**Making sense of ‘challenging’ behaviour in Reception: A discursive exploration of the way parents and teachers construct young children.**

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**Research thesis submitted in part requirement for the**

**Doctor of Educational and Child Psychology**

**Department of Educational Studies**

**May 2016**

# Abstract

The rise of so-called challenging behaviour in primary schools continues to be a topic for discussion amongst educators, politicians and the media. Children are often quickly categorised as having Social Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties or as being simply ‘naughty’ within a framework of available discourses dominated by constructed understanding of the ‘bad’, ‘mad’ or ‘sad’ (MacLeod, 2006). This thesis explores how parents and school staff use language to make sense of and share understanding of children’s behaviour that is understood to be ‘challenging’ or ‘problematic’ as they begin the journey through school based education- in Reception Year of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

A qualitative design was followed to provide in-depth research; focussing specifically on language used to share understanding of the behaviour of a five-year-old child. The study explored how key adults around a child drew upon various discourses to construct the child and bring meaning to the child’s actions. Data was gathered from semi-structured interviews with school staff and the child’s parents, followed by a joint consultation involving myself, the school staff and the parents. A critical analytic approach was drawn upon through a synthetic use of Discursive Psychology and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. This provided a framework to explore both *how* discursive resources were used to make sense of behaviour, as well as *what* constructs were produced and how they were made available to others (Willig, 2008).

This approach was found to be helpful in understanding the ambiguity and complexity of shared understanding of ‘challenging’ behaviour. Emerging discourses of pathology, disciplinary practices and the construction of the ‘normal’ school child within ‘normal’ development emphasised the power dynamics present and active within the EYFS education system. Discursive complexities of what it means to be ‘good’ and how adults position themselves in ensuring such social compliance also became relevant.

# Acknowledgements

# This thesis is dedicated to Tom and to the children I have worked with in schools, whose behaviour is understood to be ‘challenging’.

# I would like to thank the parents and the school staff involved in this study, whose honesty and openness contributed to its depth.

# A special thank you to my husband Henry, and children Elena and Evie, for your endless patience and support and for inspiring me to never give up.

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# Chapter One: Introduction

The aim of this research is to explore how parents and school staff use language to make sense of the behaviour of a Reception-aged child, which is understood to be ‘challenging’. More specifically, the aim is to analyse how language is used to construct the child and bring meaning to the child’s actions.

I have adopted a largely reflective approach to the research, and feel that an awareness of how my interest within this area has developed is helpful at this stage. During my undergraduate studies in Sociology I was introduced to the thinking of Gramsci and Foucault. I became particularly fascinated in the use of language as a social tool, an interest that continued to grow as I began working in schools ten years ago. At this stage I felt that I became witness to the impact of discourse and hegemony upon children’s developing sense of self and felt that categories produced by society were often oppressive and disempowering.

Within my work as a Teaching Assistant, often closely supporting children in primary schools who were categorised within the school system as ‘challenging’, I often felt frustrated by the development of negative reputations around a child (often shared and reinforced within staffroom conversation) and how such reputations appear to impact on both how children are treated and how the child feels about themselves and others. I have a particularly strong memory of a child who was understood as ‘challenging’ in Reception of the school I worked in and the language around him, even at such a young age, included descriptions of him being ‘just evil’. Later within my role of Lead of Social-Emotional Well-Being in a Primary school I attempted to work closely with both children and school staff to develop a deeper level of understanding of children’s needs- particularly those children who adults around them had identified as ‘challenging’.

Understanding how people make sense of children’s behaviour and the particular significance of language has become even more significant during my EP training as challenging narratives and encouraging the production of emancipatory discourses filters into every part of the EP role. I have developed an increasing interest in consultation and supervisory approaches as opportunities for challenging negative constructs and for supporting change.

The language surrounding Reception aged children who are understood as displaying ‘challenging’ behaviours became a focus for this research. I believe that making sense of a child’s behaviour and the resulting actions and language used around the child at an early stage is imperative for the child’s developing sense of self and understanding of the social world. These early experiences in which the child begins their school-based educational journey are key for laying the foundations of their understanding of their place within the school system and, at a wider level, within society as a whole. The impact of language, which places constructed meaning on a child’s behaviour, and thus may influence the actions surrounding the child, may be particularly significant at such an early stage of childhood. Understanding how key adults around the child are beginning to make sense of behaviour and develop discourses to construct the child seems a particularly significant starting place for exploring the socially constructed complexities of ‘challenging’ behaviour in the Reception class.

# Chapter Two: A critical literature review of constructing Early Years ‘challenging’ behaviour

## Overview

This chapter will explore how children who are understood to present with ‘challenging’ behaviours are constructed through dominant discourses and how this may potentially impact on the child’s developing sense of self and life outcomes. I will view constructs within the context of the primary school and early school experiences to explore how developing negative reputations may be influenced by a wider systemic context and shaped within available language.

The literature review will attempt to avoid a restrictive or fixed approach to explaining what adults understand as ‘challenging’ behaviour. Instead it aims to explore the process of constructing the socially produced category of ‘challenging’ behaviour through culturally available discourses. I begin by introducing the historical context to categorising so-called ‘challenging’ behaviour and then introduce the dominant concept of behaviours fitting within currently available categories of SEBD/SEMH. To use these categories is not to suggest that such difficulties exist, rather, I am acknowledging and exploring what language is available and used to produce meaning. I emphasise that the range of terms used are utilised to explore the production and reinforcement of socially constructed discourses. Such discourses provide frames of understanding to adults who feel that they are faced with behaviour understood as challenging.

## The changing categories of ‘problem’ behaviour

Disagreement in this area of Special Educational Need is more widespread than any other (Frederickson and Cline, 2009). Children who are positioned within these categories experience a range of difficulties; therefore needs within this area are hard to define. Terminology used to describe children whose behaviour is perceived to be ‘challenging’ within an educational context has included: Maladjustment (1944 Education Act), Emotional and Behavioural Disorders, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) and Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) (Frederickson and Cline, 2009). More recently the 2015 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice (Department for Education and Department of Health) provided a further re-categorisation of BESD to ‘Social Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties’ (SEMHD). This has signaled a significant shift in the understanding of classroom behaviour. The impact of such a dramatic change in policy is yet to be fully explored and evaluated, however, positioning ‘challenging’ classroom behaviour within a mental health category clearly reframes dominant understanding of a significant group of children’s needs within the Special Educational Needs (SEN) system.

As demonstrated above, language used to define ‘challenging’ behaviour is fluid and routinely altered. It therefore seems key to address the current available description provided through government SEND documents:

## Social, emotional and mental health difficulties

6.32   Children and young people may experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in many ways. These may include becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. These behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained. Other children and young people may have disorders such as attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder or attachment disorder.

(Department for Education and Department of Health, 2015: 98)

The description acknowledges the complexity of ‘social, emotional and mental health difficulties’, whilst also stating the impact identified behaviours may have on the school: “disruptive or disturbing behaviour”. The definition of such difficulties is then very closely linked to a number of ‘disorders’ that are located within the child/young person and understood to potentially evidence a mental health difficulty. Schools are therefore currently encouraged to recognise ‘challenging’ behaviour as a Special Educational Need and to consider that such needs may link directly to mental health.

Understanding the needs of the SEMH category

Understanding and catering for the needs of children identified as SEBD is often a very different experience than for children with a specific learning difficulty (Jull, 2008). Jull suggests that disruptive behavior and the externalization of their needs makes such children more vulnerable to being punished rather than supported emotionally through an appropriately modified Individual Education Plan. This may be due to the threat of ‘challenging’ behaviour weakening the safe, calm, positive working environment, which schools are under significant amounts of pressure to provide for their pupils. Reactive attempts to immediately correct externalized behaviours, rather than understanding the child and providing appropriate support, may lead to further difficulties for all those involved within the situation (Jull, 2008). The discomfort this may cause however, may ultimately lead to less emphasis on support and more emphasis on within-child blame.

Thomas (2005) suggests that the discourse of ‘need’ surrounding ‘problem’ behaviour should be approached critically due to the potentially problematic impact of categorizing a child with needs – and thus within a deficit model:

The notion of need here is based on a belief that a child’s problems are being identified and addressed. ‘Need’ in this context, however is more usefully seen as the school’s need- a need for calm and order

(Thomas, 2005: 49)

Whilst identifying ‘need’ in children who are understood to present with challenging behaviour is seen as a constructive action in schools (Thomas, 2005), a Foucauldian interpretation of the discourse of need would perhaps provide evidence of the ‘gentle way of punishment’ (Foucault, 1991: 104). Punishment in this sense relates to the construct surrounding ‘need’, which relies on claims of scientific fact and powerful judgements about ‘misbehaviour’ (Thomas, 2005). Foucault suggests that such discourse defines behaviour, limits action and contributes to how individuals are positioned within the power structures of society:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it does not only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.

(Foucault, 1980: 119)

In relation to the earlier mentioned shifting of the definition of challenging behaviour towards a definition embedded within mental health discourse, a Foucauldian interpretation would perhaps suggest that such discourse further categorises individuals and removes their potential for agency. Mental health discourse relates closely to illness and weakness, thus risking covertly stigmatizing the group and positioning them within a passive ‘patient’ category within society. The ‘challenging’ behaviour of a child in this sense no longer becomes punished for individual acts of wrongdoing, but for existing within a specific social category.

## Outcomes for primary aged children described as SEBD/SEMHD

The described ‘disturbed’ or ‘disruptive’ behaviour of children understood to have SEBD/SEMHD, contrasts sharply with the calm and order that schools aim to convey. As such, outcomes may include fixed term or permanent exclusion from school. Phrases such as ‘persistent disruptive behaviour’, ‘assault against an adult’ and ‘assault against a pupil’ (Department for Education, 2015) present an image of aggression and non-compliant behaviour occurring both within secondary school and early childhood. In research focused on children excluded from primary school, Hayden (1997) suggests many children identified as having Special Educational Needs are excluded from school because of behaviour described as 'disruptive' and 'uncooperative' or sometimes 'aggressive'. It is suggested that further attention should be placed on understanding the underlying reasons for these sustained patterns of behaviours and why such children are unable to respond to fair authoritative adult discipline (Hayden, 1997). Mosley (1993) explores the idea of the ‘child beyond’, who is unable to respond to typical sanctions and rewards seen in primary school behaviour policies, as their basic emotional and physical needs appear to be unmet.

Exclusion from school is often associated with deterioration in family relationships or family placements (Hayden, 1997). In such situations, school, through the act of exclusion, is seen to create increased opportunity for involvement with negative peer groups, potentially deviant behaviour and eventually criminal activity (Martin & Hayman, 1997) thus contributing further towards their identified difficulties. The negative experience of exclusion is also seen to have an adverse impact on the child’s ‘self-esteem’ (Hayden and Ward, 1996).

Government statistics for Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions in England: 2013 to 2014 state:

The number of permanent exclusions has increased from 4,630 in 2012/13 to 4,950 in 2013/14… The greatest increase in the number of permanent exclusions occurred in primary schools, where there were 870 permanent exclusions in 2013/14 compared to 670 in 2012/13… Overall persistent disruptive behaviour is the most common reason for permanent exclusions, accounting for 32.7 per cent of all permanent exclusions up from 30.8 per cent of permanent exclusions in 2012/13…There was a considerable rise in the number of fixed period exclusions in primary schools from 37,870 in 2012/13 to 45,010 in 2013/14… Persistent disruptive behaviour accounts for 25.3 per cent of all fixed period exclusions, up from 24.2 per cent in 2012/13.

(Department for Education, 2015: 3-4)

‘Behaviour and Mental Health in Schools’ (Department For Education, 2016) lists a range of risk and protective factors in four key areas: In the Child, In the School, In the Family, In the Community:

Risk factors are cumulative. Children exposed to multiple risks such as social disadvantage, family adversity and cognitive or attention problems are much more likely to develop behavioural problems.

(Department for Education, 2016: 8)

Similarly, protective factors are identified within all four key areas. Secure attachment experiences, good communication skills, positive classroom management, a sense of belonging and clear consistent discipline were identified as factors that build resilience to behaviour and mental health problems (Department for Education, 2016: 9).

A number of strategies are promoted in schools to support resilience and emotional well-being. Nurture groups are an identified intervention, which rely on predictable daily routines, emotional literacy sessions, group activities, curriculum tasks and breakfast and have provided schools with what is widely regarded as a positive resource for supporting children who may otherwise be perceived as a ‘problem’. (The Nurture Group Network). Evidence suggests that nurture groups provide better outcomes for children with SEBD/SEMHD. Ofsted (2011) have concluded that nurture groups significantly modify pupils’ behaviour, improve SEBD, give parents support, accelerated academic progress, enabled pupils to reintegrate with mainstream class and improved pupils’ attendance.

Whilst a number of strategies are encouraged to support nurturing and empathic relational approaches, the earlier presented exclusion statistics suggest that much more work is needed in supporting understanding and promoting positive change. Part of this challenge is arguably in re-framing common misconceptions relating to ‘challenging’ behaviour and in attempting to shift beliefs regarding what ‘normal’ behaviour and children should look and act like; a concept that I will return to later in the chapter.

## Construction of SEBD/SEMHD against the backdrop of the ‘norm’

An individual’s understanding of the social world that they are part of, interacting within and experiencing at all levels is ultimately shaped by language. Burr (2003) suggests that “language and our use of it, far from simply describing the world, both constructs the world as we perceive it and has real consequences” (Burr, 2003: 46). Through this social constructionist view, language can create boundaries, differences and cultural meaning. Burr (2003) comments how our understanding of what we know the world and other people to mean would not simply exist as part of a ‘natural’ part of human nature without language. Instead language is fundamental to the meanings that are created - it ultimately structures our experiences. Language constructs a world in which individuals can communicate needs, belong within certain categories and perhaps essentially to humans, establish a sense of identity.

From a sociological perspective James and Prout (1997) state that childhood is a social construction, distinct from biological immaturity and a stage that can be seen as ‘natural’. It cannot be entirely separated from social concepts such as ethnicity, class and gender. Children should be perceived as active in the construction of their social lives – they are not passive (James and Prout, 1997). Children should not be ‘naturalised’ as they “are not always and everywhere the same thing; they are socially constructed and understood contextually” (Jenks, 2010: 94).

