analysis: Risk, Resiliency and Coping tools

Thoughts of transition to secondary school generated a range of emotions including happiness, excitement and anxiety, as well as feelings of loss for what was being left behind.

> *Yeah. I'm going to miss them. (426P2)*

All six participants expressed some level of vulnerability, for example, Mollie and Ellie spoke of the need to be looked after:

> *Err Leanne and my other friends can help me as well. (182P4)*

Vulnerability was not always made explicit and sometimes participants shielded this with humour, defensiveness and bravado. Coping tools emerged in four of the participants' accounts and included avoidance of difficult topics and the need for structure and familiarity. Alongside this was the concept of power and control which emerged in five of the participants' accounts. This included whether they felt control over experiences, such Cassie being moved classes:

> *Erm year 7 and I'm in a different classroom now. I'm not in Row class (deep breath) I'm in another classroom. (226P5)*

Control was also expressed in terms of what the participants were or were not willing to talk about. Alice communicated this most strongly through her use of silence:

(laughs and motions again) that means erm prank. I played a trick. Got you yes! Yes! Its girls changing rooms. (250P3)

4.5. Overarching Theme: Language Skills and the Impact on Personal Narratives

This theme captures how participants had learnt to compensate for their speech, language and communication difficulties, but also how this impacted upon how they saw their experiences and interaction with others as a result.

4.5.1 Keith's Experiences

Keith's communication difficulties were evident when he had little experience to base his ideas upon. This arose when talking about secondary school, for example, getting his bag ready for school:

Oh yeah you have to do the night before the day happens.(418P1)

Keith showed a desire to talk about his experiences and the way that he presented himself appeared important to him. For example, he engaged in self-talk, whispering to himself before sharing something out loud, for example, when talking about his first day at primary school:

And I got some support and (pause) erm and (pause) erm and they had like a break and I was like err I was like err (pause) a bit like afraid so I didn't know err like (whisper to self) err (whisper to self) err like it was like really different.(330P1)

In contrast to the difficulties shown, Keith was also a masterful storyteller with an ability to bring his experiences to life. For example, in recounting the time that his dad was unaware that he had connected the game controller and he mimicked his dad's reaction to this:

> *I know, it was like "I didn't do anything" (mimicking dad).(64P1)*

Keith drew upon his experiences of films and imagery to bring his own experiences to life:

> *Yeah the goggles erm I erm I was like oh yeah "James Bond".(234P1)*

Keith clearly communicated his experiences when leading the conversation, but could also interpret questions literally. For example, when asked if he did the art work whilst in Year Six, he responded to "where" he did the art work:

> *Yeah I I did it at home.(184P1)*

Keith struggled to talk about things he had little experience of, but conversely gave attention to detail for things that were important to him. Motivation appeared to impact upon the responses given.

4.5.2 Mollie's Experiences

Mollie was skilful when talking about some experiences, using quotes and mimicry to bring her lived experience to life. For example, when impersonating her grandfather's response to her teasing and when quoting from the book King Kong, putting on a different voice as narrator:

He died. And the person said "it was not the aeroplanes it was the beauty that killed the beast". (210P2)

Her language became muddled when talking about difficult times such as when she was held back a year due to ill health:

Yeah I put a year back here. (132P2)

Mollie's response was sometimes literal, for example, when explaining why the playgrounds were different at the two schools:

Because it's not the same here. (284P2)

Interpretation of Mollie's account suggests that motivation often determined how much she would say. Mollie had the skills to bring experiences to life and this seemed to reflect their importance to her. Emotions impacted upon her ability to communicate, with Mollie becoming more muddled with emotive topics. She often used the word "everything" in answer to questions, and it was unclear if this was her belief, lack of language skills or an easy answer to give.

4.5.3 Alice's Experiences

Alice was keen to talk about her experiences but required time to process information and formulate her responses, for example:

Erm (pause) they erm really erm (gulp) they are erm (pause) really important important. I go horse riding with my mum. (4P3)

Alice would clearly communicate when she did not wish to talk about something by making sounds or shaking her head. Conversely, Alice could talk in detail for things that were important to her, or when supported visually, such as her secondary school:

> *(picks up her visual and looks through) Erm music and the art room and the library and the music and the playroom and the medical room and outside err the water room and the head teacher look and different uniform. (228P3)*

Alice occasionally interpreted questions literally, such as when asked about when she went to secondary school, interpreting the "when" by naming the day that she went. Alice communicated strong views and clear ideas about what she was and was not willing to share. This may have been related to motivation and a reluctance to dwell on the past and a need to drive forward. It may have reflected her approach to life rushing from one thing to the next, hence the frustration with her horse being slow. She would frequently defer talking about a subject she had raised by saying "we'll get to that". It was unclear if the intention was to avoid talking about the topic or because she had so much to say that some things had to wait. Although her language may have been a barrier to communicating her experiences at times, her delivery could be interpreted as containing a wealth of information as to how she perceived things.

4.5.4 Ellie's Experiences

Ellie was able to talk confidently about topics that she was familiar with, such as describing a typical school day:

> *We would do English and maths. That's what we normally do and then in the afternoons we normally do (pause) sometimes we do creative links erm science. (82P4)*

Ellie spoke about experiences at her new school that she had direct experience of, through the induction. She showed a preference for hands on learning, such as the practical science lesson that she experienced and was able to draw comparisons between both schools:

> *Yeah and science because normally in this school about science we talk about about erm ttt about smoking and drinking and normally we write that down. But in big school science is something that you can do like what I did. (206P4)*

The induction experience also allowed her to think about the difficulties she may encounter:

> *Yeah because you have to swap classes, like English class, maths class, because that's what we did induction day and it was kind of difficult going to different classes as here you just stay in the same class for English and maths and science. (224P4)*

Ellie's difficulty with talking about her experiences may have been related to her language difficulties or a lack of experience and opportunity. Her understanding appeared to be based upon what she had actually experienced.

4.5.5 Cassie's Experiences

Cassie's ability to talk about her experiences was affected by her emotional state. Her words became muddled when she was upset, highlighting her confusion:

They they can move me up the next like class. (234P5)

Cassie interpreted some of the language that she heard literally. For example, when asked what TV she liked to watch, she responded "one downstairs". This gives some insight into Cassie's view of the world as being on concrete terms and based on her direct experience. Cassie had developed a number of tools to support her communication skills and it seemed that actions were easier than words at times, for example, when talking about her current class:

You want to see? (212P5)

Cassie's understanding of her world appeared to be based upon what she had actually experienced and she struggled to conceptualise things that were yet to occur. For example, she was unable to say what clubs might be at her new school, but spoke in detail about having been on a Year Six class trip.

4.5.6 Harry's Experiences

Harry's language skills appeared closely connected to his emotional wellbeing and level of resilience, for example he seemed defensive on explaining why he had used the word "sweeper" to explain a broom:

Is that the same thing or? A broom. I just say… (96P6)

Harry used actions to support his narrative, for example, when describing his behaviour:

And then I was good in there, but then I went "woowoowoo" (twirling hand above head like a propeller) and I was a tiny bit bad in Year four. (116P6)

Harry communicated enthusiasm for topics by the pace of his narratives, for example, speaking quickly when wanting to convey the speed of an activity, such as when playing cricket, but also to convey when he was bored, seemingly wanting to get through a topic quickly. This gave a sense of rushing and may have reflected his approach to the world in general.

4.5.7. Cross Case Analysis: Language skills and the impact on Personal Narratives

Given that all six participants had identified SLCN, an overarching theme related to language may be considered obvious. However, it is the use of IPA as an analysis tool which allowed analysis to go beyond simply *what* was said, to the participants' meaning and motivation *behind* it. This overarching theme therefore reflects this and the interpretation which may be drawn from it. Participants were remarkably adept at expressing themselves and what emerged through the interviews were the communication tools that pupils adopted to share their experiences. Many used actions and some were skilled

in bringing their experiences to life when recreating their narratives through the use of drama. For example when Cassie spoke about reading the book King Kong:

> *He died. And the person said "it was not the aeroplanes it was the beauty that killed the beast".(210P2)*

Participants own lived experiences were an important factor in the responses that they gave, with many participants needing to have actually lived an experience to be able to offer a view or understanding of it. For example:

> *I don't know I didn't been in my new class yet. (268P5)*

Analysis also allowed the impact of emotion on the accounts to be considered. For example, the way Cassie internalised the rules that she had heard from adults and her distress, conveyed through the confusion in her use of language, when these were not adhered to:

> *Erm we need to have a couple more things that Miss Hardy and Miss Goodman need to all of us to get us (voice raised emotion) all of us the last time the second time we need to come we need to be in groups. (202P5)*

Five of the six participants interpreted some language literally highlighting the importance of allowing them to lead the conversation. Some participants used time as a means to collect their thoughts, often accompanied by a cough, noise or tapping which seemed to be a means of filling in the gaps. The most powerful accounts emanated from time and space to formulate what they

wanted to say. For example, Harry talking about the science experiment during induction:

> *The fire changing. We had to we needed to put something on like sticks, so we put something on them and the flame turned red or something. (196P6)*

Metaphor can be an important aspect of phenomenological analysis. Harry, Ellie and Keith all spoke with excitement about the fire experiment in science. Keith describes this as:

> *There was like erm like erm science erm like dragon breath like fire.(206P1)*

4.6. Overarching Theme: Experiences of the Education System

This theme captures how experiences of the education system have influenced participants' thoughts and feelings about school, what school signified to them and their position within this. This was based on the physical structure, routines, learning and social experiences.