Similarly, Burman (2007) challenges the ‘natural’ view of development and childhood, claiming that beliefs around children are not fixed but fluid, adapting to the cultural context that surrounds them. Burman (2007) states that the ‘natural’ view of the child has recently shifted from the child as a victim, to the child as the ‘perpetrator’. This dominant representation of children challenges the traditional view of children as innocent passive creatures and again demonstrates a recent historical and cultural shift of the meaning of childhood, which challenges alternative views of what childhood should ‘naturally’ be: “Current anxieties with children's anti-social activities are nothing new, but rather the latest challenge to the recent hegemonic view of childhood innocence.” (Burman, 2007: 75)

These perspectives emphasise the cultural complexity of the categorisation and discursive framing of a group of children in society. The perspectives encourage a critique of the common-sense assumptions surrounding what we understand about children/young people who do not conform. The social constructionist viewpoint questions the terms ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ and reflects on how society has constructed discourses around such terms. With regards to ‘challenging’ behaviour, the ‘problematic’ child does not fit the mould of the ‘naturally’ passive and obedient child which society has constructed – hence suggesting a sense of anxiety and discomfort around supporting their needs.

## Constructing SEBD/SEMHD through language

It is suggested that individuals are not entirely passive within society’s culturally constructed language system:

“Behind whatever is the presentation, whether of activity or passivity, there must be an active player, the person as strategist. Speaking and hearing, conversing, is something we do. It is not something that happens to us.”

(Harré and Stearns, 1995: 136)

However, there are those who present as more vulnerable to segregation and the multiple elements of social injustice, as a result of simplistic terminology of difference. Foucault (1977) identifies the growth of scientifically driven social institutions and the surrounding discourse of discipline as contributing towards the process of creating social exclusion. Naturalised dichotomies of right/wrong, good/evil, have over the past three hundred years been generated through dominant discourses of science from those in positions of power to develop social power relations and regulate populations. A dominant ‘norms’ versus pathology binary operates as a key social tool for such regulative practices. Billington (2000) argues that children have become a targeted part of the population for such governmentality. Exploring the outcomes of difference enforced through labelling of psychopathology offers an understanding of how language of ‘difference’ or ‘abnormal’ can separate a child from their social relations, future possibilities and an understanding of their own abilities and intelligences (Billington, 2000).

Children can be pathologised by available discourses within society. This vulnerability can be seen when children who have recently started school are labelled as having ‘behavioural difficulties’. Billington (2000) argues that the everyday use of language, which attaches labels of ‘disease of the mind’ to children within education systems, can have a ‘stigmatising effect of a social disease’ (Billington, 2000: 22) – with long lasting life outcomes for the individual. Billington (2000) suggests that whilst a term like ‘behavioural difficulties’ may appear deceptively mild, the constructs which generate around the child as a result of such a categorisation leads to a wide range of social and emotional implications with wide-reaching, long-term effects, such as: the possible risk of several changes of school, restriction of economic opportunities and lack of search for potential.

Pomerantz (2008) explores power relations constructed by discourses and suggests that dominant discourses within the media construct the identity of adolescent boys so that it is difficult to challenge the perpetuating practices of separating and excluding from society. The ‘common sense’ knowledge and ‘grand narratives’ in which these children and young people are positioned, work to normalise the stigmas and unjust treatment of them. Whilst these narratives are deeply embedded within culture, autonomy does allow for the identification of alternative constructions that ‘promote more inclusive subject positions’ (Pomerantz, 2008: 10).

## A context of blame?

‘Problem behaviour’ has been associated with a large number of within-child factors as highlighted by (MacLure et al 2011). These include: language delay, poor impulse control and motivation, inability to cooperate and anticipate consequences, poor concentration and low empathy and self-esteem. Maclure et al (2011) found that a child’s ‘deficit’ is understood by school staff to lie within the child or at home- rooted ‘somewhere else’. They also question societies awareness or acceptance of the role of education in producing the identified ‘deficit’. Maclure et al (2011) specifically shaped their discursive research to explore ‘problematic behaviour’ within the Reception classroom - looking at how it ‘emerged within, and was shaped by, the culture of the classroom and by wider educational and social discourses’ (p. 448). From this we are reminded that children exist within a public sphere whilst they are at school. They are open to the gaze of pupils, teachers, other school staff and parents who all attempt to construct the child using the most available and seemingly most fitting discourses to hand, within a society which offers powerful definitions of ‘normal’ as a backdrop (Maclure, 2011). Findings demonstrated that the language surrounding children’s negative reputations led teaching staff to focus on deficits within the child’s social/home context, rather than seeing it as a response to different environments and experiences – including the school. Such understanding was identified as potentially being much less productive for the child’s well-being.

Macleod (2006) suggests that three main perspectives exist within the constructions of young people ‘in trouble’: constructions of young people as ‘bad’, ‘sad’ or ‘mad’. The first adopts a moralistic perspective and blames problems on the individual deficits of the child. The second more heavily on ‘structural inequalities’. The third, which Macleod (2006) recognizes as becoming increasingly dominant within contemporary society, involves pathologising and the medicalisation of behaviour – alongside a removal of blame as the young person is construed as ill or mentally unstable. Lloyd (2003) suggests that psycho-medical models of ‘troubling’ behaviour ‘tend to deny agency and individual subject consciousness to the pupil’ (2003, p. 31) and also lack a sensitivity towards social context.

As noted previously, simplistic and deep-rooted perceptions of SEBD often provide an unhelpful contribution to developing identities and the treatment of children who often have many multi-layered needs, which require recognition and catering for sensitively at an individual level. Armstrong and Hallett (2012) explores international research studies, which suggest that many children categorized as SEBD may have mental health needs that go unidentified. Soles et al (2008) also identified children with significant depression within their study, who were not recognized by their teachers (whom they saw daily) as being anything more than poorly behaved. MacFarlane and Woolfson (2013), suggest that education policy could be an enabling (rather than disabling) normative influence upon educator perceptions of this population. Whilst it is arguably important to challenge and critique the over pathologising of behaviour, it could be suggested that studies such as these also highlight a general misunderstanding of the individual needs of children who present with ‘challenging’ behaviour.

Disruptive behaviour often becomes understood as a ‘within- child’ problem. However, Harris (2006) and Mayer (2001) explore systemic perspectives and how children seen as SEBD can be understood as a challenge to schools that are having to provide an inclusive education system. Schools often struggle with children who appear to challenge authority and the traditional view of the educational environment: “Classrooms require ‘docile bodies and disembodied minds’ (Davis, 2005: 525), with ideal learners constructed as rational, detached and physically subdued” (Gillies, 2011: 186).

Millei (2005) explores the discourse of control in an Early Years classroom through a Foucauldian perspective. The research identifies how the understanding of ‘disruption’ as a control problem is entrenched within educational discourses including educational psychology. Neo-Skinnerian behavioural terms such as stimulus-response conditioning (through practices such as rewards and ‘consequences’) are heavily utilized as a way to ‘manage’ unwanted behaviours and thus to discipline children.

The discourse of control in this particular pre-primary classroom became the dominant discourse of understanding… the same discourse joined teacher’s actions towards the conduct of young human beings and created the only possible subject positions for both teachers and young human beings.

(Millei, 2005:129)

Through a case study design, Woods (2010) found how a child described as SEBD was caught in a vicious circle. Using pupil voice to optimize understanding of the child’s difficulties, the research highlighted how sanctions, behaviour discipline strategies and perceptions of unfairness lead to feelings of anger and a lack of pupil-teacher trust. Thus leading to pupils acting on their own set of moral values and consequently resulting in further sanctions, feelings of unfairness and potential anger.

## Reframing SEBD/SEMHD

MacLeod (2010) challenged the categorization of children understood as SEBD within studies. He attempted to identify the meaning of Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties or more recently Social Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties, and reframe it to ‘study of (the) behaviour of young people which causes adults concern’ (Macleod, 2010: 96). Armstrong (2014) refined this definition by adding ‘children’, to emphasise the study of SEBD as the study of adult psychological reactions to the behaviours of children or young people.

Reframing may rely on placing children at the centre and providing opportunities to fully understand their world and individual views. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that:

Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

(UNICEF, 1999: Article 12)

Interestingly, such reframing would directly shift the power balance within the process of understanding of children’s needs. Empowering pupils may be an uncomfortable process for the dominant structures that seek to maintain control over passive learners. It is argued by Sellman (2009) that, “Many mainstream teachers overtly or covertly resist pupil empowerment initiatives as they are uneasy about conceding power and control to pupils” (p.34). Sellman (2009) also suggests that whilst research on pupils’ perspectives within this group is limited, available research suggests pupils often state their difficulties are a result of biological conditions (such as ADHD) – thus reproducing the dominant voice of the medical model, developed by other people in their lives. It is suggested that such a ‘mis-education’ needs an arena in which it can be safely re-conceptualised, providing opportunities for young people to develop further understanding of themselves as individuals.

## The Importance of Relationships: Working together to explore, reconstruct and overcome difficulties

Ramvi (2010) suggests that the success of the teacher-pupil relationship relies heavily on a teacher’s ability to recognize anxiety in themselves as well as the pupils. They suggest that without this sensitivity, the teacher is more likely to punish the child rather than develop a relationship in which they can offer containment for the pupil.

In a study that explored later psychiatric disorder among children with problematic teacher-pupil relationships, Lang et al (2013) reported:

Clear association between poor teacher-pupil relationships and the presence of psychiatric disorder at secondary-school age as well as primary-school age: effects that mostly remain significant when adjusted for a range of confounding factors. These results suggest that a difficult relationship with a teacher may be highly detrimental to a child’s well-being, and may actually precipitate behavioural problems in some young people.

(Lang et al, 2013: 340)

The study looks at the impact adverse teacher-pupil relationships can have on children’s emotional well-being and health. It highlights the importance of supporting teachers in understanding children’s emotional needs and developing positive relationships (Lang et al, 2013).

The role of the Educational Psychologist and Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) is key in supporting parents and schools in finding new ways of understanding challenging behaviour. For example, schools who have made a consultation request for psychological support often already feel stuck within a ‘problem’ of what they perceive as a abnormal, unmanageable behaviour. Narratives within consultation are often based around how the school has ‘tried everything’ to support the child, with limited success, whilst the parent/carer may often feel that they are also struggling and sense that that there may be a further underlying reason for their child’s difficulties (Billington, 2000). As a result the Educational Psychologist and TEP often take on a therapeutic role in listening to and containing (Bion, 1962) the school and parents pain. Farrell (2006) discusses the importance of consultation for the role of the Educational Psychologist in promoting positive change:

The origins of consultation are entirely consistent with an inclusive approach and lie in the fact that pupils do not live in a vacuum, that psycho/social/educational problems are multi- facetted, and that they exist in a social context in which a number of people have an interest in helping to bring about change. Therefore explanations for a child’s reported problems are unlikely to be rooted in one place – e.g., within the child.

(Farrell, 2006: 297)

In relation to the discussion of ‘problems’ with those who feel immersed within the situation, Avdi (2012) emphasizes the need to explore the language used to fully understand each individual’s needs and position within the problem. Avdi discusses the various narrative and dialogical forms of psychological approaches, which are used to focus on the construction of meaning within a psychotherapy framework:

Psychological problems are approached as interactional and discursive phenomena that are created, maintained and dissolved in and through language and social interaction (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; McNamee & Gergen,1992). Broadly speaking, this literature tends to expand the focus from individual psychology to the social, political and cultural conditions that produce mental distress.

(Avdi, 2012: 62)

Narrative and dialogical frameworks allow an exploration of subject positioning and the use of discourse. Subject positioning refers to how individuals are positioned, and position themselves, within language and social interactions (Willig, 2008). A focus on subject positioning can help the analyst to understand how the individual is experiencing the world. As therapy is also viewed as a collaborative process of meaning making when approached through this perspective, it can be a particularly useful way of fully exploring the implications of various discourses in the ‘clients’ difficulties (Avdi, 2012):

The analytic tool of subject positioning offers the potential of studying therapy as an interaction, attending to the active role of therapists, and taking into account the powerful role of context in people’s sense of self and in the course of therapy.

(Avdi, 2012: 74)

Additional understanding and discussion around how the child has been constructed and the differing interpretations of the child’s needs, within successful consultation, may help to establish mutually supportive trusting relationships (Farrell, 2006) and have a potentially positive impact on the child. Within the consultation process dominant discourses may also become apparent and the space can provide opportunity for challenge and reconstruction. Alternatively an awareness of the dominant discourses can provide a space to empower individuals by giving them opportunity for their voice to be heard and encouraged at an equal level to others (Rimehaug and Helmersberg, 2010). In relation to the earlier mentioned ‘blame’ of behaviour – attached by schools to parents, consultation can provide this key opportunity to develop alternative ways of thinking and narratives.

Cottle and Alexander (2014) explore the historical impact of dominant policy discourses within Early Years parent-teacher partnership and identify two dominant contradictory discourse relating to teacher’s perspectives of parents: ‘parent agency’ and ‘deficient parenting’ (Blackmore and Hutchison, 2010). The ‘parent agency’ perspective is an understanding of parents as competent and both actively and positively involved in supporting their child’s education. In contrast the ‘deficient parenting’ perspective provides the opposite understanding of parenting, as uninvolved and uninterested and attracts blame for unwanted behaviours of the child. Similarly, parents are often understood as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (Smidt, 2007) depending on how they support the school setting. Whilst relationships between parents and teachers are recognized to be embedded within a historical context of the school as an institutional system led by continuously changing government policies, it is also recognized that the partnership is fundamental to quality provision in the EYFS (Cottle and Alexander, 2014).

Kotthoff (2015) identifies how parents describe their resources or ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986) during discussions with teachers about their children- to demonstrate what positive attributes they are able to contribute to the school. This can present as an ‘idealised’ account of school-oriented ways of parenting and demonstrates how parents can conform to the dominant discourses and practices of the school system. Such findings are particularly interesting within the context of challenging negative constructs of young children. Parents may feel more obliged to follow the lead of the school, with regards to understanding behaviour and constructing the child. They may demonstrate their cultural capital in a number of ways such as following the school’s reward system and sanctioning their child in front of school staff to show that they are not weak parents. The deployment of such social resources potentially defends against the threat of negative deficient parenting discourse.

## Constructing Self

Whilst society continues to construct children who are understood to display ‘challenging’ behaviour, and those around the child attempt to make sense of the behaviour and indeed attempt to cope with the complexity of factors surrounding the behaviour, it seems the child is left to make sense of how they may fit into the socially embedded confusion.

It is thought that children’s ‘theories’ about who they are and how they fit into society are revised and revisited throughout childhood (Schaffer, 2006). Both social experience and cognitive development encourage self-awareness. However, it is suggested that it is ‘other’s’ perceptions and responses, which play a crucial role in the construction of self within childhood. Cooley (1902) referred to the ‘looking-glass self’ to describe self as a reflection of how others see us. The self can thus be conceptualised as intersubjective: developed within a wider cultural context and shaped through the views, values and visions of others.

From the Discursive Psychology perspective, language is undoubtedly a ‘resource for action’ (Edwards and Potter, 1992). Understanding of the development of the self fits within this conceptualization. Discourse can be used to describe people/children and from such descriptions action is taken:

Particular constructions of self and others are used to stabilize and make factual seeming, particular versions of events in the world which themselves contribute to the organization of current activities. (Edwards and Potter, 1992:129)

The self is understood to be socially constructed, born not freely but within a context of social frames. Expectations are understood to limit constructions of self (Howarth, 2002) and are influenced by the wider social and cultural context: “Always in a macro context influenced by historical and political issues of racism, gender, imperialism and power” (Aveling and Gillespie, 2008: 203). However, dialogue is recognized to promote agency and opportunities for difference. Self, as a multi-dimensional and fluid concept, can be supported to embrace change (Howarth, 2002).

## The Early Years and the impact of starting school

The years from birth to seven are a period in human development when the capacity to learn is, in John Brierley’s words (1994) at ‘flood-readiness’ (Fisher, 2010). However, Fisher (2010) suggests that in starting more formal education children’s readiness and eagerness for learning is stifled and ‘disaffected’. Children who had begun to construct their own understandings and constructs of the world and themselves within the world become confused and disheartened (Donaldson, 1978). Maclure (2011) for example notes that:

Whole-class teaching under contemporary conditions has particular rigours for very young pupils, as it submits them to extreme body discipline, requiring them to sit erect and immobile—i.e., ‘properly’—on the floor for substantial amounts of time.

(Maclure et al, 2011: 466)

Government expectations require children starting school to be working towards a range of Early Learning Goals, including the goal for ‘Managing Feelings and Behaviour’:

Children talk about how they and others show feelings, talk about their own and others’ behaviour, and its consequences, and know that some behaviour is unacceptable. They work as part of a group or class, and understand and follow the rules. They adjust their behaviour to different situations, and take changes of routine in their stride.

(Department for Education, 2013: 17)

Boxall and Lucas (2010) question how realistic this goal is for many children, often from complex backgrounds who enter school with emotional, social, behavioural and cognitive learning needs that cannot be fully catered for within the mainstream classroom. Those children who are far from reaching the early years goal but are expected to function within the typical norms and rules of a mainstream classroom, are more likely to experience difficulties and become at risk of exclusion. Margetts (2000) found that children who had Special Educational Needs and who displayed ‘problem’ behaviour, such as aggression or hyperactivity (identified using a standardized rating scale), as well as children from different ethnic backgrounds, were more likely to experience difficulty adjusting to their first year of school.

Sanders et al (2005) also explored the impact of the transition itself. Transition is recognized as a demanding time for children to learn to adapt to new surroundings, systems, hierarchies and rules as well as having to establish new social relationships. It is suggested that these key periods of change and challenge during the early years can impact enormously on the child’s future progression and development:

Each of these experiences is likely to affect children and their capacity to adjust and to learn. Such is the significance of early transitions for young children that it is essential that parents, educators, policy makers and politicians play close attention to young children’s experiences in order to provide well for them.

(Fabian and Dunlop, 2002: 1)

Children are expected to adjust quickly to a structured learning environment. Whilst the government proposed a change of direction towards a more play-based primary school pedagogy in 2010, this was not matched by the requirement for academic outcomes an curriculum expectations. There is a growing emphasis in Reception classes on the early development of literacy and numeracy skills rather than on the acquisition of social skills through play (Rogers and Rose, 2007). However, this stands in contradiction to research, which indicates that the most effective settings are those that focus as equally on the development of social emotional skills as on the acquisition of learning key skills through play. For example, settings that encourage children to resolve conflicts proactively “Through talk and rationalisation a proactive way, rather than relying on traditional disciplinary techniques of distraction or direct adult instruction.” *(*Rogers and Rose, 2007).

Gelder and Savage (2004) suggested that the Reception classroom is a ‘muddle in the middle’ to emphasise the lack of understanding and research into the social, emotional and educational needs of four year olds in schools. Indeed this phrase is reflected by Maclure et al (2011), who suggest that primary schools must interrupt the production of ‘negative reputations’ constructed around children who are seen as a ‘problem’ within Reception classes, and that perhaps reducing the “emotional quotient of classrooms” (p.467) is an integral part of this shift. Their findings suggest that perhaps the promoted emotional context of the classroom may sometimes be utilized negatively to shame and covertly marginalise children who are not behaving in the desired way. Whilst it is therefore recognized that children can benefit from *quality* Early Years provision (Rogers and Rose, 2007), further understanding of social-emotional pedagogy within such provision is seen as an essential part of ensuring the best outcomes for young children.

## Conclusion

‘Challenging’ behaviour in schools has been re-categorised multiple times since the 1944 Education Act. Language within such categories, produced through dominant discourses, works to construct children who present with social and emotional needs and potentially high levels of distress, in ways that fit with societal norms within a culturally and historically situated frame. The children who are constructing their sense of self within this specific context are not passive but active agents within the social world in which they are interacting, yet are limited by the adults who surround them and the discourses that are available to them. This seems particularly the case for young children who are adapting to new school systems and are extremely reliant on others to make sense of new experiences. There is the potential for negative reputations to be easily constructed around the child with limiting consequences. Opportunities to promote a sensitive understanding of all those involved within the ‘problem’ may provide a space for reconstructing the child’s difficulties and needs.

# Chapter Three: Methodology

## 

## Overview

This chapter aims to address methodological considerations and offer an overview of my epistemological positioning. A rationale for the selection of Discourse Analysis is provided, alongside an exploration of the specific critical approach adopted for this study. This chapter will also discuss the practicalities of procedure, data collection and ethical considerations.

## Ontology and Epistemology

The research is founded within a social constructionist epistemology and both an interactionist and critical framework. After consideration of the alternative methodologies, Discourse Analysis appeared most fitting for this research. The appeal of this approach is that it allows an exploration into construction of meaning within a social context. It avoids objective, positivist claims of quantifiable truth relating to a ‘real’ world and instead provides space for reflexivity and meaningful reflective accounts.

It is important to carefully consider the ontological and epistemological implications of subscribing to a social constructionist paradigm. This can be explored further through an understanding of ontology as being concerned with what exists in the world; our view and assumptions regarding the nature of reality (Willig, 2001). From the social constructionist perspective, reality cannot be known, as knowledge is fabricated from different perspectives (Burr, 2003). Psychological claims of objectivity are therefore rejected within this critical stance, as there are no facts or ways to avoid subjectivity. This ontological viewpoint offers a relativist position that has drawn influence from a number of disciplines such as sociology, linguistics and philosophy. Constructions, or categories and concepts, which offer ways to make sense, are understood to be continuously shifting and transforming over time and space. Sense making is therefore deemed to be culturally and historically specific, influenced by the social world in which it is created.

Language is a central component to the social constructionism paradigm, as ‘talk’ is understood to construct the world (Burr, 2003). Three key assumptions are made about the use of language: language does not directly reflect thoughts; our interests bias our descriptions of the world; language has a performative function- it allows us to accomplish things in the interpersonal world (Burr, 2003). The perspective therefore invites us to be cautious in our understanding of knowledge and critical in our considerations of how language categories are used between people to produce understanding. Research within this paradigm is therefore not interested with any ‘truth’ behind words, but how words are used to establish meaning and construct dominant forms of understanding.

In taking a social constructionist perspective, I am interested in the analysis of language and exploring how a child is constructed through the interactional and wider sociocultural context. I will not be looking for transparent reflections of the world that are ‘out there’ to be discovered- regarding challenging behaviour in the Early Years. The research questions therefore avoid such interpretations and instead aim to guide in-depth exploration into how language is being used around Reception aged children to construct meaning, with a specific focus on the use of dominant discourses. The final question opens up possible discussions regarding how language can be used to guide opportunities for positive future outcomes.

## Research Questions:

* How are Reception aged children, who are described as presenting with ‘challenging’ behaviour, constructed by the adults around them?
* Does the language used between different adults that are in an on-going relationship with the child tell us something about possible opportunities to question or alter how the child is constructed?

## The ‘turn to language’: discourses within the social context

The past century has given rise to the development of definitions of discourses, which are socially located. Parker (1992) offers a concise definition to emphasise the constructive nature of discourses:

A system of statements, which constitute an object. (Parker, 1992: 4)

Stuart Hall offers more detail about the cultural formation of discourses:

Discourses are ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice; a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated, with a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society.

(Hall, 1997: 6)

Such understandings have been underpinned by the formation of critical approaches to language, which reject cognitivist views of language as simply expressing experience; instead suggesting that language constitutes experiences and the subjective reality of social life (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

Theorists such as Wittgenstein and Foucault have heavily influenced the shift towards placing discourse within a social, historical and political context – in which language is produced. For example, Wittgenstein claimed that psychological states should be treated as social, discursive activities rather than expressions of deeper ‘essences’ beneath the words (Wittgenstein, 1953). Foucault spoke of a ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault, 1980: 131) in explaining the emergence of socially constructed dominant discourses – imposed through social interaction and institutions. In exploring the construction of knowledge and discursive spaces the researcher is encouraged to look towards the social world in action. Burman and Parker offer a helpful reminder:

Psychological phenomena have a public and collective reality, and we are mistaken if we think they have their origin in the private space of the individual

(Parker*,* 1993: 1)

Social interaction therefore offers a platform for exploring and beginning to understand psychological phenomena.

## What is Discourse Analysis?

Potter and Wetherell (1987) describe discourse as:

All forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds. So when we talk of discourse analysis, we mean analysis of any of these forms of discourse.

(Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 7)

Willig (1999) suggests that Discourse Analysis is concerned with the way such spoken interaction or text (language), constructs ‘objects, subjects and experiences’ (Willig, 1999: 2).

Discourse Analysis rejects accounts of true or false descriptions of ‘reality’ and explores how versions of the world and interaction are produced in discourse (Potter, 2004). The concept of what people understand as ‘reality’ is analysed through examination of social use of language:

Discourse analysis neither asks questions about nor makes claims about the reality of people’s lives or experiences but examines the ways in which reality and experience are constructed through social and interpersonal processes.

*(*Avdi and Georgaca, 2012:12)

Discourse Analysis positions itself as a social constructionist approach through providing a methodology that explores how understanding is constructed within the social world, without claiming truths. It is often understood as more than a methodology – it is a *conceptualisation,* which requires the psychologist to look at the social world in a different way. Language should be understood in terms of action and the analyst should be freely asking what is the text *doing* rather than what is the text saying (Willig, 2008).

There are two main approaches to Discourse Analysis: Discursive Psychology and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. Both are interested in the function of language in constructing social reality but are differentiated by the research questions that they are seen to address (Willig, 2008). The two approaches have also been founded within different philosophical traditions, with Discursive Psychology based within an interest in the ‘negotiation of meaning in local interaction in everyday contexts’ (Willig, 2008: 95) and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis influenced by the work of Michel Foucault and concerned with the discursive resources available to people that work to construct ‘subjectivity, selfhood and power relations’.

## Discursive Psychology

Potter and Wetherell (1984,1987) are recognised as pivotal figures within the development of Discourse Analysis: specifically the perspective of Discursive Psychology. The publication of ‘Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour’ (1987) marked the introduction to this version of Discourse Analysis. Discursive Psychologists conceptualise psychological phenomena such as memory and identity as ‘discursive actions’ rather than cognitive functions (Willig, 2008). Emphasis is placed on the action orientation of talk; how individuals use discursive resources in everyday life to achieve interpersonal objectives within social interaction. Talk and text are identified as action orientated and fundamentally socially driven. Discursive psychology explores the specific features of these social actions – the construction of talk and text out of a range of styles, linguistic resources and rhetorical devices. The interactional context is seen as particularly key to the construction of such social action. (Edwards and Potter, 1992: 28)

It is language use that is understood as ‘discourse’ within Discursive Psychology (Jergensen and Phillips, 2002). Discourses are socially specific and understood within the historical and cultural context in which they are embedded. A preference for naturalistic data sources (naturally occurring talk and text) is therefore identified (Hepburn and Wiggins, 2005).

Discursive Psychology is concerned with how language/talk helps to create meanings and addresses the social functions of talk (Coyle, 2007). Analysis aims to identify discursive practices through which the categories are constructed. It is therefore attentive to representations of ‘natural’ or ‘objective’ accounts and how these are achieved. Potter and Wetherell (1987) discussed everyday ‘dilemmas of stake’ within language, whereby individuals aim to establish their words as a factual stable representation of the world using discursive resources. For example, individuals may draw upon certain figures of speech such as ‘disclaimers’ to reject negative attributions to claims of truth, excuses and justifications (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Discursive Psychology also coined the term ‘Interpretative Repertoire’ meaning ‘recurrently used systems of terms used for characterising and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987:149) as an alternative to the concept of ‘discourse’. This reflects the flexibility in use of linguistics, which occurs to produce repertoires (Coyle, 2007). The term also emphasises the dynamic and flexible nature of language use and construction. Developments within discursive psychology draw upon the notion of interpretative repertoires alongside ‘subject positions’ to offer a more critical approach to analysis (Wetherell, 1998), a concept which I will return to shortly.

Limitations of Discursive Psychology are broadly based around the concept of the ‘lack of person’ as suggested by Langdridge (2004:345). This is due to Discursive Psychology’s sole focus on discourse, which means that it does not address the ‘self’ or concepts of subjectivity; the aim is to instead explore the discursive construction of psychological concepts (Willig, 2008).

It is therefore argued that this approach does not offer understanding of thoughts or internal manifestations of discourses – only the social or public are of concern. Further to this, Discursive Psychology is also criticised for its inability to explain questions of stake and interest by answering the question of why people may commit to such resources? (Madill and Doherty, 1994). Finally, questions are raised as to how much social context is actually accounted for when so much of it is discarded. For example: when the focus of study is only on language, the rich social and material context within the data gathering and analysis can be lost (MacMartin and LeBaron, 2006).