4.6.1 Keith's Experiences

Keith perceived his school experiences to be different from his peers: for example, that he was born in Spain and his early education experiences were in a Spanish school, meaning that he had to adjust when he returned to England:

And I got some support and (pause) erm and (pause) erm and they had like a break and I was like err I was like err (pause) a bit like afraid so I didn't know err like (whisper to self) err (whisper to self) err like it was like really different (330P1)

When talking about his experiences of the education system, Keith was generally positive. Keith spoke about the structure of secondary school as if he was already well informed, such as having a list of clubs to choose from, a map to find his way around and having to hand in homework. He made many references to the differences of secondary school and it being "better" than his current school. For example:

Erm it it's much much much more bigger than our school but I I've seen the library and it's really cool. (168P1)

Keith believed that his first day at his new school would be:

Erm really really different and erm (pause) erm like erm really fun as well. (352P1)

As he continued to talk about school, Keith made reference to finding some aspects of school 'hard' both in his new and current school:

Yeah. Sometimes I struggle a bit.(416P1)

Keith used a sporting analogy to describe being ready for secondary school:

Yeah it's like maybe like you're playing PE, err like tennis or like come at you like "oh" (acting out hitting a ball).(426P1)

Keith embraced new experiences, such as the primary school residential trip, and seemed to view the transition to secondary as an exciting part of a journey.

Keith communicated that he was ready to move on as evidenced in his positive descriptions and enthusiasm when talking about his new school. Keith saw the uniform as part of the rite of passage:

> *Yeah its erm a bit different erm and you get a lot older as well. Mm. Yeah and and erm (cough) a different colours too.(298P1)*

Keith compared his current and new school in terms of what was visible. His description of the transition to secondary mirrored his transition to English school and those worries and fears may have resurfaced. Keith communicated conflicting feelings between apprehension and "fun" for the transition. The induction days seemed to have assisted his feelings of familiarity to a degree and, therefore, perceived readiness for secondary school. However, his image of tennis balls "coming at you" and his phrase "you'll get used to it" suggested there was something to get "used to" (with which to familiarise himself).

4.6.2 Mollie's Experiences

Mollie spoke positively about her school experience saying that she "loves" her current school and that "everything" is good. She spoke fondly of memories from her photographs, for example:

> *(looked at pictures) I remember that day (laugh) I stroked a snake. (108P2)*

Mollie described her experience of secondary school during her induction days as "fun". She focused on the social aspects of school life, for example, meeting

other children, having lunch and playing on their gym trail equipment. She was most looking forward to:

Meeting everyone. (298P2)

Mollie also suggested that she found some aspects of the new school difficult. For example she spoke of an adult from her current school being with her for the induction:

Yeah. He helped me with hard things. (400P2)

Mollie described physical differences between the two schools such as the playground, dinner trays and corridors. When talking about these differences, she said:

"get used to it". (302P2)

Mollie spoke with enthusiasm about meeting new people and the gym equipment at her new school giving the impression that she was ready to move on based upon these experiences. However, Mollie was unable to imagine what her first day at secondary school would look like and referred to some aspects of the induction as being "hard" and that she would need to "get used to it". Mollie believed that the staff at her primary school had helped her prepare for the move and when asked how she would feel the next time she went to her new school, she responded:

I'll be happy. (408P2)

4.6.3 Alice's Experiences

Alice viewed school as a positive experience and expressed that she liked both her current school and her secondary school.

> *Erm I like this school erm in September I'm leaving school, this school. (98P3)*

When talking about school, Alice focused on the social and learning aspects. She spoke about the things that she had learnt in her current school and those that she hoped to learn. Alice said that she was most looking forward to making friends at her new school and her favourite part of the induction was:

> *(pause) Playing with Helen outside. (192P3)*

Alice commented on the lunches at the two schools, preferring lunch at the secondary school:

> *Because it's more nicer than Bowden school. (206P3)*
> *Bowden school. Disgusting and that. (208P3)*

Alice reflected on the importance of the social aspect of school life which centred around lunchtime. This was also the time that she said bullying occurred at her current school, and so perhaps secondary was seen as a fresh start. Friendships appeared to be the most important factor in her enjoyment of school and Alice seemed to be basing her enjoyment of her new school on the friendships that she had already formed.

4.6.4. Ellie's Experiences

Ellie made reference to the structure of school, both at her current and next school. Her first response when talking about her new school was the physical structure and she appeared intimidated by the size of the school:

> *(deep breath) It's massive. (128P4)*

Ellie described a number of different subjects at secondary school which were related to the lessons that she experienced during the induction day. Ellie also saw school as a social place and said that she was most looking forward to playing and sitting with her friends:

> *My best friend Ophelia cos we're going to be in the same class cos her brother's gone to Gilroy as well so she'll probably know and two of my brothers have been there. And tt there's an English lesson class and a maths class and science class, art class. 186P4.*

Ellie's experiences of both primary and secondary school were largely positive. She described playtimes as the best part of the school day and associated this as time to be with her friends. She described the pupils and teachers at her current school as "nice" and used the same word to describe her induction experience:

> *It was nice (pause) err all of my old friends were there and I got to be in the same tutor group as my best friend called Ophelia. (134P4)*

Ellie gave the impression that she saw secondary school as 'better' than primary school. For example, when describing science:

> *Electricity that we had. It's a science class and we holded a (pause) a erm match, matches and put it on the thing, on the gas and it looked really cool. (156P4)*

Ellie seemed to see the new experiences that secondary would bring as exciting and novel. For example, when describing wearing the safety glasses in science:

> *I never done that before. (166P4)*

There was some ambivalence in her feelings of readiness for secondary school. For example, she expressed concern about the size of the school and having to change classes, but later said:

> *Err it's kind of good changing classes. (250P4)*

Ellie described being ready for secondary school as:

> *That you can. That you feel ready for going into secondary school. (260P4)*

Ellie gave the impression that she was ready to move on to secondary school, basing this largely on the support network of other people. She believed that the induction days had helped to prepare her although these also seemed to highlight concerns. Her underlying fear about change was perhaps cushioned by the support network she had built around her as she said that she felt happy and excited about the move to her new school.

4.6.5 Cassie's Experiences

Cassie identified school as a place of rules and demonstrated a need to conform to these:

> *Any clothes. Bring in from home dress all up. Some Year Sixes going home at the end of day (swallows) and some of them is staying in here. (146P5)*

Cassie also showed distress when these were not followed by others:

> *Erm we need to have a couple more things that Miss Hardy and Miss Goodman need to all of us to get us (voice raised emotion) all of us the last time the second time we need to come we need to be in groups. (202P5)*

Cassie described the schools in terms of their physical structure, for example, the size of the current school's playground and the gym trail. This seemed important to her as she liked to be outside. Cassie also saw school as a place for learning, and described Year Seven as:

> *You can go you can do anything like do work, go and do work in loads of work. (346P5)*

Cassie's perception of school was based upon her direct school experience and she associated school with the freedom to do "anything". Cassie saw her experience of school positively as is evidenced in her description of her current school as "fun" and her enjoyment of playing with the parachute during the induction day at her new school. Cassie did identify some difference between the schools in terms of routines:

No there were other, let me check. But in a different class in there. You need to move class. We stay in one class, go out have our break, then come line up, then come out in, then have lunch. (242P5)

Cassie spoke about her current school being a preparation for the new school:

To learning new work, helping me to do writing, my work. (362P5)

Cassie appeared to embrace new experiences and saw school as an opportunity to explore the wider world. School was described as a place both for learning and to have fun and socialise. Cassie felt she had nothing more to learn before she moved on to her next school and this may be based upon her adherence to school rules.

4.6.6 Harry's Experiences

Harry described school as a place of structure and routine. He was able to describe a typical day in detail:

So…My school starts at Nine O'clock. We come here at 8 O'clock. So then when bell goes we walk to our classes we do work, we have, and then we change over to maths, and then the Year Sixes go up and some Year Sixes go to Miss Smith and some Year Sixes go to Miss Jones and then we have dinner and then we go to the afternoon and then we have.. (pause). (40P6)

He spoke about the behaviour system in his current school, highlighting its importance for him:

That that I got red cards. Red card means you have to stay in for three days, no wait , yeah sooo the first day you have to stay in lunch and break, second day lunch and break third day lunch and break , break and lunch I mean. (120P6)

Harry showed a desire to conform to the rules of his new school in terms of how he should address staff and getting to lessons on time:

> *Because, because, you be late you get told off and have to stay in after school. (264P6)*

Harry described his new school in terms of its physical presence, noting both the building and classes as much bigger than his current school. Harry's description of the corridor may reflect feeling small in a larger environment or the long journey to go home.

> *Yeah. A long long long corridor then you walk down another long long long corridor until you go home at 3.30. (220P6)*

Harry was dismissive of the idea that the schools could have similarities, appearing to base his perceptions purely on the physical structure. Harry spoke enthusiastically about his experiences of secondary school and felt that the induction days helped:

> *Err by a lot actually. (212P6)*

Harry expressed feeling ready for his new school, saying he had already made friends and was interested in joining sports clubs. He said:

> *I'm ready for everything except English and Humanities. (256P6)*

Harry showed a desire to conform to the rules of his new school, possibly seeing this as a fresh start from his experiences of his current school. He was confident in his ability to fit in to the new school systems and make friends.

His responses about his new school gave the impression that he was already psychologically moving on from his current school.

4.6.7. Cross Case Analysis: Experiences of the Education System

The second and third broad questions of the interview schedule were "tell me about your primary school" and "tell me about your secondary school" which contributed to an overarching theme of the education experience. All participants had just experienced their secondary school induction and so were not only able to talk from direct experience, but it was fresh on their minds. For example:

> *Well I met my new teacher, I met some new friends (tapping on table) I looked around the whole entire school, even the Sixth form, even the playground even the astro turf (pause). So (yawn) so as you walk all the way down and then there's like an astro turf yeah and then yeah. (140P6)*

The physical building was their first impression and was referred to by five of the six participants providing conflicting emotions of awe and excitement, alongside trepidation:

> *(deep breath) It's massive. (128P4)*

School as a system emerged as a theme for all six participants incorporating the structure of the school day, rules and the learning aspects of school:

> *Yeah "Madam Deputy". You have to say "Madam". Your you have to say "Sir" you're not allowed to say (pause). (274P6)*

All six participants spoke about school as a largely positive experience. Most participants were keener to talk about secondary school than primary school and these generated feelings of excitement and expectation. The idea of 'moving on' and school transition being part of a journey was a strong theme across all six participants. All six pupils identified secondary as 'different' with four participants describing it as 'better' than primary school. Two pupils described secondary school as 'hard'. The experience of Science was a popular theme when talking about induction:

> *We we used those for (pause) like a stick they have like at the end of the stick they had erm some chemicals and we put it through and then they changed different colour so it was really cool (216P1*)

Lunchtimes were also a key theme, and were referred to by all participants, highlighting the importance of the social aspect of school:

> *Erm food and you can sit with other friends and don't get bullied there and this school get bullied and all that.(210P3)*

The notion of needing to 'get used' to difference was a common theme and this may have been participants' repeating phrases that they had been told or trying to convince themselves:

> *Erm its it's like erm you'll you'll get used to it. (284P1)*

4.7. Summary

The organisation of the data, which has been outlined in the individual experiences above, is captured in a table (Appendix O) which provides a summary of how the participants' themes are organised into Subordinate (individual), Superordinate and Overarching (cross case) themes. A second table (Appendix P) provides a summary of the Overarching themes and Superordinate themes with an extract from each participant. A further table (Appendix Q) provides a summary of the Superordinate themes and a data trail through the Subordinate and Emergent themes. All participants conveyed either directly or indirectly their perceptions of secondary school readiness. Although they were unable to define this, they presented what this meant to them through their descriptions and thoughts about the school system and their position within it. All six participants presented themselves as being ready for secondary school, with any underlying fears either not being shared, or being seen as short term, in terms of 'getting used to' the new experience. The move to secondary was generally seen as a rite of passage and was met with feelings of excitement. In terms of the research questions, it was the perceptions of the participants, and the subjective experience of the individual – rather than any kind of verifiable, objective form of 'reality' beyond this that was explored. The discussion chapter will explore these findings further, in relation to the research questions posed, what these findings mean in relation to the local and

national context and how the current research findings contribute to the existing research in this field.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter will explore the current research findings and the researcher's interpretation of them in relation to the research questions posed. A range of psychological theories are used to reflect and elaborate on some of the formulations and experiences that led to the four overarching themes. The findings are reviewed in relation to previous research in terms of commonalities, differences and new areas of discovery. Finally the research is summarised and reflected upon, noting its limitations and implications for EP practice and future research.

5.2. Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

5.2.1. RQ1: What sense do pupils with SLCN make of their experience of primary school?

Primary school was seen as a largely positive experience by all participants, with Cassie describing school as "fun" (98P5). The belief that Year Six was special was expressed by three of the participants, for example, through an end of year show and residential trip.

The most important experience of primary school appeared to be that of friendships and this view was shared by all six participants. Ellie expressed that playing with friends was the most important aspect of school and also referred to the importance of lunchtimes for this. Cassie described the best part of school as "Playing .... outside" (108P5) an experience shared by Harry, that the best aspect of school was being on the playground and thus amongst friends. Alice spoke a great deal about her friendships at school, but also made reference to bullying at lunchtimes. It was of interest that the focus of the primary school experience was outside of the classroom and so school was primarily seen as a social place to develop relationships. Keith's exploration of the social experience of school was through the Year Six residential trip. He and Ellie communicated reliance upon friends at difficult times in school.

Four of the participants (Ellie, Alice, Keith and Harry) had transferred to their current school in Year Three (Key Stage Two) and so had experienced a primary school transition. Four participants reflected on feeling scared on their first day at their current school.

The structure of school was referred to by all participants in terms of the physical structure of the building and equipment, and the routines of the day suggesting this was seen as representing 'school'. Harry was the only

participant to refer to the primary school behaviour system and codes of behaviour.

Four participants spoke about the learning aspects of school, for example, Harry said "I hate literacy, science, humanities, but my best subjects are maths, (pause) PE, PE" (50P6). Difficulties with reading and writing were described by several participants (Keith, Mollie and Harry). Reference to PE was made by four of the six participants suggesting it was seen as a key component of primary school life. All participants made reference to at least one member of teaching staff.

Primary school was seen almost as an extension of home and family in some cases. Mollie described being at her school for a long time and her love of school. She spoke about friends and teachers in her current school with affection saying that she would miss them and wanting a hug from them. Cassie also shared a keen sense of belonging to her school including the importance of clubs.

It is of interest that no participants made reference to their language difficulties and this seemed to reflect a view that the pupils saw themselves as the same as

their peers. Where differences were noted this tended to be through support systems of additional adult assistance or resources.

5.2.2. RQ2: What sense do pupils with SLCN make of their experience of secondary school following their induction days?

The participants' attitudes towards their new schools were positive. All of the participants had experienced at least one induction day and this facilitated their thoughts about secondary school. The interviews were conducted at times to coincide with pupils having attended their secondary school induction days. This was to ensure that pupils had real secondary school experiences to talk about. Interviews were timed within a week of the induction so that the experience would be fresh in their minds to aid the participants' ability to recall and explore their secondary experience. This was found to be important not just in terms of the timing of the data collection, but also the participants desire to talk about this recent experience. At the time of interview, all of the participants demonstrated some level of excitement about their induction days. It was felt that having now experienced secondary school directly, aided their ability to talk about, and formulate, ideas about secondary school based upon this direct experience.