## Critical Discourse Analysis: A Foucauldian Perspective

Linguistics and social theorists such as Habermas (1977) who wrote about how language serves to legitimise power relations within society have heavily influenced critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The approach claims that Discursive Psychology is ‘politically limited’. CDA is concerned with addressing ideology and social changes (Coyle, 2007). The aim of CDA is to examine the role of language in exploring how social realities are constructed (Willig, 2008) whilst also at some level investigating the discursive aspects of societal inequalities (Wodak and Meyer, 2014). In this sense, and in contrast to Discursive Psychology, CDA produces a more abstract conceptualisation of discourse.

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis positions itself as fundamentally concerned with issues of identity, ideology and social change. Led by the work of philosopher Michel Foucault, Foucauldian understanding suggests that power relations underpin how we talk about and understand the world (Burr, 2003). Central to the approach is the belief that discourses ‘facilitate and limit, enable and constrain what can be said, by whom, where and when’ (Willig, 2001: 107) Dominant discourses are understood to privilege and reinforce power structures within society thus discourse analysis becomes concerned with studying the availability of discursive resources within different cultures and the impact that this may have (Coyle, 2007).

The Foucauldian perspective suggests that discourse is related to social institutions (such as education) and practices whereby existing structures validate discourses (Willig, 2001). The school child can therefore be seen to exist within a system that works to validate the ‘normal’ approach to schooling including how the child should be seen to behave within this system. Discourses are therefore not only expressions of social practice; they are also an exercise of power in their ability to regulate ways of talking, thinking and acting (Jager and Maier, 2014). Analysis is therefore interested in the on-going ways that discourses produce subjects and reality; conveyed by active subjects (Wodak and Mayer, 2014). Foucauldian Discourse Analysts agree with Discursive Psychology understandings of linguistic construction of social reality (Coyle, 2007) but advocate that some things do exist independently of language (Parker, 1992).

Further exploration of the Foucauldian understanding of social reality leads to the concept of ‘positioning’, which is particularly important within the Foucauldian tradition. Developed from the work of Harre and Davies (1990), the term relates to the construction of identity through discourse. Individuals are accorded particular ‘subject positions’ when constructed through discourse. They can position themselves within a discourse or be positioned by others. Positioning is not fixed and can be challenged:

Who one is… is always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the positions made available within one’s own and other’s ‘discursive practices’.

(Harre and Lagenhove, 1999: 35)

Unlike Discursive Psychology which does not concern itself with the relationship between symbolic systems, subjectivity and social interaction, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis attempts to address such issues. In doing so, it has been challenged in its ability to approach the concept of subjectivity using discourse alone. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) suggest that subject positioning cannot be understood in terms of discourse alone. The emotion and attachments involved in positioning (they argue) requires a more multi-dimensional analysis- such as the introduction of a psychoanalytic perspective. However, this is not something that I chose to engage with in this research. Instead, my position is one that acknowledges that subjective experience can be explored through discursive resources and a Foucauldian level of analysis. Subjectivity will be approached with regards to what is means to be an individual positioned within discourses located in the social world.

## A Synthetic Approach

Potter and Wetherell (1995) suggest that Discursive Psychology and Foucauldian psychology are complementary and that discourse analysis should involve insights from both. As I am interested in both ‘*how* people use discursive resources’ as well as ‘*what kinds of objects* are constructed through discourses and what kinds of ways of being these objects and subjects make available to people’ (Willig, 2008: 96) it will be important for the analysis to attempt a synthesis of the two approaches rather than separating them as two distinct and incompatible approaches to analyse. Wetherell (1998) outlines principles of synthesizing Discursive Psychology with Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, and termed the approach ‘Critical Discursive Psychology’.

This research therefore adopts a post-structuralist interest in how specific discourses constitute subjects and objects. Post- structuralism, which can be largely linked to the Foucauldian approach, offers a mode of critical enquiry, locating language and meaning making within the historical and socially embedded context in which it is located (Chouliaraki, 2008). This is explored alongside an interactionist interest in the ways in which people’s discourse is oriented towards social action in specific contexts of interaction. Equal focus is placed on what people do with their text and talk and on the discursive resources they deploy in these practices, it can therefore be understood as a version of ‘Critical Discursive Psychology’.

The synthetic perspective is distanced from both poststructuralist and interactionist analysis in their basic forms, as these forms of analysis would not pay sufficient attention to the complex dynamics of discourse. Adopting just one form of analysis would risk largely neglecting the intricacies of interaction and conversation or the implications of the subjective experience of subject positioning and power relations present with the construction of meaning. Whereas combining both, offers a platform to provide a thorough, meaningful exploration of discourse.

## Procedural guidelines for analysis

As Pomerantz (2008) suggests, discursive psychology and critical discourse analysis require a very careful systemic and 'interrogative' analysis of the discourse data. To assist with this engagement in the text I present the method of analysis used within the form of six stages. This method presents a synthesis of both Discursive Psychology and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis: a Critical Discursive Psychology influenced by Pomerantz (2008), Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) and Avdi and Georgaca, (2012).

This approach supports an in-depth discursive ‘micro-analysis’ whilst allowing further exploration of the data using the five levels suggested by Avdi and Georgaca (2012) who have analysed text by adopting an overall critical Foucauldian perspective. I feel that this approach will allow me to explore all elements of the use and nature of language. The framework does not intend to offer a set of fixed procedures, but to introduce basic principles and practices used within discourse analysis to guide my thinking:

* Stage 1: Description
* Stage 2: Interpretation
* Stage 3: Language as constructive- Discourses
* Stage 4: Positioning
* Stage 5: Practices, institutions and Power
* Level 6: Subjectivity

For a full description of each stage, please refer to Appendix A.

Reflexivity will be a key approach within the research design. As a researcher I will acknowledge my role and the part I played within the whole research process. A research diary provided a way of exploring my own personal and political values and perspectives that may inform my research (Burr, 2003), and I attempted to reflexively discuss my own interpretations of how accounts were constructed.

## Pilot Study

A pilot study was carried out in order to provide an opportunity to see how possible it would be to accomplish a free-flowing discussion; what difficulties the participants had with regards to the framework of the data collection and to begin to develop analysis skills through exploration of discourse and discursive features. The pilot involved a recording of a single discussion between two members of school staff within a school, in which I was the link Trainee Educational Psychologist. The two participants identified a Reception aged child whom they knew well, and anonymously discussed how the child presented and why they felt the child behaved the way they did.

The pilot study gave me an insight into how comfortable participants appeared to be in response to the research design and how much data I was potentially going to be able to gather. It also made me aware of the need to reassure the participants through a transparent approach; one which allowed the participants to understand who I was, what my interests were, why I was interested in this research area, that I was interested in the language used to share understanding and that I was not going to pass blame or judgement.

The pilot allowed me to consider the practicalities of the data collection. I was able to practice with the recording equipment (two Dictaphones), for example, ensuring that they were in the correct position so that I was able to hear what the participants were clearly saying when it was played back. I had the opportunity to practice and become familiar with the process of transcribing the data. I was also able to facilitate a space, following the recording, in which the participants supported me in feeding back their experience and critiquing elements of the process (such as lack of structure) which they found slightly difficult.

Perhaps most importantly, the pilot offered me an opportunity to analyse data - similar to the data that I later collected. It allowed me to gain skills in discourse analysis, gave me an understanding of the time it would take me to analyse data and gave me insight into emerging dominant discourses and my responses to them.

## Overview of Procedures: *A case study approach*

This research adopts a case study design to provide detailed focus through a single-case; on the use of discourse in understanding a Reception aged child’s ‘challenging’ behaviour. It is exploratory in nature and aims to avoid a traditional quantitative, deductive model. The qualitative case study approach will instead provide an idiographic perspective and offer attention to contextual detail. Focussing on one particular child (a case-study) will also allow triangulation of information so that an in-depth understanding and appreciation of the various dimensions of the case (Willig, 2008) can be gained. This methodology allows exploration of a part of the social world in detail, whilst avoiding broad claims of truth that position the researcher in a powerful position over the research. In explanation of what the Case Study can provide social research, Mabry (2008) suggests, “The Case Study offers deep understanding of particular instances of social phenomena.” *(*Mabry, 2008: 3)

This is a particularly helpful approach when exploring the complex, context dependent and dynamic nature of social reality. However, it does not come without criticism- mainly questions of the value of the method when it cannot be generalised. Some have argued that it lacks value and validity due to the inability to relate the methodology to a hypothetico-deductive model of explanation (Dogan and Pelassy, 1990). This critique has been largely disputed due to the fact that generalisability is not an aim of qualitative research. Attempting such aims would result in sacrificing rich, contextual detail, which qualitative research is attempting to capture (Flyvbjerg, 2004).

Case Studies have been utilised within a variety of qualitative research studies for a range of purposes. Single-subject case studies of students (Mabry, 1991; Spindler, 1997; Wolcott, 1994) are understood to recognise difficulties in educational delivery to pupils identified as having additional needs- whether academic or social-emotional (Mabry, 2008).

Within phenomenological tradition of exploring experience, Case Studies adopt a naturalistic approach in which the research is sited within ‘natural settings’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The term ‘Thick Description’ (Geertz, 1973) is used to describe the detailed recording of experience and cultural context. Where Case Studies reveal power structures and adopt a more critical approach, they are understood to be radical or post modern (Mabry, 2008).

Avdi and Georgaca (2012) suggest that the appropriate amount of data sampling depends on the research questions asked but that generally Discourse Analyses rely on a small amount of participants or text. This research therefore focussed on the data surrounding one child through a case study design. The qualitative methodology was designed to maintain curiosity and commit to ‘emergent design’ rather than searching for data to confirm or disconfirm (Mabry, 2008).

## Selecting the Participants

The initial stage of my research involved informal discussions with Educational Psychologists within my service, regarding potential participants. Through this process I was able to identify a Reception aged child within my Local Authority who did not attend one of my link schools, but who had been identified as potentially requiring Educational Psychology support in the future due to what the school described as concerns regarding some ‘difficult’ behaviours.

The five-year old boy attended a Reception class (4-5 years old) in a village primary school. Following a brief discussion between the school’s SENCo and the link Educational Psychologist, it was felt that the child would potentially be an appropriate focus for the research – should the parents consent. I contacted the school to explain my research questions and details of the research process, and the school then initially contacted the parents of the child to see if they would be interested in consenting to taking part. Further to this consent process, the parents were then given full details of the research within the participant information sheet and given time to consider the decision of taking part. They were informed that their child would not be directly involved in the data gathering but would form the recorded discussions.

Alongside the child being identified as the ‘focus child’, the participants also included the mother and father of the child and two members of school staff who felt that they knew the child well. In this case the school staff were the Reception class Nursery Nurse, who had worked in the Reception classroom everyday since the child started school in September 2014 (working alongside the Class Teacher) and the school SENCo who had supported the Class Teacher with strategies to support the child in class and had met the parents twice previously to talk about his behaviour (initially in Autumn 2014).

I was not looking for any other specific criteria within the sample as I felt that focussing on the use of language in action would highlight and generate understanding of how discourse functions within a specific context and with an individual case. Once consent was gained I was able to familiarise myself with the school staff by meeting them to talk about the research and answer any questions that they had. I spoke openly about the focus on language within the research. I also spoke in detail to the mother of the child over the telephone, and followed this up with an additional phone call to answer any questions. I did this to ensure that the participants felt comfortable and more at ease with me once we arrived at the recording stage. It was important that we considered the implications for the child at this stage. We discussed how the research was not an intervention but how it may feel helpful to talk in-depth about how they (school and parents) understand the child, as it could potentially guide future support. I also reiterated how the child would remain anonymous and how the analysis approach aimed to explore language used around the child. I was mindful that there would not be negative outcomes for tom in taking part in the research.

Following the initial phone calls and meeting in school, a time was then arranged in June 2015 to have a meeting/discussion about the focus child (Tom) in school between the SENCo and Nursery Nurse, which I asked to record with a dicta-phone. I requested the meeting to have a broad theme along the lines of: ‘Why we think *Tom* may behave the way he does and what else needs to be done to support him?’ I explained that my intention was to record their discussion and to have minimal input in their thinking as I was hoping to record ‘naturally-occurring’ talk. I also explained my hopes for them to explore their ideas and feel free to question each other, run with trains of thought, explore lots of different areas of thinking and to let me know if they felt stuck or needed guidance or prompting. The recording lasted approximately 30 minutes.

I then recorded a similar discussion with the child’s parents, using the same questions to initially guide the discussion, again recording the data with a dicta-phone, which lasted approximately 25 minutes. This took place at the child’s home, whilst the child was at school. As I had a particular interest in how the key adults in the child’s world made sense of his behaviour and used language to construct his identity, it felt important to explore how language was used and what it did both within the school and home context. I was keen to explore these separately to see how language can be used in different contexts to construct the same child.

Finally, shortly after these recordings, I recorded a final discussion (approximately 70 minutes), which took place with all of the participants (two members of school staff and two parents) in school. I took a position similar to that of a reflective consultant in this discussion and aimed to provide a space to explore ideas about the child including positive ways forward for understanding and supporting the child. During this group discussion I was aiming to both explore shared understanding and carefully challenge some of the constructs and discourses that had been drawn upon, which surrounded the child, should it have been appropriate.

The discussion took the form of a consultation, which is often used within the practice of Trainee Educational Psychologists and Educational Psychologists who are qualified. For the purpose of encouraging talk and exploring use of discourses, during the discussion I took a position similar to that of a ‘reflecting consultant’- related to the epistemology of social constructivism (Staver, 1998). This approach argues that the role of the consultant should only be to contribute to the *process* of change and not to it’s content (Helmersberg and Rimehaug, 2010). Prescribed solution and generalised claims of knowledge are seen as oppressive factors within the consultation process (Mingers, 1997). The participants, or indeed consultee’s, experiences and evaluations are instead considered equally valid and discussion is opened up to include and appreciate everyone’s conceptions:

Conflicting stories from different people are considered equally valid because truth is at best an intersubjective reality, and such conflict can never be solved by trying to decide which is true and which is false.

*(*Helmersberg and Rimehaug, 2010: 195)

Within the reflective approach, the consultant attempts to expand alternative narratives and understandings in order to provide a space for the participants to construct, and negotiate a greater ‘intersubjective consensus’ (Helmersberg and Rimehaug, 2010). Through adopting a similar reflective position during the study, I was able to explore how meaning is constructed and negotiated within interaction between parents and teachers in school settings. I was also able to fully engage in listening to the discourses emerging around me. Appendix B provides additional description of the reflective approach and examples of the discursive interventions I used as a researcher.