They all considered secondary school to be different in some way from primary school, and had a range of feelings in relation to this. Alice described feeling “a little bit nervous” (184P3) on her first induction day. Although Mollie felt a little shy, she described her induction day as “fun”. Three participants (Keith, Ellie and Harry) were enthusiastic about the science lesson they had experienced as part of the induction day. Harry described the best bit of the day as “The fire changing” (196P6) suggesting he saw attending secondary school as an opportunity for more practical and perhaps risk-taking learning. Both Ellie and Harry said that induction was helpful and Harry described in detail the induction day, meeting his new teacher, friends and the building. Cassie talked about enjoying her induction, but this experience was impaired by her distress of discovering she had since been moved from the class she had attended during her induction day.

Most participants focused on the social aspect of secondary school, particularly friendships and this was often encompassed in the lunchtime experience. Ellie spoke about lunch with friends and that the best bit of induction was being with her old friends. Alice also spoke of lunchtimes with friends and believed bullying would not occur at her secondary school. Harry felt that he had already made new friends at his new school and this appeared to be influencing his positive perception of secondary school. Lunchtime

seemed to be an important part of the secondary school experience. Keith described lunchtime in terms of a fingerprint machine and the improved food. Secondary school life was perceived as an experience which would extend beyond the learning curriculum for some (Keith, Cassie and Harry) as they expressed looking forward to clubs at secondary school.

There was also a sense of trepidation about secondary school for some participants with both Mollie and Ellie making reference to needing to be looked after by other children. This may be less about the secondary school, but rather a reflection of how the participants perceive themselves, based upon experiences in the primary environment.

Most participants referred to the size and structure of secondary school. This may be because the induction days had just occurred and the novelty of the larger building was likely to be memorable as a first impression. Ellie was preoccupied with the size of the school describing it as “massive”. Movement around school was a concern for some participants with Ellie sharing ambivalent feelings of being both scared and excited about this. Harry referred to the ‘long, long, long corridor’ which may reflect feelings of inferiority about secondary school. As with primary school, Harry made reference to the behaviour system "Because, because, you be late you get told off and have to

stay in after school" (264P6). All participants seemed interested in the facilities on offer at a larger school

5.2.3. RQ3: What are the pupils' perceptions of secondary school readiness?

Participants' perceptions of secondary school appeared to be anchored on the induction experience. This had provided them with a sense of what secondary school was about, which allowed participants to begin to consider what this might mean for them going forward, and possibly alleviate or increase fears.

All of the participants appeared to see transition to secondary school as a positive thing and a rite of passage in spite of any worries they expressed. The idea of 'moving on' and school transition being part of a journey was a theme shared across all six participants. Most participants expressed a desire for new experiences and a feeling of being ready to move on to secondary school. However, the notion of needing to 'get used to' the difference was a common theme and both Keith and Mollie used this phrase. This could be interpreted either as participants not being secondary ready, or conversely, that they feel ready to embrace change and 'get used to' a new experience. Harry's responses about his new school, such as having already made friends and knowing how to refer to the staff, gave the impression that he had already moved on psychologically from his current school. Some participants (Harry and Alice) appeared to perceive the move to secondary school as a fresh start.

Perceptions of secondary readiness therefore appear to be based upon their direct experience of the induction. All of the participants felt that they were ready for whatever the first day might bring. This may reflect a positive attitude, or conversely, participants' difficulty with imagining and verbalising what the first day might look like. In spite of the induction, some participants struggled to visualise and share their thoughts about the first day at secondary school.

Induction days also contributed to an increase in anxiety in some cases, for example, Cassie being told that she would not be in the class that she had experienced. For Ellie, having had an experience of secondary school life enabled her to think and worry about this in concrete terms. This suggests participants were developing perceptions of readiness even if these were not positive.

In terms of describing what secondary readiness means, Keith used the metaphor of tennis balls "to like be ready like what comes at you" (422P1) as his way of being prepared for secondary school. This suggests the need to be alert. Ellie expressed being ready as "that you can. That you feel ready for going into secondary school" (260P4) suggesting that being ready was about a positive attitude.

Some participants interpreted secondary readiness in terms of what they were looking forward to. For example, Mollie was "ready to meet new friends" (380P2) and Alice expressed that she anticipated meeting "My new friends at Beale House" (238P3). Cassie was looking forward to "going up in my new class" (360P5) even though this change of class had caused her distress and reflected her need for preparation. She expressed being ready as "because I'm excited" (340P5) again perhaps reflecting being ready as having a positive attitude towards the new school. Harry said that he felt ready but was unclear as to exactly what this readiness meant, saying "I'm ready for everything except English and Humanities" (256P6) suggesting that he felt ready for the social and procedural changes at secondary, but less so, some learning aspects.

5.3. Findings in Relation to Psychological Theory

The findings as reported in Chapter Four are further discussed below in relation to psychological theories in an attempt to further understand their meaning and offer psychological insight.

5.3.1 Overarching Theme: Concept of Self, Family and Life experiences

Concept of self could be explored through Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) (Kelly, 1955, cited in Beaver, 2015). PCP proposes that people are proactive in making sense of themselves and the world in which they live.

Meaning is constructed from experience and so an individual's sense of the world is personal to them and their version of reality. These constructs comprise of our preferred construct and its polar opposite. What is important is the way experience is construed, rather than the experience itself. An example of this can be seen in Alice's account of how horses were "her world" but complained about her horse being slow and sleepy and how she tried to speed him up by shaking his reins. This construct of speed is revisited throughout her account, for example, by complaining that her sister always tried to rush her. Alice perceived things that slowed her down as frustrating, but conversely, did not like to be rushed, showing how she had constructs about her world relating to pace and would seek the evidence to support her version of reality.

Self in relation to others could be understood by applying attachment theory.

Bowlby (1988, cited in Geddes, 2006) maintained that early relationships are vital in providing the organising framework and representational models for a child's future relationships. Through these experiences, children develop internal working models, core beliefs and life scripts (Treisman, 2017). Ellie described how she and her friends played "mums and dads" connecting to her friends through recreating family relationships and how she and her best friend pretended to be twins to emphasise their closeness.

Bion (1967, cited in Geddes, 2006) described 'containment' as the ability of an attachment figure to bear the overwhelming feelings generated by exploration of an unknown world. Ellie expressed a fear of new experiences such as her experience of her first day at her current school and secondary induction day. She demonstrated a need for a containment figure, in the form of a best friend who would console her with a cuddle on her first day. This attachment figure was reminiscent of a mother comforting a baby or small child as described in attachment theory as a 'secure base' through which she felt safe to explore the environment. At times of stress, Ellie found comfort and security in her peer relations at school, for example, having a "big" buddy and "old" friends to look after her at her new school. Her friendships appeared to reflect family life and the dynamics and support systems within this. Delaney (2009) describes how the school building can come to represent a secure physical base in terms of rules, routines and roles of people. The experience Harry shared of the behaviour system at his current school and his desire to follow the rules at his new school suggests he found this containing.

The desire for social acceptance from peers can be related to the need to belong as described in Maslow's theory of a 'Hierarchy of Needs' (Maslow, 1954, cited in Beaver, 2015). These needs are: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, cognitive, aesthetic and self-actualization. Maslow (1954

cited in Beaver, 2015) stated that people are motivated to satisfy certain needs and that some needs take precedence over others. For example, there is a need for safety and belonging before pupils can engage fully in personal development and learning. Motivation based on the need to belong is demonstrated through the use of friendships as support systems. For example, Alice and Ellie switched between calling new and old friends 'best' friends dependent on what the need was.

5.3.2 Overarching Theme: Risk, Resilience and Coping Tools

Much of resilience research has examined the interaction of protective and risk factors in high-risk populations. Prince-Embury (2006) describes protective factors as including intellectual ability, easy temperament, autonomy, sociability, effective coping strategies and communication skills. Another group of protective factors identified pertain to the child's environment, including family, positive school experiences, good peer relationships and relationships with adults (Prince-Embury, 2006). Resilience is viewed as a dynamic process involving a number of contextual factors (Masten and Powell, 2003, Cited in Treisman, 2017) which includes internal and external domains. Social bonding, community cohesion and social connectedness are linked to positive coping and resilience (Gilligan, 2008, Cited in Treisman, 2017).

Participants' communication skills could be described as a risk factor. Participants demonstrated their resilience and coping tools in a number of ways. For example, Ellie presented as being helpless and her coping tool appeared to be her support network of people around her, highlighting the contextual nature of resilience and her use of an external domain. Mollie demonstrated resilience when sharing experiences of illness and loss, whilst also expressing hope about her future. Mollie explained that she was not able to remember things about her past as a result of having cancer when she was younger. She used saying that she couldn't remember as a coping tool when she did not wish to discuss certain topics. Her easy temperament and sociability are considered resilient factors from an internal domain. Keith demonstrated resilience through a number of difficult experiences and it is perhaps these life experiences that have allowed Keith to develop autonomy. Keith learnt to embrace new experiences as he had survived thus far, knowing that he would "get used to" his new reality. He developed a number of coping tools such as seeking a sense of control and the use of humour to navigate difficult situations.

Some of the coping tools employed by participants may be understood as defence mechanisms. Defence mechanisms were first recognised by Freud (1894, cited in French & Klein, 2012) in his early psychodynamic work and

can be seen as necessary for attacks that are anticipated consciously or unconsciously from external sources or from within. A coping tool employed by many of the participants was the need to know what was happening and when, in an effort to have some feelings of control over their world. For example, Cassie liked to have clear rules and instructions and appeared to internalise these, repeating them almost verbatim reflecting her internal working model. This may be understood by the defence mechanism described as omnipotence and often stems from anxiety about not feeling in control of your life. Keith also demonstrated this in his need to know the 'nuts and bolts' of how things worked. Splitting is the tendency to polarise people, in one's perceptions, as all good or bad and this was demonstrated in Harry's description of himself and others. There was a sense of bravado with Harry, which may have been to support feelings of wellbeing and to enable him to avoid conversations that might attack this. The most prominent theme to emanate from Alice appeared to be her desire for power and control and this was reflected in her interactions with others. This may reflect feelings of powerlessness and Alice may have been re-enacting another relationship as explained by the defence mechanism transference which is an unconscious phenomenon which occurs when feelings from one relationship are played out or re-experienced in a later relationship.

5.3.3 Overarching Theme: Language Skills and the Impact on Narratives

Social constructivism suggests that people co-contribute and co-construct a narrative about their own positions within organisations and how they might relate to others. It suggests there is no single 'truthful' narrative but that we have several available and we might privilege one over another. Narrative thinking (White 1995, cited in Woolfson & Boyle, 2008) acknowledges the expertise that people bring and helps them to voice the rich stories of their lives. According to narrative approaches our lived experience is storied with a past, present and future. The narrative can be expressed through emotion (e.g. Casssie's distress of changing classes), imagery (e.g. Keith's description of safety goggles as invisible glasses), metaphor (e.g. Keith's description of tennis balls coming at you), humour (e.g. Mollie mimicking her granddad), descriptions (e.g. Ellie's view of the school as massive) and encompasses non-verbal communication (such as Harry comparing his behaviour to a helicopter's whirling propeller). Some of our stories become subjugated discourses whilst others become dominant. This was demonstrated by all of the participants in the telling of their experiences of life and of school. They all had something to say and the researcher something to learn. A fresh start as advocated by Alice and Harry in their hopes for secondary school may have been seen as an opportunity to re-author their story.

Although language was sometimes a barrier to communicating about their world, their delivery held a wealth of information as to how the participants perceived things. For example, Alice rushed through accounts reflecting her experience of being rushed. Harry communicated enthusiasm for topics by the pace of his narratives, but also to convey when he was bored. Their accounts and the speed that they conveyed them may reflect how he and Alice perceive the world as fast-paced and frantic. All participants made use of their visual aids and actions to bring their stories to life. Additionally, there was an assumption by all participants that they would be understood and any breakdown in communication was often perceived as the fault of the researcher.

Participants' language skills, at a given moment, appeared closely connected to their emotional wellbeing and level of resilience. Thus, Cassie and Mollie's language became muddled when talking about difficult times such as Cassie's confusion over a change of class and Mollie's experience of being held back a year due to ill health. At other times, Mollie was skilful in sharing experiences, using quotes and mimicry. Keith was also a masterful storyteller with an ability to bring his experiences to life through impersonations, humour and metaphor. Keith showed a desire to talk about his experiences, as did all of the participants, and the way that he presented himself appeared important. For

example, he engaged in self-talk, whispering to himself before sharing something out loud.

5.3.4 Overarching Theme: Experiences of the Education System

Experiences of the education system could be explored by applying Brofenbrenner's (1979, cited in Woolfson & Boyle, 2008) eco-systemic theory to explain how the qualities of a child and their environment interact to influence how they will grow and develop. Brofenbrenner (1979, cited in Frederickson & Cline, 2015) suggested that there are four levels, each contained inside the next like a set of Russian dolls. Microsystems are the settings where the participant actively participates such as home, classroom and playground. Interactions within the Microsystems typically involve personal relationships with family members, classmates and teachers, in which influences go back and forth. The Mesosystem encompasses the interaction of the different Microsytems and involves linkages such as between home and school and between peer group and family. The Exosystem pertains to other people and places which the child may not directly interact with, such as parents' workplaces, and extended family members. The Macrosystem is the largest and most distant collection of people and places to the child, but exercises significant influence on the child. It is composed of the child's

cultural patterns and values, specifically the child's dominant beliefs and ideas, as well as political and economic systems.

Ecological system theory is phenomenological in nature with the child at the centre (Darling, 2007). Understanding the participants' experience using the eco system would first begin with the development of the active person: shaping environments, evoking responses from them, and reacting to them. We can see this happening, for example, in Harry's difficulties with authority in primary school and his experience of the school behaviour system. He was keen to conform in secondary school possibly seeing this as a fresh start from the primary experience of detention. He was confident in his ability to fit in to the new school systems and make friends. Harry is seen here at the centre interacting with the Microsystems of school life. Home-school communication would reflect the Mesosystem and the Macrosystem would perhaps reflect Harry's dominant beliefs about school and behaviour.

Participants' experiences of the school system tended to focus on Microsystems. For example, Ellie's use of friendships to help her to navigate the education system and she anticipated using these resources to assist with the next system. An example of the Mesosystem was the communication between the primary and secondary school systems. Interestingly there was

very little spoken about this which may have been because it did not directly include the participant. Some participants spoke of primary school staff accompanying them on their secondary school visits. Interaction between home and school was demonstrated in Cassie's distress about a letter being sent home from her new school to inform her mother of a change of class. Examples of the Exosystem are the processes associated with the participants' EHCP and the support provided within this by the Local Authority. The Macrosystem could be understood in terms of the culture of secondary schools. Secondary schools are typically larger environments and accommodate pupils from a number of primary schools often from different cultural and economic backgrounds.

5.4. Findings in Relation to Existing Research

The findings of this study resonate with some of the findings of previous research outlined in the literature review and introduction chapters. The current findings will be explored in terms of the dominant features identified in the literature review: school structure, peer relationships, sense of belonging, teacher relationships, the learning experience, bullying, growing up and the transition experience.

5.4.1. School Structure and Discontinuities in the School System

The structure of school was a feature identified in the research of almost all of the papers identified in the literature review. A number of these were based on views obtained whilst pupils were in secondary school and so do not relate to feelings of readiness per se. Ganeson and Ehrich (2009), Tobbell (2003) and Brewin and Statham (2011) applied an ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1999, cited in Tobbell, 2003) as a basis for generating a psychological theory for understanding the systems involved in secondary transition. In terms of commonalities ~~with the~~with the current research, the structure and school systems of secondary school and comparisons to primary experience appeared to be of importance to all the participants in this study. They tended to compare primary and secondary in terms of the physical structure of the building, and the structure of the school day. The findings of this study appear to concur with the above studies that readiness for secondary may be about reducing the difference between primary and secondary systems or preparation for this difference as much as possible. The need to 'get used to it' was shared by a number of participants in this study. Pupil perceptions of secondary tended to be based in the 'here and now' and through direct experience and so are reflected in the Microsystems (immediate environments) with little regard to the systems beyond this. This is consistent with Tobbell (2003) and Brewin and Statham (2011) who found that one of the most important 'proximal' relationships was with the peer group.

In the current study a number of participants reported concerns in relation to movement around school, with the induction experience adding to this fear for one participant. Another spoke of the use of a map to help them find their way around. This corresponds with the study by Ganeson and Ehrich (2009) in which the organisational aspects of the day were highlighted as a concern following transition. Dockrell and Lindsay (2007) reported pupils with SEN and SLCN found aspects of transition challenging, particularly practicalities of the school day. Other studies have also found that getting lost was a commonly cited concern before transition (e.g. Ashton, 2008) and post transition (e.g. Tobbell, 2003). However, in all cases, it was indicated that these difficulties were soon resolved. The significance of this is that participants' worries about readiness for movement around school may perhaps be minimised prior to transition through greater opportunities to familiarise themselves. This is in keeping with Ashton (2008) who found pupils wanted as much experience as possible in preparation for secondary school.