Critique of this approach emphasises the potentially unethical nature of reflective neutrality. Such attempts may not provide opportunity to confront oppressive behaviour or perceptions (Minuchin, 1991). With regards to this research, I felt that it was important to attempt a reflective position whilst remaining sensitive to the potential need to challenge constructs, which could be oppressive or impact negatively on the child. Helmersberg and Rimehaug (2010) emphasise the importance of choice within this positioning; choice of questioning and themes to dwell upon may exert a degree of covert power. I felt particularly aware of this during the discussion process and indeed found the concept of neutrality a challenge to fully achieve.

## Research Diary

A research diary was used throughout the process and provided a space to consider my on-going thoughts and reflections during the process. It allowed me to engage with the process of considering my actions, values and language within my role as a researcher, and helped to co-ordinate my thoughts during the process of social action (the act of ‘doing’ the data gathering) with my thoughts at the stage of analysis. I have recorded a number of these reflections in Appendix C.

Whilst the Discourse Analysis approach does not recognise or emphasise the importance of emotion, I felt it was important for me to consider my personal investment within the research. I was aware throughout the research process that in the past I have felt quite passionate, and at times frustrated, about how young children are constructed and driven to challenge such constructs: I therefore found the research diary to be a helpful place to keep a check on my interpretations of situations that I was encountering during the process and a space to consider how to deal with these thoughts and values. I also found it a helpful place to consider aspects of the social situation that I had seen or heard, which I felt had impacted on me but I wasn’t entirely sure why at the time. Within my role as researcher, I took on a fairly passive and reflective position, the diary gave me space to engage with my own use of language and discourses that I was otherwise largely keeping to myself.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was received from the Ethics Review Process of the University of Sheffield School of Education, in April 2015 (Appendix D). All adult participants were fully informed about all aspects of the research process and given the opportunity to withdraw consent at any time, prior to or during the discussions. Please refer to Appendix E for a copy of the Participant Information Letter and Appendix F for a copy of the Participant Consent Form.

Careful consideration was made to ensure that the participants were aware that the research process was not an intervention, and to protect existing relationships between school and home. I was aware that the discussion topic may be particularly sensitive, especially for the parents of the child and I was careful to respond tactfully to the situation. Whilst the research did not directly involve a child (Tom), the potential impact of the research on the focus child was considered at all stages, as was the need to ensure that all participants involved in data collection were not exposed to risk greater than those they encounter in their everyday lives. I was also mindful of how Tom was represented within the research. Whilst at this stage Tom may not be aware of the research and is only a young child, I am aware that he may be interested in finding out about the research when he is older. I have considered that as the analysis of data that I have adopted will provide a critical approach to viewing systems and language rather than Tom himself – it should therefore be emancipatory in nature. I will also consider redacting the contents of the thesis if I feel that its contents may cause harm to the child’s understanding of himself or between parents and child/ child and school.

As I was analysing the language used by the adult participants to construct a young child the research methodology potentially seemed quite personal to those involved. I was aware that the participants were potentially at risk of experiencing this personal/ close up exploration of language as an uncomfortable feeling of being scrutinised or feeling like they have said the wrong thing. As I took a minmal part in the first two interviews, I was aware that the participants could also feel uncomfortable as they may have hoped to seek reassurance for how they were describing the child. It was therefore imperative for me to reassure the participants from the onset of the research journey. I explained clearly, through the informed consent process, that my aim was to explore how we (as social beings living within this specific culture) use the language that is available to us in everyday life to make sense of behaviour- my aim was not to blame individual people for the child’s behaviour. As part of this I aimed to seek to build trust by being open, and helped the participants feel comfortable within their setting. I also explained that exploring language at such an honest level may lead towards further positive steps in understanding and catering for the child’s needs in the future.

The British Psychological Society (2009) Code of Ethics and Conduct were adhered to throughout the research. Participant names will remain anonymous, as will the name of the school. Individuals have been given a pseudonym to protect their identity.

I explained to the participants that I would feedback a summary of my findings following further analysis at the end of 2015. Whilst this date was delayed due to the time taken to analyse the data, I was able to feedback my findings in April 2016. During the feedback I shared information regarding the constructions of the child, reflections on the opportunity to talk about the child and implications for EP practice. All feedback was provided through sensitive ethical considerations and the participants described how they had found the research process helpful to their own situation and the feedback interesting and useful. Please refer to Appendix G for reflections on the feedback experience.

## Reliability, Trustworthiness and Quality Assurance

Whilst qualitative methods appear to be growing in popularity and reported credibility (Yardley, 2000), there continues to be considerable debate regarding the assessment of quality within this research area. As I take a social constructionist perspective, the positivist concepts of reliability and validity are arguably inappropriate for judging the quality of the findings (Burr, 2003). In this sense alternative understanding of such terms are needed to explain the credibility of qualitative studies.

With regards to interviewing and recording naturally occurring talk, reliability should therefore be understood in terms of rigor and quality, as well as the researcher’s truthfulness within social research (Golafshani, 2003). Reliability cannot and does not pretend to be a matter of objectivity as it is accepted that this is incompatible within the social world. It is also accepted that researchers and the ‘researched’ offer subjective accounts of reality, which do not mean that they lack quality or worth; instead triangulation assists in producing rich, descriptive, detailed data.

Guba (1981) proposes four criteria to consider ensuring trustworthiness within research: a.) credibility b.) transferability c.) dependability and d.) confirmability. These quality criteria will be considered to guide the research and adhered to wherever possible. This will include a highly reflexive approach in considering the data, and multiple peer reviews to elicit critical questioning of the data analysis.

Within this research, researcher subjectivity will not be considered a threat to reliability or a concept to be avoided at all costs; instead awareness and acceptance of subjectivity is fundamental (Burr, 2003). Developing skill in understanding the impact of subjectivity on the entire research process from start to finish is seen as a key part of the research journey. As I was both a part of the data gathering process and the data itself, it was important for me to be reflective and highly aware of my role within the entire experience.

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# Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

## Introduction: Making sense of Tom’s behaviour

This chapter presents an analysis of the three transcripts, which present separate discussions of how key adults surrounding ‘Tom’ make sense of his behaviour. The analyses are then discussed in relation to the research questions. To facilitate this exploration, the three discussions are focussed upon in turn. An overview of emerging discursive constructions is provided for each, followed by description and analysis of discursive features, rhetorical devices and emerging interpretive repertoires. A specific Foucauldian interpretation is then drawn from the text, through exploration of the macro implications of the use of language and development of constructs. Lastly, consideration of the use of language in relation to opportunities for altering or challenging dominant discourses is identified through further exploration of the discursive constructions.

The analysis has been guided by steps to provide a systematic and interrogative exploration of the data (Pomerantz, 2008). The approach presents a synthesis of both Discursive Psychology and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis: a Critical Discursive Psychology influenced by Pomerantz (2008), Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) and Avdi and Georgaca, (2012). Whilst the analysis follows the key principles and practices of discourse analysis, it is led by the text and my reflections as researcher and not by a fixed structure of procedures (Willig, 2008). To guide understanding of the analysis, please refer to Appendix H for the system of transcription.

## Discursive Analysis: Discussion between teaching staff

|  |
| --- |
| **Emerging discursive constructions within the analysis of Tom’s teachers making sense of his behaviour: Transcript 1 (Appendix J)** |
| * Tom is constructed as having always had a ‘difficulty’ |
| * Tom is constructed as ‘confusing’ and difficult to make sense of |
| * Tom is constructed within a deficit model |
| * Tom is constructed as a problem to the school |
| * Tom is constructed as a child heavily controlled by school staff |

### Tom is constructed as having always had a ‘difficulty’

### 

Tom is constructed by his teachers through a range of rhetorical devices. From the outset of the discussion he is described as a child whom ‘difference’ was recognised from starting in Reception class. Positioning Tom within this historical framework fuses together memory and attribution (Edwards and Potter, 1992), which functions to strengthen the construct of Tom as ‘different’. This form of accounting suggests that such difference is perceived as on going and potentially a part of him:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 25-26 | NN | Well when he first came in he was quietish (.) erm didn’t settle with one particular thing he would go to one thing |
|  |  |  |
| 28 | SENCo | Mmm |
|  |  |  |
| 30 | NN | then go to another thing you know didn’t like stay in any particular place |
|  |  |  |
| 32 | SENCo | Yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 34-35 | NN | and then within a couple of days we noticed er he’d take things off other children and |
|  |  |  |
| 101-102 | NN | do you know what I mean? Sort of like warnings that this was what (.) he was going to be like sort of thing (..) |

In the speech used between the school staff, particular discomfort appears to be present throughout initial description of what seems to be understood as not typically ‘normal’ behaviour. Sentences struggle to flow and words are missed as if there is a reluctance to use certain labels or terms:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 118-119 | NN | and we and we’d found almost straight away that we thought there was something (..) |
|  |  |  |
| 121 | SENCo | mmm some difficulty |

The apparent reluctance to use certain language to describe Tom is not questioned but reassured by the SENCo who seems to seek to confirm that she understands. The systematic vagueness (Edwards and Potter, 1992) shared between the staff appears to provide further opportunity for consensus.

Confirming and encouraging language is used repeatedly throughout the discussion. The word ‘yeah’/’yes’ is used regularly to encourage and to acknowledge that the two individuals agree with each other’s viewpoints. Or, if they do not agree they are using such language as a social function to demonstrate that the other’s voice is being heard and is valued, potentially as a form of corroboration (Edwards and Potter, 1992). This may be linked into the dynamics of the relationship being embedded within an educational institution whereby the system reflects the ‘us’ (teachers) and ‘them’ (children and parents) arguably produced historically from shifting government policies that heavily influence and shape the relationships between parents and teachers (Cottle and Alexander, 2014). However, this also promotes reinforcement of dominant discourses and less space for challenge and emergence of counter-discourses (Edwards and Potter, 1992).

Within discussion regarding speech difficulties that they have identified ‘straight away’, description such as ‘trouble’ and ‘very bad’ are used to emphasise what is understood to be a particular difficulty for Tom. Stating that it is ‘important to say’ suggests that this may offer some significant explanation for Tom’s behaviour or generate a sense of pity for Tom amongst the background of an otherwise rather negative tone. The information is presented within the form of empiricist accounting (Edwards and Potter, 1992) and we see the ‘facts’ forced upon the listener.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text Text |
| 157-158 | SENCo | mmm (2.3) I think it’s important to say that he does have  trouble with speech not just – |
|  |  |  |
| 160 | NN | he’s got a very bad stutter |
|  |  |  |
| 162 | SENCo | Yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 164 | NN | very bad |
|  |  |  |
| 166-167 | SENCo | I think (.) I find him (.) I don’t know if it’s just cos I’ve got used to him but I do find him a little bit easier to understand now |

Description and emphasis upon the severity of Tom’s stutter provides a psycho-medical discourse to position Tom’s difficulties within.

### Tom is constructed as ‘confusing’ and difficult to make sense of

The suggestion that Tom has ‘got’ difference again emphasises the understanding of Tom as having a difficulty that they cannot understand but they nevertheless feel is located within him. This construction of Tom relates to the findings of Maclure et (2011) and Westling (2010) who also noted within-child understandings of children’s behaviour – alongside a lack of exploration into understanding behaviour as a child’s response to the school environment.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 501 | NN | he’s very (.) he’s very confusing because he’s got all these different- |
|  |  |  |
| 503 | SENCo | I was just going to use that word- |
|  |  |  |
| 505 | NN | Yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 507-509 | SENCo | It just seemed really confused because it in one respect it er (..) he wants to be helpful (.) but then in another respect especially with the children he’s being particularly unhelpful |
|  |  |  |
| 517-518 | SENCo | and making trouble and making things difficult (..) has it (.) I wonder if the play sort of behaviour whether that’s just unintentional? |

The linguistic features ‘I wonder if…’ suggests room for negotiation and an open-minded approach in understanding Tom. From this however, a shared understanding of confusion is also produced. It could be considered that during the research process of stopping and reflecting, the school staff identified that Tom does not fit within one category of explanation. Tom is therefore understood as ‘confusing’ – a word repeated to potentially emphasise Tom’s complexity. Burr (2003) suggests that categories within language create boundaries and hence cultural meanings. When such boundaries appear to be unclear, potentially due to lack of a clear label, a confusion and discomfort appears to develop as the experience lacks structure and meaning.

As Tom’s Nursery Nurse begins to explain her description it is possible to understand the ‘confusion’ as being related to the school environment rather than the child: “I personally don’t think that Tom can cope with free-flow”. However, the discourse of Tom as a ‘confusing’ child who sits outside of the ‘norm’ is already constructed and, as suggested by Thomas (2005) the environment is almost an afterthought. The behaviour that is understood to be within Tom is explored further between the two members of staff – again mutual agreement is demonstrated. Whilst the concept of a ‘free-flow’ environment has been approached as a potential reason for some of Tom’s behaviours, the focus moves to Tom himself potentially having a delay or deficit within him, preventing him from fitting into the system. The words “can cope with" works to strengthen this claim, as does the pathological discourse drawn upon to explain perhaps quite typical behaviours such as “giddy and excitable”.

Use of the phrase “making things difficult” provides a within-child understanding of Tom’s behaviour and also highlights the perception that Tom is making typical school functioning a difficult task. We see that Tom’s behaviour is not constructed as a reaction to his environment, which may need supporting, but a ‘problem’ to the environment. Use of active verbs position Tom as a child who is driving and controlling the situation.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 541-543 | SENCo | yeah (.) I wonder if there’s almost a bit of a panic or an anxiety throughout those free flow times so he (..) cos sometimes when I’ve watched him he’s he seems quite giddy and excitable doesn’t he? |
|  |  |  |
| 547-548 | SENCo | at those (.) when there’s an adult around he seems to really control himself and reign it in almost |
|  |  |  |
| 550 | NN | Yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 552 | SENCo | where as in those free times it’s a bit of an explosion like he doesn’t (..) know |

The juxtaposition of “control himself and reign it in” with “an explosion” provides powerful metaphorical language. This emphasises the contrast between the behaviour expected within educational settings; controlled, obedient and passive or what Davis describes as ‘docile bodies and disembodied minds’ (Davis, 2005) with the destructive, chaotic and all encompassing imagery of an explosion; behaviour which is uncontrolled and understood as particularly challenging within schools. Such vocabulary constructs Tom’s behaviour as extreme and something to be feared. This binary emphasises the contradictory constructions of Tom produced by the school staff, which are potentially generating the further creation of ‘confusion’ that they describe.