An area of interest that surfaced across a number of participants in the current study was lunchtime. Lunchtime perhaps epitomises the social aspect of school life. Sancho and Cline (2012) had highlighted the importance of 'informal socialising' to promote a sense of belonging. However, lunchtimes

were largely neglected in previous studies in terms of the importance of the social aspect and therefore the current study contributes new insight from previous research. If lunchtime is such a key component of successful transition into secondary life then time and effort should be spent utilising this part of the school day.

The importance of buddies as a system of support was referred to explicitly by one participant but others made reference to peer support and this appeared to reflect an important part of feeling ready for secondary school. This is consistent with Akos (2002) and Ganeson & Ehrich (2009) who reported pupils valuing buddy systems to support the transition process. In line with other studies (Pratt & George, 2005, West et al, 2010), the participants in the current study distinguished between school and peer (formal and informal) systems of support.

5.4.2. Peer Relationships

The current research identified friendship as a significant factor for participants' perceptions of secondary readiness. This corroborates with almost all of the studies identified in the literature review and other research (e.g. Akos & Galassi, 2004, Gillison et al., 2008) and highlights the need for a focus on the development of peer relationships as part of the work on

secondary readiness in primary school and ways to develop this once pupils are in secondary school. Participants made multiple references to friendships in keeping with previous research (Tobbell, 2003; Sancho & Cline, 2012). As with Brewin and Statham's (2011) study with LAC children, making friends was seen as a positive aspect of transition. The participants expressed excitement at the prospect of new friends. However, as Sancho and Cline's (2012) findings suggest peer relationships change in secondary school and this may be where the communication difficulties emerge.

Knowing other pupils from primary school was seen as a significant factor for two of the participants in keeping with research by Ganeson and Ehrich (2009). These pupils tended to use other pupils as a support system. Both of these pupils referred to old and new friends suggesting this was seen as a natural progression. In contrast to the study by Ashton (2008) participants did not express concerns for being lonely or falling in with a bad crowd. Losing friends was only referred to by one participant.

5.4.3. Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging was dominant across all participants' experiences in line with findings by Tobbell, (2003), Sancho and Cline, (2012), Ashton (2008) and Ganeson and Ehrich, (2009). Participants expressed this in the use of the language they used, such as 'we' and 'they' as opposed to 'me' and 'my' and

in the use of names to personalise the experience. Participants communicated a sense of attachment to their primary school whether this was the physical environment, staff or pupils, with some expressing feelings of loss around leaving their old school. Secondary school readiness is thus perhaps also about being able to say goodbye and move on.

Every participant in the study expressed a desire to go or an acceptance of going to secondary school which could be considered an indicator of secondary school readiness. The experience of induction, which every participant had, appeared to foster the beginning of a sense of belonging to secondary school. This is significant in terms of highlighting the importance of induction experiences and perhaps indicates a need to maximise the benefit of this to aid secondary readiness.

Being able to form new friendships was seen as important by almost all of the participants and it could be hypothesised that this will aid in their sense of belonging to their new school. The distress for one participant at having been told that she was being moved from the originally allocated class to another highlights the importance of a sense of belonging. This demonstrates the need for sensitivity and understanding of the emotional aspects of readiness for transition as acknowledged by Ganeson and Ehrich, (2009) and highlights that

teachers need to be sensitive to the needs of newcomers, providing them with time to adjust.

5.4.4. Teacher Relationships

In the study by Ashton (2008), pupils were interested in what their new teachers would be like and what impression they would make on their teacher. This was replicated in the current study, in the experience of Harry, who described his new tutor as "nice" and was keen to make a good impression. Primary school relationships with staff were well established and a number of participants felt sad that they were leaving their primary teachers behind, a sentiment shared in the study of ASC pupils (Dann, 2011), LAC pupils (Brewin & Statham, 2011) and other pupils in general (Ashton, 2008). Some pupils expressed a reliance on the primary school staff and this was reflected in the study by Bailey and Baines (2012) who postulated that this might lead to pupils being unaware of the difficulties that lay ahead. The significance of this appears to suggest participants had not yet considered their new teacher relationships and this did not appear to be of a concern or a factor in terms of secondary readiness.

5.4.5. The Learning Experience

In the current study, the learning aspect of secondary school did not appear as important as the social aspect, in line with findings such as Ashton (2008) who

considered pupils to be too preoccupied with the social and environmental aspects of moving school to think about the content of the lessons. Participants saw school as a place for learning, but only one expressed a concern in relation to the work becoming more difficult and having to complete homework. Harry and Keith had expressed concerns about being unable to write when they joined their primary schools in Year Three, but neither participant expressed such concerns for secondary school. The studies by Tobbell (2003), Brewin and Statham (2011), Ganeson and Ehrich, (2009) and Dann (2011) indicate learning to have been of greater significance in their studies. The research of Tobbell (2003) and Ganeson and Ehrich, (2009) took place after transition and so the learning aspect was based upon actual experience of the secondary curriculum rather than the induction experience. However, Brewin and Statham (2011) and Dockrell and Lindsay (2007) reported that even before transition, pupils raised worries about harder work. The significance of the current findings is that participants' feelings of readiness for school do not appear to be impacted upon by concerns about the learning aspect of secondary school life. When participants spoke of lessons, these were based on the lessons that occurred during induction which tended to be science and PE. It is of interest that three participants spoke very enthusiastically about the exciting use of the Bunsen burner in science and as Ashton (2008) points out there is a danger that if the high expectations are not met, pupils are at risk of

becoming disaffected. The significance of this is that there is a need for pupils to have as many experiences as possible, prior to transition, in order to form realistic expectations and feelings of readiness.

5.4.6. Perceptions of Bullying

In contrast to the findings of prior researchers, Ashton (2008), Brewin and Statham (2011), Dockrell and Lindsay (2007), Ganeson and Ehrich, (2009) and Fortuna (2014), only one occurrence of bullying was referred to in the current study and this was in relation to the participant's primary school. Strikingly, this participant was convinced that bullying would not occur in her secondary school. It may be that participants did not wish to think or talk about this in this context, or it may be that, as a result of having their EHCP, these participants felt more protected than others as suggested in the work of Bailey and Baines (2012). Some participants shared experiences of feeling special and one spoke about having a buddy to help her manage as advocated by Dockett and Perry (2013). It may be that bullying was less of a concern in the current research due to participants basing their secondary experience on that of primary, and of the induction. If bullying was not experienced during the induction then their supposition was that it could never happen. This raises an important question about whether secondary readiness should provide coping tools and awareness raising of bullying or whether this would

contribute to anxiety that perhaps was not there previously. Ellie indicated for example, that she had not been worried about movement around school, until she had experienced it during induction.

5.4.7. Growing Up

A prevailing theme in the current study was that of growing up and being treated as an older child in the school environment, as reflected in the work of Ashton (2008). There were some conflicting feelings about growing up, such as Ellie and Mollie's perception that they needed looking after by other children at secondary school.

All of the participants in this study expressed that they were looking forward to the new opportunities available to them at secondary school. Like Dann (2011) participants liked having control over aspects of their day at secondary school, such as their lunchtimes. One participant spoke of his pride in the smart uniform, but worried about managing the organisational aspects of the day, which was also highlighted in the Ashton (2008) study. Participants tended to view transition as a rite of passage as was identified by the work of Pratt and George (2005). Participants' responses when comparing primary and secondary school gave the impression that they believed that secondary school was in some way superior to primary school. This was communicated in a

number of ways including the more sophisticated and dangerous science equipment, the improved food and new opportunities available. All participants indicated that they were ready to move and some perceived this as a fresh start, as identified by Pratt and George (2005) and Jindall-Snape and Miller (2008).

5.4.8. The Transition Experience

Ganeson and Ehrich (2009), Dockrell and Lindsay (2007) and Akos (2002) all reported transition as perceived as a positive experience by their participants. All of the participants in this study spoke about secondary school as a positive experience and communicated feelings of perceived readiness for secondary school, . Given that all of these participants had an EHCP for SLCN this is positive to note, particularly given the research that suggests that having a positive outlook at Year Six aids the transition process (Evangelo 2008, Rice et al, 2010). However, according to Bailey and Baines (2012) it could be that the participants were not yet aware of the difficulties ahead. Idealised views of the future were present in all of the narratives in spite of different perceptions and experiences. Their beliefs about secondary life were based upon the induction experience, such as Keith and Ellie's excitement for science and as Ashton (2008) suggests, schools need to live up to this expectation to prevent pupils becoming disaffected. This research focuses on perception, not the

reality of a situation and as Evangelou et al., (2008) and Zeedyk et al., (2003) suggest, schools need to prepare pupils by helping them to manage their perceptions and expectations, by alerting them to how secondary school will be different and providing coping strategies. The significance of this is that participants did have positive feelings about the transition and feelings of secondary readiness. Findings reported in the large scale study by Evangelou, et al., (2008) found having the right attitude going into transition is an important factor.

5.5. Knowledge Generated in Relation to the Phenomena of Secondary School Readiness

It was the hope of the researcher that the concept of 'readiness' would be elicited from the pupils themselves through exploration of personal journeys and the meanings that pupils assigned to this experience. This was an ambitious aim, given that the Department for Education (2014a) had removed this terminology from their assessment and accountability publication. Research should embrace the quest for discovery and this requires researchers to be ambitious and pioneering if we are to attempt to learn something new. The researcher acknowledges that 'readiness' is an elusive and problematic concept in that it is open to a range of interpretations. However, the same

argument for including pupils with SLCN in research can be applied here, that just because something may be difficult, is not a reason not to do it.

My understanding of secondary school readiness is likely to differ from that of the participants, and theirs from each other's, highlighting both the uniqueness and complexity of what perceptions of readiness are. All of the participants' found this a difficult question to answer directly and their perceptions of readiness tended to be drawn from interpretation of their experiences and reflections. Although all of the participants communicated that they felt ready for secondary school, they struggled to articulate what this might mean to them. For example, Keith was unable to say what his first day at secondary would look like 'Erm really really different and erm (pause) erm like erm really fun as well' (352P1). He was unable to imagine who he might meet, but listed the lessons he had experienced on the induction day. This highlights the importance of the induction experience in his conceptualisation of readiness, but it could also be argued that these may limit perceptions of readiness to those actual experiences. For some participants' secondary readiness appeared to reflect the discontinuities of primary and secondary school life, for example Mollie saying 'You get used to it' (392P2). Secondary readiness also appeared to be about how it made participants felt emotionally, for example, Cassie saying she was ready 'Because I'm excited' (340P5). One commonality

regarding secondary school readiness did appear to be based upon friendships and so at least in part, secondary school readiness could be interpreted as the social aspect of school life. This demonstrates the complexity of the phenomena of perceived readiness for secondary school and how it is open to a range of interpretations.

This research has brought about new knowledge in terms of understanding how ready participants with communication difficulties felt for secondary school, following the experience of induction. The findings of the current study are important as they provide in depth, the experiences that participants had navigating through primary school and the tools and mechanisms they developed to cope with these. The key features identified in the study regarding secondary readiness were: the importance of friendships, the positive feelings regarding secondary school and the importance of transition experiences, pupils feeling that they were prepared for secondary school, and perceptions that secondary school was 'better' and a rite of passage. The positive induction experience, particularly around practical lessons such as science, and social opportunities such as lunchtime are seen as key factors in creating feelings of readiness.

Factors that are considered to impair perceptions of secondary readiness include discontinuities and differences between the two school systems and

participants' feeling that it was necessary to become accustomed to, or 'get used to', these. There were also feelings of loss regarding those that participants were leaving behind and for one, feelings of despair at a change of classroom after induction. There was also a lack of understanding from participants as to themselves as part of a wider system. This study supports that of Merrick (2011) which postulates that participants, when talking about experience, focused on the demands of the environment and friendships, rather than their language needs. Based upon these findings Educational Psychologists can begin to formulate hypotheses to explore as part of their work with regard to secondary school readiness.

5.6. Implications for EP Practice and Future Research Possibilities

The impact and importance of this research was considered in terms of promoting greater understanding of the phenomena of secondary readiness and promoting ways of gathering the views of pupils with SLCN. The research aimed to move from exploration of separate phenomena from a participant's own unique experience, to exploring convergent and divergent themes between participants in order to further EP understanding and practice.

5.6.1: Implications for EP practice

These findings allow EPs to begin to formulate hypotheses about how to help support secondary readiness and to consider if there is something they need to be doing differently as an EP. Hypotheses about what supports feelings of readiness based upon the findings of this research would recommend that EPs promote a positive attitude towards secondary school as part of a secondary readiness programme. This would include increased opportunities for induction and other direct secondary school experiences including meeting other pupils and staff before transition.

The timings of the interviews to coincide with secondary school induction days were not only important in enabling participants to talk about actual secondary school experiences, but also highlighted the desire of the pupils to share these experiences. This begs the question 'what do primary schools do following secondary school induction days?' Primary schools need to build upon the momentum and enthusiasm that the induction experience brings, and in some instances concerns, and use this as an opportunity to discuss what the pupils have found out. It is an opportunity for pupils to discuss any worries they may have within a familiar and supportive environment. If we consider this in terms of Bronfenbrenner's model, (1979, cited in Frederickson & Cline, 2015) this reflects pupils' exploration of the new classrooms, playground, lunchtime routine and other systems that they directly experienced and the

interactions within these microsystems, such as new classmates and teachers. This may help to understand any perceived discontinuities between the primary and secondary school system and negotiations of new and old friendships and relationships. It is likely that pupils from a single Year Six class are likely to be attending more than one secondary school and so classes could carry out their own small piece of research on similarities and differences between different secondary schools thus exploring the macrosystem of secondary schools.

Pupils could return to primary school to talk about the secondary experience to the next cohort as a trusted expert on the experience. The research suggests that it would be helpful if schools provided opportunities for pupils to interact and form connections with each other during the early months through a range of formal and informal activities. This research has highlighted that lunch time is perceived as important to the students and so it is vital that schools acknowledge and utilise this as part of their transition work. The EP should explore ways to promote friendships pre and post transition, particularly for vulnerable groups such as those with SLCN.

The EP is in a unique position of working in both primary and secondary schools and so ideally placed to support feelings of secondary readiness

before, during and after transition. This should include developing staff sensitivity across schools to the potential anxieties and being aware of pupils' need to know what is happening as a way to manage such anxieties. Ways to say goodbye and having positive endings to primary school life will also be important. Additionally, exploring ways to minimise the perceived differences between primary and secondary school and working with staff to develop the coping tools pupils will require to manage the differences.

The research demonstrates that participants' perspectives can help to contribute to identifying the provision they need and so an implication for EP work is how to facilitate this. This study and some previous studies have demonstrated that with the use of appropriate tools, young people with SEN and communication difficulties are able to meaningfully express their thoughts, feelings and conceptualisations of their experiences. This research demonstrated that questions may be misinterpreted or may not be the questions that the participant values and highlights the importance of time and space to encourage personal narratives. Given that it is mandatory (DfE, 2015) to have due regard for the child's views, EPs are ideally placed to help promote a person-centred approach in the understanding and empowering of young people who have difficulties which impact upon their ability to express themselves.

In terms of the impact and importance of the research (Yardley, 2007), these findings will be disseminated to the researcher's EP service during a research conference. This will provide an opportunity to explore ways to support secondary readiness for pupils with SLCN and pupils in general at a service wide level. This will also be an opportunity to highlight ways of opening up discussions and empowering pupils with SLCN to share their views either directly with EPs or ways to support other staff to have these important conversations with pupils about how ready they feel for secondary school.

5.6.2: Future research possibilities:

The current study explored experiences of school and feelings of readiness for secondary school for pupils with SLCN. A follow up of the participants' experiences of secondary school as they continued further along the journey of school would make for another interesting piece of research. As friendship was such a key area in the current research, the changing style of peer relationships as pupils get older would be an area of interest. Other experiences that could be of interest are the meanings that pupils make of the autonomy that may be expected of them at secondary school and their perceptions of the different teaching styles that they experience across the school day. Given the larger scale and more complex systems of secondary

education, it would be interesting to explore pupils' experiences of a sense of belonging to this community and how it compares to that of the primary community.

Further studies should continue to promote the participation of all pupils, particularly those perceived as vulnerable, in research in which they are living the experience. This study supported previous research (Owen, Hayett, L & Roulstone, 2004, Merrick, 2011) demonstrating that semi-structured interviews supported by visual materials are an appropriate method of collecting data from children with SLCN and it is a valuable, informative and worthwhile process.