Although Tom is constructed as a child who does not fit the ‘norms’ of development and presents as difficult to change and hard to understand, there are examples of inter-discursivity present throughout the discussion. This linguistic feature suggests a willingness of the staff to understand Tom’s strengths as well as his difficulties. Whilst this constructs Tom positively and celebrates him as a child who does not simply present the school with negative experiences, it also again creates Tom as a ‘confusing’ child, a child with needs (Thomas, 2005), who potentially has a split personality (drawing upon pathological discourse). Tom is positioned within an educational discourse, which focuses heavily upon a good/bad dichotomy. As an understanding of Tom’s multi-faceted self is explored and developed in the discussion, rather than constructing a new positive and optimistic understanding of Tom, his many levels are deemed to be confusing as they do not fit comfortably into the available ‘good/bad’ dichotomy. He sits outside of any ‘norm’ and this appears to be reflected uncomfortably. Rather than a celebration, explorations of Tom’s strengths become a threat. His strengths appear to be treated with suspicion and the language used leads quickly into further discussion of the negative behaviour, which is present more often than the positives. The following text demonstrates how the extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) ‘absolutely adores’ is used to provide contrast and ‘distinctiveness information’ (Edwards and Potter, 1992) to demonstrate how Tom is understood to not be able to function in social situations.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 773-775 | NN | And he does love this (.) it’s a little girl and he loves her absolutely adores her (..) but (..) and he does the same for her y’know he does look after her and does nice things for her and helps her (..) |
|  |  |  |
| 777 | SENCo | Mmm |
|  |  |  |
| 779-781 | NN | But when it’s in a situation when they’re playing (..) he’s (.) not being kind (.) y’know he’s not being kind (..) he’s got like all these things going on and I don’t I don’t (.) I’ll be honest I don’t understand why(.) |

### Tom is constructed within a deficit model

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 658-659 | SENCo | but the playtime ones (.) but the playtime issues do seem to be with his lack of control- |
|  |  |  |
| 661 | NN | yeh (.) I think he wants it his way (..) |
|  |  |  |
| 663 | SENCo | Mmm |
|  |  |  |
| 665 | SENCo | and that’s it (..) |
|  |  |  |
| 667 | SENCo | mmm (..) and is that because he’s an only child? (2.1) |
|  |  |  |
| 669 | NN | mmm(.) don’t know (.) possibly |
|  |  |  |
| 671 | SENCo | he’s got used to not sharing- |

Again here emphasis is placed on Tom: “issues do seem to be with *his* lack of control”. This rhetorical device produces understanding of Tom, which suggests that he is potentially choosing his behaviour. Narrative that sits within what MacLeod (2006) describes as the ‘bad’ constructs of SEBD/MH, which present the perspective of the child as having a moralistic deficit.

The school environment is not described as presenting a difficulty for Tom- rather Tom becomes the focus of negativity; relating directly to the findings from MacLure et al (2011) who described such practice within an ethnographic study of the Reception classroom. When understanding of why Tom may behave in such a way is explored as something more than simply within Tom, discussion is not based around the environment or wider social complexities of playtime. Instead, Tom’s family/home life is drawn upon – with the possible negative implications of being an only child ‘he’s got used to not sharing’. This understanding appears not to be simply one of blame, but rather one in which there don’t seem to be any other obvious reasons for the staff to draw upon to explain Tom’s behaviour. The family and home becomes an unknown ‘entity’ which possibly contains answers that they are unable to access. MacLure et al (2011) suggest that teacher’s identify ‘deficit’ within the child or from home, believing its roots are ‘somewhere else’ rather than within the system.

It was potentially more comfortable for the school staff to explore this option for Tom’s behaviour rather than trying to unpick the impact of school systems, which they may feel that they have only minimal control or influence over. Or potentially, they may feel uncomfortable to be linked to a system, which may be related to the negative behaviours that they are describing.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 426-427 | NN | don’t you feel that I’m not sure but don’t you feel that there’s a little bit of immaturity as well? |
|  |  |  |
| 429 | SENCo | yeah (.) yeah (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 431 | NN | in comparison to say the other children (.) |

In opening this discussion regarding developmental immaturity, Tom’s Nursery Nurse does not fully commit to the rhetorical question but first seeks acceptance from the SENCo by leading through a question. Once reassured, the popular educational discourse of developmental norms are drawn upon to share understanding of Tom’s behaviours and place him within a model of deficit and need. Development discourse and comparisons to other children provide the powerful definitions of ‘normal’ as a backdrop for emphasising deficit (Billington, 2000). Thus strengthening the claim that the problem lies within Tom rather than the system. As Thomas (2005) suggests, behaviour that does not fit into the school system becomes reconstructed to become a ‘need’ within the child, which requires treatment, monitoring and removal of agency.

Emphasis is then placed on the development of such need using rhetorical devices such as emphasis on time passed without significant change; alluding to the idea that there must be a problem.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 676 | SENCo | hmm (..) and you would have thought that by now- |
|  |  |  |
| 678 | NN | [yeah] |
|  |  |  |
| 680-682 | SENCo | you know sort of a year in (.) all of the things you know the consistency with the response in him doing things like that you would think that he would now begin to learn and the fact that he does like the positive- |

The ‘problem’ is emphasised by a three-part list (Jefferson, 1990) and through the word ‘now’, which gives the sense that expectations are such that by this stage of the child’s schooling (end of Reception year) children have adjusted to school routines and expectations. Those who do not are seen to be different and confusing to those who are working within the system. This is highlighted by Boxall and Lucas (2010) who question the appropriateness of the social-emotional Early Learning goals for some children.However, the system itself is not questioned as to why Tom may not have adjusted to it as yet.

### Tom is constructed as a problem to the school

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 507-509 | SENCo | It just seemed really confused because it in one respect it er (..) he wants to be helpful (.) but then in another respect especially with the children he’s being particularly unhelpful |

Tom is described as “unhelpful” and helpless. Although it is not completely clear whom he is being unhelpful to, it seems that his behaviour may be understood as unhelpful to the everyday systems and routines of school functioning.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 517 | SENCo | and making trouble and making things difficult (..) |

Within discussion regarding how Tom might be supported considering their understanding of his behaviours, a shared construct of support strategies is described – stating that fairly rigid approaches are utilised depending on specific categorised needs, rather than the needs of the individual. Billington (2000) suggests that providing children opportunities dependent on their category and hence ‘abnormality’, risks hiding individual identities and limiting potential.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 803-807 | SENCo | Because really (.) you would deal with them very differently (.) if it was a child who was partic- who was finding those unstructured times (.) y’know difficult and making him anxious then you would sort of go over erm perhaps y’know preparing him for those things y’know what are you going to play outside? And maybe going over some (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 809 | NN | Yeh |
|  |  |  |
| 811 | SENCo | scenarios with him beforehand (..) |
|  |  |  |
| 813 | NN | Yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 815-816 | SENCo | you know making sure that there was a grown up that he could come and speak to and but then if it’s (.) if it’s for control (3.1) that’s that’s a difficult one |
|  |  |  |
| 818 | NN | Yeah |

Again empiricist accounting embedded within educational discourse is used to provide a context for understanding Tom’s behaviour. Difficulties that children are experiencing are seemingly approached very differently in terms of support. Different constructs and linked actions are clearly apparent and available for children depending on how their behaviour is made sense of. A particularly conflicting construct related to children having control is demonstrated through the term “that’s difficult”, suggesting that such a child cannot be comfortably supported within the system. Again, control may be linked to the meaning and positioning of ‘control’ within an educational institution: schools may resist pupil empowerment initiatives, as they are uneasy about giving pupils control (Lewis and Burman, 2008). Therefore children who are demanding control sit in conflict to the hierarchical structures of the system and present a challenge. Historically the child should be passive and reformed by adults – those who do not fit into this structure are positioned within available scientific discourses of pathology (Billington, 2000).

The emerging interpretive repertoire from the school staff interview appears to be one of deficit; constructed through rhetorical devices which position the ‘problem’ firmly within Tom.

## Understanding Tom through a Foucauldian lens

The use of pathological discourse appears to dominate the constructions of Tom, with specific implications to ideology and power relations. The constructions are succeeded through a range of rhetorical devices and discursive frames, which position Tom within a discourse of pathology and, at times, deviance. This depiction of Tom is represented as empathic and understanding – within a ‘clinical mind-set’ (Thomas, 2005) of ‘need’. However, deficit is located within the child and ‘treatment’ of the child. Goffman (1987) describes how once labelled with ‘need’ the child graduates through life with a self-image of sufferer or victim of one’s own problems.

Alongside this understanding of Tom, his typical processing and functioning skills are also identified as ‘different’. He is constructed as machine like and potentially less human through the comparison to a machine:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 103-104 | NN | when we spoke to him he didn’t answer in the way it was almost like an automatic answer rather than a thought out d’you know what I mean? |

The appearance of a developmental discourse to suggest that Tom has not got the ‘maturity to think’ supports this construct. The psychological discourse strengthens a ‘natural’ claim to hierarchy and rank in populations, and as highlighted by Foucault: ‘Rank in itself serves as a reward or punishment’ (Foucault, 1977: 181).

Whilst the ‘normalising gaze’ (Foucault, 1977) is used by those around him both naively and with seemingly good intentions, through the process of comparison and rank Tom is positioned within a system of power:

The perpetual penality that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchises, homogenises, excludes. In short, it normalises.

(Foucault, 1977: 183).

The descriptions of Tom’s behaviour as aggressive and out of control provide an example of governmentality fears of animalism and unreason in human beings; both which are perceived to be forces that are uncontrollable categories of resistance (Foucault, 1977):

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 220 | NN | (.) I mean I have seen him jump on top of children and swing them round |

Discourses can be identified as circulating here to identify and pathologise children, thus attacking, “children’s resistance to the power of reason, government and responsibility, both at a structural and at an individual level” (Billington, 2000: 24). It could be argued that the very system, in which Tom is placed, decreases his chance of success and increases his likelihood of being pathologised at a very young age. Validating the allocation of pathologies at the beginning of his school journey denies individual identity and development of self, risking loss of agency and opportunity.

Tom is constructed as part of the monitoring, surveillance and regulation system. Specifically located within a discourse of discipline and control.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 1009-1011 | SENCo | he needs that extra you know all the little things like the hi-vis jackets to watch him at play time |

Descriptions position him as part of the system and in doing so functions to strip Tom of individual emotional and personal experience that he may be feeling. He is constructed as a child who lacks control and who is being guided into a role of passivity and compliance.

A number of descriptions place Tom within a system of punishment.

By the word punishment, one must understand everything that is capable of making children feel the offence they have committed, everything that is capable of humiliating them, of confusing them:… a certain coldness, a certain indifference, a question, a humiliation, a removal from office’

(La Sale, Conduite, 1783: 204-5 cited in Foucault, 1977)

Through a Foucauldian lens, constructions of Tom are underpinned by attempts to create ‘docile and obedient bodies’ (Iyer, 2013) through surveillance of children within the Early Years environment. Failure to regulate emotion and control the body led to constructions of Tom as ‘unhelpful’, ‘hurtful’ and from this, accompanying punitive action.

Whilst language of need is dominant throughout the teacher’s descriptions, this is embedded within shared language of discipline, control and monitoring; drawing from what Iyer describes as “the pool of shared language available in the shared culture” (Iyer, 2013: 190). ‘Need’ then appears to become both a further tool for monitoring and surveillance and a framework for exploring ways to reform the child (Thomas, 2005).

## Does the language used between the teaching staff tell us something about possible opportunities to question or alter how the child is constructed?

The discursive constructions of Tom and the way in which they are produced potentially close down opportunities for altering the way that he is constructed. Rhetorical devices such as confirmation and repetitive agreement of negative constructions of Tom appear to produce a fixed sense of who Tom is (Edwards and Potter, 1992).

The teaching staff work together to explore a range of different aspects of Tom’s life, in an attempt to produce an in-depth understanding of his behaviour. Meaning is sought from home, school, within-child and environmental factors. The staff therefore seem particularly keen to talk about Tom holistically – as a child who may be complex and not simply behaving in a ‘naughty’ way. However, available discourses, which are shaped within the school context, appear to restrict the breadth of exploration and understanding.

Positioning takes place in a deficit within-child model, located firmly within educational and psychological discourse. This is not challenged. Indeed, the discussion (focussed specifically on understanding Tom’s ‘behaviour’) provides a space to further confirm Tom’s constructs within this category. The dynamics of the place and space within the school building and between the school staff – removed from home/parent influences- allows further confirmation of dominant practices and discourses of discipline and reform.

Whilst discussion touches in many instances upon the way Tom may be communicating through his behaviour, it appears that further support would be needed to encourage school staff to fully explore the impact of systemic and school based environmental influences, effectively challenging the dominance of the deficit model. Further to this, influences that provide a more in-depth understanding of Tom’s behaviour outside of the school context seem particularly key to developing a wider perspective of understanding. Established constructs appear to be based mainly on school experiences and limited knowledge of Tom’s behaviour at home.

School staff present as a homogenous unit during their discussion. Encouraging individual reflexivity with regards to their understanding of Tom could offer an opportunity to resist dominant discourses and provide space to focus on the child without direct outside influences. Language surrounding Tom appeared to lack an emotional understanding and connection, which could be promoted to support a connection with Tom as a human being and not simply as part of the system.

## Reflective Summary: Experience, Involvement and Reflections:

I had met the school staff once before - to explain the recording process – and found that they appeared quite relaxed and ready to start the interview without seeming overly nervous. The participants appeared to know each quite well as conversation and laughter flowed easily between them before the recording began. I was glad that I had gained the experience of the pilot study as we were able to openly talk about my ‘presence’ in the room, to ensure that they felt comfortable before we began. We agreed that following the lead into the interview, I would be nearby to listen and sometimes watch but that they would aim to have a discussion between themselves about Tom. They were reassured that I would re-enter the talk if they were ‘stuck’ or felt that they had finished their discussion.

Taking a step back and listening to the emerging language was, for me, an illuminating experience as I began to see claims of ‘truth’ emerge and attempts at collaboration to maintain a shared experience. I was aware that due to my interviewer presence and my transparent focus upon language, the participants were possibly restricting their language or at least not achieving naturally occurring talk. However, I also felt that as the two participants appeared to know each other well, they quickly progressed into a quickly moving conversation and appeared to relax into their talk.

Whilst listening to the talk I reflected on how quickly I would perhaps usually become involved in shaping understanding within my day to day TEP practice. In simply listening for over twenty minutes, I felt that I was able to gain a much richer understanding of how the participants were making sense of the child. Whilst at times I found seemingly ‘within-child’ interpretations of Tom rather restrictive and perhaps frustrating, I could also see that the school staff were attempting to broaden their understanding and I empathised with the resulting ‘confusion’ that they described.

The discussion between staff flowed easily without any need for further intervention from myself. I found the experience of listening to adults who knew Tom in school spending extended time to share their personal understanding very interesting. It provided me with time to immediately begin to reflect upon the subtleties of interaction, the dominance of some discourses and underlying power-relations.

During the analysis I found that I had to engage in multiple readings of the transcripts to make sure that I was developing a clear overview of all of the language used to construct Tom. Whilst initially I felt perhaps drawn to the overtly negative constructs of Tom (perhaps due to my past experiences), I began to acknowledge that there were certainly alternative discourses in use – such as a the discourse of ‘need’ and constructing Tom as having the ability to be ‘lovely’. I had to make sense of this use of language myself – part of the analysis that took time, extended engagement with the transcripts and further reading of the literature.

## Discursive Analysis: Discussion between parents

|  |
| --- |
| **Emerging discursive constructions within the analysis of Tom’s parents making sense of his behaviour: Transcript 2 (Appendix K)** |
| * Tom is constructed as a child who has changed since starting school |
| * Tom is constructed as a child influenced by other children |
| * Tom is constructed as a child heavily controlled by school staff |
| * Tom is constructed as a child who will not be changed by the school’s approaches to behaviour management and monitoring |
| * Tom is constructed as a ‘good little lad’ |
| * Tom is constructed as having an unpredictable and frightening ‘temper’ |
| * Tom is constructed as having a Jekyll and Hyde personality |
| * Tom is constructed as potentially being a ‘normal’ boy |
| * Tom is constructed as a child that needs ‘punishing’ |
| * Tom is constructed as a child who is isolated as a result of his disruptive behaviour |

The parental discussion contrasts in terms of where understanding of Tom’s behaviour is positioned. Whilst at school understandings of problematic behaviours were predominantly constructed within Tom, the discussion with Tom’s parents constructed an understanding of Tom whereby his behaviour is initially understood as due to environmental changes and differing social experiences and gradually moves further towards within-child.

### Tom is constructed as a child who has changed since starting school

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 70-71 | Father | we said that to start that he seemed to have changed since he’d been at school (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 18-21 | Mother | whereas school he has to sort of like maybe follow rules and things like that and he maybe don’t want to do that (short laugh) maybe that’s why he’s been a bit (.) hit and miss with his behaviour and stuff and erm- |

This initial understanding of Tom is presented with consensus (‘we’) to warrant factuality (Edwards and Potter, 1992), and positions him within a system, which his mother potentially recognises that he might not want to be in. She makes a clear link between school practices and possible reasons for Tom’s behaviour since being ‘a bit hit and miss’. Her narrative positions her as demonstrating plausibility for her understanding of Tom and as initially acting as an advocate for her son.

### Tom is constructed as a child influenced by other children

### 

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 23 | Father | he likes copying as well doesn’t he? |
|  |  |  |
| 25-26 | Mother | he does like to copy (.) he tends to copy people a bit who aren’t impeccably well behaved shall we say erm |
|  |  |  |
| 28 | Father | [laughing] |
|  |  |  |
| 30 | Mother | he seems to gravitate towards the erm (.) boisterous ones (.) so erm- |
|  |  |  |

Tom’s parents attribute his behaviour to the negative influence of other children. Agreement is confirmed between the parents with some statements (such as difficulties with sharing at school) however there is a lot more questioning, challenge and differing interpretation present within the discussion – compared to the school staff discussion- thus supporting space for counter-discourses:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 47 | Father | mmm he always likes to be entertained doesn’t he? He can’t just sit here- |
|  |  |  |
| 49-50 | Mother | well he can play on his own alright he will quite happily play on his own and do drawing and writing and play with his toys and that (.) |

This interplay of thoughts and experiences supports a careful construction of Tom as an individual without immediately categorising him through certain fixed types of behaviour. With this comes consideration of other dynamics surrounding Tom such as the different relationships his parents have with him and the different behaviours they may see as a result of this.

### Tom is constructed as a child heavily controlled by school staff

### 

The school become presented as ‘they’ through description of what school staff ‘do’ with Tom:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 86 | Mother | they have to sit him at the side |
|  |  |  |
| 93 | Mother | when they go for dinner they always have him at the back of the line (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 99 | Mother | he wears a hi-vis vest (.) [so they can see him] |
|  |  |  |
| 126 | Mother | cos they’ve been gradually er sending him out to play like instead of the first five minutes oh we’ll just bring him in (.) they send him out for another five minutes and then they build it up so he’s coming in when everyone else is coming in erm |

Rhetorical devices such as extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986)support Tom’s parent’s construction of the educational system working against Tom: “they always have him at the back of the line”. Tom’s mother’s language in particular, presents both Tom and themselves (as parents) as extremely passive agents within the school system:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 277 | Mother | er well if it’s helping them at school then that’s fine with us |

Whilst Tom’s mother appears to have polarised school and home using vocabulary to highlight their separation and difference (‘us’ and ‘they’), she also positions herself as a compliant mother – seemingly not wanting to challenge the school’s practice.

### Tom is constructed as a child who will not be changed by the school’s approaches to behaviour management and monitoring

### 

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 286 | Father | I’m not sure on the hi-vis thing (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 288-289 | Mother | but then I you don’t know if they have to do that or if it’s for their benefit or whatever I don’t think that’s gonna make any difference to how he behaves is it? |
|  |  |  |
| 291 | Father | No |
|  |  |  |
| 293 | Mother | I think it’s more for the teachers benefit (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 295 | Father | Yeah |

Here Tom’s father begins to question how Tom’s behaviour is understood and supported by stating that he is unsure how he feels about Tom having to wear a hi-visibility jacket every playtime to alert teachers to his whereabouts. The parents jointly describe how such strategies may be for the teachers’ benefit rather than to support Tom’s behaviour. This is accepted rather than challenged in their discussion. School or ‘they’ is potentially seen and constructed as an unknown system, which remains powerful and mystified and understood as not to be challenged or interfered with.

### Tom is constructed as having an unpredictable and frightening ‘temper’

Alongside descriptions of their understanding of Tom’s behaviour as being related to changes in home and school, an on-going theme relating to what is understood as Tom’s ‘temper’ runs through the discussion:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 166 | Mother | he does have a bit of a bit of a temper (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 168 | Father | he does have a temper (.) definitely a temper (.) erm- |
|  |  |  |
| 170 | Mother | but that’s more when he’s tired I think isn’t it? |
|  |  |  |
| 172-173 | Father | he’s with him being big as well he’s strong as well isn’t he so (.) he can (.) I don’t know(..) |
| 379-380 | Father | but it’s like I was saying it’s his temper (.) that’s the thing that he can he can be real good then all of a sudden he’ll just (finger click) pew (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 382 | Mother | it can be a bit frightening (.) a bit Jeckyll and Hyde (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 384-385 | Father | yeah he can be Jeckyl and Hyde can’t he he can be real good then all of a sudden he’ll just he’ll just lamp you- |

Tom is constructed through a pathological discourse, which stands in contrast to the passive images presented of Tom at school. Tom becomes constructed as an unpredictable child and something to be feared. By stating that it “can be frightening” Tom’s mother positions herself within a passive and helpless situation; this is a particularly powerful construct as it stands in sharp contrast to discourse of mother and child represented as connected by a lovingly tranquil relationship, highlighting her position as struggling within an ‘unnatural’ situation.

Shortly after this part of the discussion Tom’s mother became noticeably upset. She wiped away tears and her husband comforted her. This moment was not explicitly apparent within the language recorded as his mother took a few seconds to pause and his father continued to talk. However, I felt the emotional impact of the language that had been used to describe Tom and the developing constructions, which relied on negative descriptions of behaviour and pathologising him as a child, perhaps caused her to reconsider such constructions and she then began to alter the way that she spoke about him.

Alongside discussion of Tom’s ‘temper’, talk of his Jekyll and Hyde personality emerges several times:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 524-526 | Mother | yeah (4.5) yeah cos I say don’t I that cos he’s a Gemini (.) he has a split personality (.) cos Gemini is a sign of the twins and like you say Jekyll and Hyde split personality (laughing) |
|  |  |  |
| 527 | Father | (laughing) it does seem a bit like that don’t he really though (5.6) |

Alternative discourses are drawn upon for understanding Tom as he cannot be categorised easily into ‘good’ (passive, compliant, happy, polite) or ‘bad’ (active, disruptive, non-compliant, angry) at a constant level. To make sense of his combination of behaviours the available dominant discourses of pathology and astrology appear to offer potential answers for his parents.

The concept of Tom simply being a young individual child who is experiencing different emotions and events and communicating through behaviour is perhaps partially explored by his parents. However, there seems to be a lack of confidence evident within this thought process- reflected through the language at this level of understanding.

### Tom is constructed as a ‘good little lad’

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 585 | Mother | yeah, well most of the time he is good isn’t he? |
|  |  |  |
| 587-590 | Father | we are saying all the bad things about him but he is a ni- he is a good little lad isn’t he (.) a lot of the parents and that say he’s very- like I was talking to one of the neighbours down the road and y’know the lady down there and she said that he’s very polite (.) he’s very polite is Tom- |
|  |  |  |
| 592 | Mother | oh yeah |

Tom’s parents present examples through vivid description and consensus (Edwards and Potter, 1992) to strengthen their claim of Tom as ‘good’. Within the discussion his parents also spent time considering their own impact on Tom. This ran throughout the discussion and in parts, dominated the talk.

Consideration of how Tom’s father’s play-fighting games may impact on Tom’s behaviour is jointly explored:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 175-179 | Mother | but I don’t know whether though cos we do like we call it like that’s it we do sort of like controlled play fighting in’t it? I don’t know whether we’re doing that with him is good or bad so on one hand I’d rather do it at home but not at school but then again if he’s doing it at home is he doing it at school thinking it’s ok? But\_ |
|  |  |  |
| 181-182 | Father | that’s me and Tom like having a rough and tumble on the floor I think me dad used to call it a rough and tumble y’know- |
|  |  |  |
| 184 | Mother | but it’s controlled though if he starts hitting or biting- |

The language implies that Tom’s parents are relating to the play fighting behaviour as if it may be a problem and perhaps feel that they have to defend their choices and own behaviour with their child. The father uses his past family experiences to perhaps emphasise the importance of such close play experiences with his son. Tom’s mother states that the behaviour is ‘controlled’ twice – seemingly as she feels that she has to justify such behaviour otherwise it may be seen as unacceptable. Again the good/bad split appears as a dichotomy which Tom’s world appears to fit uncomfortably within; those around him seem to be seeking clarity as to whether their actions and Tom’s actions are good or bad. Billington (2000) suggests that the existence of this dichotomy is a key social tool of governmentality – a dominant discourse that reproduces social regulation. When things don’t fit comfortably into either category a sense of discomfort seems to be produced.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 177 | Mother | I don’t know whether we’re doing that with him is good or bad |

This discomfort is represented through language such as the Jekyll and Hyde references and comments that refer to Tom as having a split personality. Interestingly, their use of language demonstrates a doubt in their choices and understanding and it seems that they position themselves as willing to be challenged and to comply with what they are told or what society dictates as good.

### Tom is constructed as potentially being a ‘normal’ boy

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 212 | Father | he has loads of energy don’t he (.) which all kids have haven’t they |
|  |  |  |
| 611-612 | Mother | but you don’t know whether it’s sort of (..) the norm (..) do you whether other kids can- |
|  |  |  |
| 614 | Father | oh yeah that’s right yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 616-617 | Mother | flare up in different ways do you? It’s not as if he expresses his temper that often (..) |

Developmental discourse is drawn upon to consider the ‘norm’ rather than Tom’s behaviour simply being accepted as individual. His parents acknowledge that perhaps the behaviour isn’t too much of a concern and that his ‘temper’ doesn’t happen that often but their understanding is based around what they feel they don’t know. It seems they would only feel comfortable to accept Tom’s behaviour if they knew what was ‘norm’ and if Tom fitted into this.

When trying to make sense of how Tom plays with his toys at home, his parents share joint understanding which again attempts to ground Tom within the dominant discursive framework of the ‘normal’ (Cooper, 2008 and Grieve 2009).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 220-221 | Father | erm (2.5) I mean the only thing I can think of is with his toys he’s rough he seems to be quite rough with his toys don’t he? I know- |
|  |  |  |
| 223 | Mother | That could be like a boy thing though (..) fighting (..) erm- |
|  |  |  |
| 225-226 | Father | well he likes his figures and he (.) he doesn’t seem to be so (.) he plays sort of nice but he’s sort of rough with them y’know he’s careless- |
|  |  |  |
| 228-229 | Mother | well yeah he sort of like role plays with them don’t he likes fighting with them (..) I think it’s just one of those things that they do don’t they |
|  |  |  |
| 239-241 | Mother | they always have to crash into each other and stuff like that but again it could be just a boy thing but we haven’t got anything to compare him with or to have we so (..) |

Terms such as ‘a boy thing’ and ‘just one of those things that they do’ suggest that Tom’s parents are attempting to fit him into the acceptable category of Tom as a boy just like any other boy. They seem to be emphasising sameness and rejecting difference. The end line, stating that they have nothing to compare with – followed by a long pause suggests that whilst their stake of normalisation has been claimed, they also feel unsure as parents and far removed from the system, which constructs the ‘norms’. This is poignantly highlighted by his mother’s statement:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 244 | Mother | we don’t know if that’s normal or (..) er (4.7) er (6.8) trying to think (10.5) |

Throughout the passage a strong sense of a need for acceptance and hope that Tom fits into the societal norm is present. His parents question each other and offer different interpretations to situations, however jointly conclude that Tom is a ‘good little lad’ who has a temper which can at times be frightening and get him into trouble. In contrast to the school setting, his parents talk in detail about what they could be doing that impacts on Tom’s behaviour, offering a critical reflection towards the actions they have taken to support him. A tone of concern is present within the discussion regarding possible wrong choices or opportunities that they feel they may have missed to ensure Tom’s positive behaviour development and acceptance into a world of the ‘norm’.