5.7. Limitations of the Research

It has been stated throughout this writing that the claims made by the research should be appropriately limited. As the statements are interpretive, results are not considered as statements of fact, however, the results are grounded in examples from the data and therefore should appear transparent and plausible (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). Whilst the aim of this research was not to find commonalities with existing research it was important to acknowledge the potential for this to occur. This may be explained by the findings of the literature review having been unconsciously held in mind during the analysis

phase. However, it could be argued that these participants are the experts on their lives and the findings of this research corroborate previous research and the experience of other pupils. Outlined below are some limitations of this research and consideration as to how they were, or could be, addressed in future studies.

5.7.1. What could be improved upon?

In order to make the interview accessible visual aids were used to support the data collection stage. However, the visual aids differed in terms of quality and quantity of what was recorded, for example, one pupil used photographs and had many pages to share whilst another had only a single drawing. There was also the potential for bias if another person helped participants create this. It could have been improved by having a pre-interview session in which to complete this activity with each of the participants.

The research explores the participants' experience at a single point in time. Interviews may have produced different views of their experience if captured at a different time. This could be improved by interviewing participants over a period of weeks which would allow the participants' time to build rapport with the researcher.

Another critique pertains to the lack of standardised evaluation criteria for validity in qualitative studies. The researcher attempted to address this through

Yardley's (2007) framework of evidencing sensitivity to content, commitment and rigour, coherence, transparency, impact and importance and these are detailed in the methodology chapter.

The quality of the analysis of the participants' experience is reliant upon the researcher having a commitment to detail, truthfulness and conscientiousness. A limitation is that interpretation is open to bias consciously and unconsciously on the part of the researcher during both the interview and interpretation stages. The use of semi-structured interviews may have facilitated participants to speak of experiences important to them, but at the same time the researcher was seeking to explore specific phenomena which may have created tensions during the process.

The analysis is that of the researcher, through engagement with the interview data provided by the six participants. It is the responsibility of the researcher to report what the text says to them as there is no further involvement of the participant in the interpretation phase and so no means of checking the accuracy of interpretation. Another researcher may have interpreted the themes differently. An improvement to the current study would be to share the interpretations with the participant to check for accuracy. The analysis of the

data was monitored by other Doctoral students to ensure it was a 'reasonable interpretation' of the data.

The pupils were selected from a limited pool of pupils locally who met the requirement of the study. This reflected a lack of ethnographic representation but was representative of the LA in which it took place.

The researcher was aware that a small-scale study using individual stories had limitations in terms of generalisation but that it enables us to understand some children's experiences and feelings in some depth.

5.7.2. What was unavoidable?

The participants of this study have SLCN and so there was a lack of quality and quantity of language to explore as a result. IPA relies on the importance of language and the ability of participants to tell narratives. The onus is on the researcher in interpreting the information which is made more difficult with limited language fluency. Interpretations often went beyond the verbal responses as greater interpretation was required with sparse transcripts and there is a risk that some interpretations may not have come from the data. This leads to greater potential for bias. The researcher attempted to guard against this through the application of double hermeneutics. This required close attention to the hermeneutic cycle of movement between the part and the

whole to guide interpretations and acknowledge that access to the participant's experience was only through the participants' account of it. Ideally it would have been beneficial if participants' language had been richer, but real world research will always have some degree of limitation. Whilst the researcher acknowledged that IPA with participants with SLCN might be a challenge, this in itself was not a justifiable reason to exclude this group from this type of research analysis, and was deemed to be the most effective analytical tool to use with the data gained.

As with any form of interview, there is the potential for a power imbalance. Whilst the researcher was mindful not to explicitly influence the participants' sharing of their experiences in any way, there was always an element of power imbalance in terms of the researcher being the adult and asking the questions. Issues of power during the interview stage may bring into question the reliability of the participants' responses as being a true reflection of their experience.

5.8. Reflections

The participants were regarded as a homogeneous group in terms of all having identified SLCN and so perhaps the overarching theme 'Language skills and the impact on narratives' could be considered obvious. However, it was the

compensatory strategies that the participants used to convey their experiences and the understanding that they had of their worlds as a result of their difficulties, which became of interest and was unexpected. This highlights why phenomenological research with this particular group is important and another methodology may not have been so effective in exploring this phenomena. Friendships emerged as a dominant feature even though the interview schedule did not have questions about relationships in it; this highlights how the phenomenological principles were upheld by allowing participants to discuss the experiences that they thought were relevant in relation to the questions being asked and guiding research questions. The participants provided accounts of their lives and primary and secondary experiences even though they found the phenomena of secondary readiness difficult to conceptualise.

As the focus was on participant experience, and their meaning-making of this, it was important that this was not lost in the analysis by the researcher. There was an ethical duty to report the views that participants shared in a way that was fair, accurate and honoured their experiences. Each pupil was treated as if they were the first and only participant in the research so that the individuality of each participant's narrative would be honoured, the idiographic nature of IPA retained and novel themes would be encouraged to emerge.

Whilst the researcher was mindful not to unduly influence participants, any interview situation creates power issues between researcher and participant. However, there were times during interview when the power imbalance appeared to be in favour of the participant. This was most evident in the case of one participant and demonstrates how children may have ways of communicating dissent, such as switching the topic of the conversation, looking away or silence (Merrick, 2011). Through the use of a reflective journal, I was able to explore my thoughts and reactions that may have influenced interpretation of the data.

Reflection occurred throughout the research process. I was mindful that the participants had identified SLCN and the challenge I might have had in understanding their communications. I was also a stranger and was grateful and honoured that each participant opened up their thoughts and feelings and shared with me to the extent that they did. I remained aware of the dynamics of the interaction and when understanding broke down on my part or theirs, sought ways to repair this without influencing them. The aim was to have participants feel empowered to express their lived experience and to feel heard and respected. I was impressed by the important insights that they were able

to provide as well as some of their thoughtful reflections about their past and conceptualisations about their future.

5.9. Conclusion

This research was based on qualitative IPA of a small sample of six participants. It is important to acknowledge the idiographic nature of such findings and that the aim was not for these to be generalised, but to extend our learning and understanding. It enables us to understand some children's experiences and feelings in some depth. Whilst cross case analysis attempted to organise participants' experiences into common themes, the nature of studying the lived experience of individual people means that presenting findings should also attempt to convey the richness and complexity of human experience.

This research has generated new knowledge about the area of readiness for secondary school by providing an in-depth insight into the experiences of six young people at the point of transition. It identified common themes across participants and many of these corroborated previous research findings, suggesting the experiences of these participants have commonalities with other pupils' perceptions of school and transitioning into secondary school.

It was the researcher's intention that these young people felt listened to and that this would inspire EPs and other professionals to consider ways to engage with vulnerable young people in a person-centred way in order to empower them and support a shared understanding with the relevant professionals involved with them. Pupils, including vulnerable pupils, are experts on their own lived experience and they are experts on the tools they can apply to share their experiences in order to contribute to the improvement of the systems in which they are a part. As this study demonstrated, each participant had a unique educational history, including strengths, interests, needs, coping mechanisms, experiences and hopes for the future. It highlights the need to view each individual in a holistic context to fully appreciate their narratives and ways to support them. The EP is ideally positioned to facilitate exploration of a young person's strengths and needs and their interactions within the systems that surround them.

The phenomenological assumptions of the study facilitated an understanding of each participant's lived experience and allowed for them to be explored at an individual level and as a group of pupils with SLCN. The outcome of this study demonstrated the ability and capacity of these pupils to express their views and feelings. All of the participants evidenced that they were not only capable of, but felt empowered to, provide a viewpoint on their experiences of

school. This fulfilled the emancipatory aim of this study and participants appeared to relish the opportunity to talk. In spite of their communication needs, the young people in this study felt that their voices were heard, and as a result they were empowered to express their thoughts about the impending transition process and to share their feelings of being ready for secondary school.

The purpose of this research was to explore what the experiences of such pupils can tell us about the phenomena of secondary school readiness. As a researcher, it was my hope that the concept of 'readiness' would be elicited from the pupils themselves through exploration of personal journeys and the meanings that pupils assigned to this experience. This research is important and relevant as there is a national demand for 'person-centred' practice and this study places the pupil as an active participant in the exploration of their readiness for secondary school. In terms of what we can learn about secondary readiness, it appears that there is no substitution for opportunities for pupils to find out for themselves the issues that matter to them and to check their assumptions. Readiness for secondary school may then be about finding out details and forming realistic expectations, coping tools and building relationships with people who are already part of the system before, during and after the transition

period. The findings revealed that for these participants the experience of secondary readiness is about the importance of friendships, the positive feelings regarding secondary school and the importance of induction experiences, pupils feeling that they were prepared for secondary school, and perceptions of secondary school as being ‘better’ and a rite of passage.

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