### Tom is constructed as a child that needs ‘punishing’

Discussion regarding different ways of teaching Tom how to behave was jointly considered and the parents began to state what their approaches were- seemingly to me rather than as part of their conversation. This approach seemed to function through using language to state that they were doing all they could to parent to their best ability and became a claim to their firm parenting techniques, rather than a discussion about how or why the approaches may impact on Tom’s behaviour:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 443-444 | Father | erm (.) that’s how we punish him here (..) if you’re naughty if you do that again (.) we won’t do it straight away unless it’s (?) - |
|  |  |  |
| 446 | Mother | [oh no he does get a couple of warnings] |
|  |  |  |
| 448 | Father | and then (.) that’s it- |
|  |  |  |
| 450 | Mother | take everything off him(.) |

Tom’s parents show solidarity in use of culturally dominant discipline approaches. Use of language such as ‘punish’ suggests that they are positioning themselves as parents who perceive ‘naughty’ behaviour to be unacceptable. They suggest such behaviour requires discipline, using the same language systems as other traditional social institutions, which speak of correcting behaviour (Foucault, 1977). The same language of discipline that is described within other classrooms as functioning to control bodies within pedagogy of surveillance and regulation (Iyer, 2013). Such language (for example “a couple of warnings”) is typically heard in schools, which seek to ‘correct’ behaviour through a reward and consequence approach. Use of an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) “take everything off him”, suggests that the parents are seeking to show that they are not weak in their approaches- they are firm and do not show emotion in their approach even when it means leaving their child with nothing. This discursive device largely suggests that the parents fit (or hope to fit) within the accepted cultural discourse surrounding ‘good’ parents who discipline their children and do not allow behaviour that threatens the status quo of society (non-compliance), positioning them in contrast to ‘deficient parenting’ discourse (Blackmore and Hutchison, 2010). Interestingly, this positioning presents them within a discourse of dominance and power, whereas in their discussions relating to Tom at school they position themselves as passive and powerless.

With regards to school, whilst Tom’s mother acknowledges that she is unsure as to what approaches school are using to understand and support Tom’s behaviour, she speaks of how school are ‘trying’ and how she wouldn’t want to be unfair by blaming them:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 564 | Mother | we don’t want to be saying you should be doing this should be doing that cos pointing the finger cos it’s not fair |

The language of justice used within the expression “it’s not fair” is potentially how *they* would feel if blamed as parents and also perhaps stands in contradiction to the examples of how school are ‘supporting’ Tom. Again, as a rhetorical tool it also demonstrates their positioning as the ‘supportive parents’ - to comply and empathise with the school.

### Tom is constructed as a child who is isolated as a result of his disruptive behaviour

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 265-273 | Mother | erm (.) erm (.) the only things I’m sort of aware of is like erm when he’s going in for dinner they would keep him at the back and they would walk at the back with him like so he’s not interfering with other children erm and if he’s misbehaving in the morning he doesn’t get to go out (.) he’ll help the teachers get things ready and do things like that so that he’s not just sat there looking out at the other children (.) they’re the only sort of things I’m aware of rather than any sort of specific one to one treatment as it were (.) erm yeah I think they’re just sort of minimising any sort of possible disruptions (..) I’m not aware of anything else (..) |
|  |  |  |
| 277 | Mother | er well if it’s helping them at school then that’s fine with us |
|  |  |  |
| 279 | Father | Mmm |
|  |  |  |

Whilst Tom’s mother seems to want to openly convey a need for school staff to be treated fairly, there are several accounts that could be interpreted as Tom being treated unfairly and this is not emphasised in a way that suggests that someone is explicitly being an advocate for him. When Tom’s mother states “if it’s helping them at school then that’s fine with us”, Tom’s father appears to agree with an utterance but does not explicitly confirm his position within this perspective. Again, both parents seem to take a very passive position, potentially due to their earlier discussion regarding their own understandings, which places blame with themselves and potential shame with having a child who could sit outside of the acceptable norms of society. However, this does stand in contradiction to earlier language used to suggest that starting school may have triggered Tom’s current behaviours. His parents appear unsure what position to take and the uncertainty seems to create a tone of ambivalence and tension.

Tom’s parents do speak openly about wanting to meet with school to find out what is happening. They speak of not knowing enough and wanting to take an active role in finding out more. This role remains fairly passive, as they seem to be seeking advice- “get some ideas” rather than meeting with school to share expertise and challenge approaches that school are using to ‘support’ Tom.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 536-539 | Mother | well school wise (.) we don’t know if we know everything that they’re doing (.) so it’s a bit hard to say what they could be doing what they should be doing erm (..) erm here I don’t know (.) can you think of anything that we could maybe do different? I don’t think there’s much else we could do differently is there- (..) |
|  |  |  |
| 541-543 | Father | no (.)that’s probably one reason why we sort of want yeah maybe a meeting with the school and y’know to get some ideas and that cos y’know you’ve talked to other parents and stuff like that and they only do similar to what we do- |
|  |  |  |
| 545 | Mother | yeah (.) the norm (.) it seems to be the norm (.) |

Again language of the ‘norm’ is described. This time evidence of consensus and corroboration is provided (Edwards and Potter,1992) to strengthen their narrative of parents who have tried the ‘correct’ strategies and feel there is nothing left they can do.

The emerging interpretive repertoires from the parent interview appear to be those of deviance and of abnormality v normality.

## Further understanding of Tom; through a Foucauldian lens

Tom’s mother suggests that ‘difference’ was recognised at an early stage. They felt as parents that Tom had ‘changed’ when he started school. This statement begins to construct Tom as a child who was settled and developing ‘well’ until he became part of an oppressive school system. Here the concept of the impact of starting school on Tom’s behaviour is partially introduced but not elaborated.

Whilst counter-discourses which attempt to present Tom in a positive light and as a ‘normal’ boy can be identified, this is entwined with the use of terms such as ‘temper’ and ‘Jekyll and Hyde’ which draws upon mental health discourse and suggests that Tom’s functioning stands in contrast to the ‘norm’ of childhood (Billington, 2000).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 382 | Mother | it can be a bit frightening (.) a bit Jekyll and Hyde (.) |

The use of the historical-fictional characters Jekyll and Hyde in describing Tom’s behaviours appears particularly poignant as it suggests that Tom can present as less human when his parents see him behave this way. Such a construct depicts Tom as potentially having a biological disorder or ‘condition’, which is beyond the control of everyday parenting and teaching support. In a popular self help book, Engel (2011) describes a ‘Jekyll and Hyde Syndrome’ – relating behaviours directly to an understanding of Dual Personality disorder (a mental health difficulty). This highlights the dominance of popular psychology and attaching diagnosis of difficulties to the individual. Available discourses and potential stigmatised connotations therefore risk positioning Tom within an arguably inappropriate framework at a very young age.

Constructing Tom in this way presents a powerful rhetorical device for the claim that he needs controlling as he may be both a threat to others (Foucault, 1964) and unable to function in a typically ‘normal’ way due to his difficulties: “the language of abnormal psychology is enmeshed within institutions of mental diagnosis and surveillance” (Parker, 1996: 4). Discourses of normal and abnormal, dominant within the fields of both psychology and education, emerge here to contribute to the processes of governmentality (Billington, 2000). Mental health discourse can be located historically through Foucault’s exploration of psychiatry and mental illness (or ‘madness’) as social constructs of ‘unreason’ (Foucault, 1964), which are categorised and confined due to their threat to society. Tom’s parent’s descriptions of how they ‘punish’ Tom’s behaviour position Tom within a discourse of ‘unreason’ – surrounded by ideological tools of ‘reforming’ strategies understood to be the ‘norm’ or common sense knowledge.

The dominant discourse of the ‘boy’ is drawn upon several times to explain Tom’s behaviour and construct who he is. Such language works to both construct a sense of acceptance for Tom’s behaviour and reproduce understanding of hegemonic masculinity; male power (Wetherell and Edley, 1999). Understanding of Tom within such fixed gender discourse can be identified as an additional area in which power relations are present. Tom is denied implications of diversity or difference through his positioning within the discourse of ‘fundamental biological determinism’ (Martino, 1999) of the typical behaviour of the ‘boy’, which works to potentially further remove agency from his developing sense of self. Expectations that, as he is a boy, he is likely to continue to behave in a negative way in school regardless of any supportive factors are shared between parents.

Whilst Tom is not directly involved within the discussion, the gender discourses that are drawn upon by the key adults in his life suggest that their actions will be influenced by their construction of him. Actions such as not supporting potential system changes or social and emotional needs due to the fact that he is simply a ‘boy’ and will therefore continue to behave in such a way because of this. Such ‘essentialised and naturalised notions of masculinity’, Martino (1999) highlight how issues of constructing behaviour could be potentially disempowering and influence children’s understanding of self, participation and achievement in school.

## Does the language used between the parents tell us something about possible opportunities to question or alter how the child is constructed?

Tom’s parents multiple discursive constructions of Tom appear to reflect their dual role as loving parents of a young child and obliging parents of an Early Year’s pupil attending a school. Whilst constructing Tom as a passive child within a system, which does not appear to have helped him, they also jointly construct him as a deviant child who needs punishing. Such constructions appear contradictory and at times fragmented.

The negative constructs surrounding Tom appear to be dominated by understanding of ‘within’ child factors that to need punishing. This understanding is shared between parents as the ‘normal’ thing to do. The process of sharing this understanding instigates a very emotional response from Tom’s mother, as the impact of talking through the constructs appears to become ‘real’. This response contrasts to the largely removed and at times homogenous response of the school staff.

Language relating to school practice and the potential lack of information coming from the school seems to be particularly important to how Tom is constructed. Whilst Tom’s parents present as taking a relatively passive role in their relationship with school, their understanding of how school may be impacting on Tom’s behaviour would potentially encourage them to alter their constructions of Tom and vice versa. The parents openly state that they want the school to meet with the school staff to discuss the situation but they have not yet had the opportunity. This emphasises the lack of information flow and potential control of knowledge.

Tom’s parents construct the school as an ‘unknown’. To enable opportunities to challenge and alter constructs, more allocated time seems to be needed to develop a relationship between the two settings, so that school is demystified and the parents feel comfortable to express their views and share their approaches. The lack of a strong parent partnership potentially risks constructing Tom within discourses underpinned by suspicion and blame.

## Reflective Summary: Experience, Involvement and Reflections:

The second interview, with Tom’s parents, took place at their home, whilst Tom was at school. I felt that Tom’s parents appeared a little more nervous than the school staff – potentially as they were emotionally invested in discussing Tom and understandings of his behaviour.

Tom’s parents clearly expressed before beginning the interview that they were looking forward to having the joint discussion at school as they felt that they hadn’t been kept informed with what was happening at school.

During the recording, a lot more pauses and gaps in conversation were evident. I therefore provided more prompts and direction, for example, asking them questions about possible triggers for what they understood as Tom’s more extreme behaviours and asking them about support for Tom in school. I also reassured them that they did not need to rush into their answers, that they could take their time to think.

I felt that the experience of interviewing the parents at home was significantly different to interviewing the school staff at school. The parents appeared to be emotionally connected to the experience and a little lost for words at times – as if their was no simple answer to understanding their son. They appeared to develop a multi-faceted construction of Tom which evoked different emotions from them. They seemed to connect reflexively whilst being ‘stuck’ within dominant discourses. I felt this to be quite an emotional experience and one which made me empathise for their position as parents. Perhaps as a parent myself, I felt that I could relate to both feeling incredibly emotionally attached to your own child and also unsure of how to ‘make sense’ of a situation when feeling removed – unsure what is happening in school and not communicated with.

Again during the analysis of data, I found myself particularly interested in the multiple constructs emerging and the contradictions that unfolded as Tom became understood within categories of ‘good’ and ‘bad’. Upon reflection, at the analysis stage, I was also interested in the language which did *not* appear within the parent’s discussion. For example, questions of why the school hadn’t invited them into earlier meetings to help them understand Tom’s behaviour in school, questions of why Tom might behave as he did to warrant a Hi-Vis vest and further discussion around how the school perhaps understood Tom. I considered that perhaps the parents restricted what they said as they may have seen me to be associated with the school/ the education system, as well as the potential considerations related to their passive and powerless subject position.

## Discursive Analysis: Consultation

|  |
| --- |
| **Emerging discursive constructions within the analysis of Tom’s teachers and parents jointly making sense of his behaviour: Transcript 3 (Appendix L)** |
| * Tom is constructed as a ‘good’ pupil only when he has additional attention from adults (School staff and parents) |
| * Tom is constructed as a disruptive child who can become angry and hurt other children (School staff and parents) |
| * Tom is constructed as being ‘confusing’ (School Staff) |
| * Tom is constructed as having speech and language ‘needs’ (School Staff) |
| * Tom is constructed within an emerging mental health discourse (School Staff and Parents) |
| * Tom is constructed as ‘bad’ (School staff) |
| * Tom is constructed as a child who can and wants to be ‘nice’ (School Staff and Parents) |
| * Tom is constructed within discourse of the ‘only child’ (School staff) |
| * Tom is constructed as in need of further specialist assessment (School staff) |
| * Tom is constructed as in need of daily monitoring (School staff) |
| * Tom is constructed as a child whose challenging behaviour has developed from home (School staff) |
| * Tom is constructed as behaving unnaturally (School staff and parents) |
| * Tom is constructed as child who is not relaxed at school (School staff) |

### Tom is constructed as a ‘good’ pupil only when he has additional attention from adults

Following my introduction, the SENCo took a lead in beginning the discussion within the group by outlining what the school staff had identified as key difficulties. Tom wasn’t immediately considered in terms of how hewas struggling – a short introduction to his parents explained that he liked 1:1 adult attention and how this could have a very positive impact:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 24 | SENCo | attention and actually when he’s got that we see really good- |
|  |  |  |
| 26 | NN | [yeah very positive] |
|  |  |  |
| 28 | SENCo | behaviours we see (.) y’know we see him trying to help- |

Whilst a sense of positivity is provided through Tom being described as ‘good’, this is located within conditional and contrasting language. Several examples are drawn upon to demonstrate how his behaviour impacts on other children. Tom is introduced as a child who is potentially harmful and upsetting the status quo, rather than a child who has been considered to have additional needs. A child whom the school environment may be causing some difficulties, which may need supporting. This can be located within rhetorical devices such as instead of describing the influence of adults as supportive to Tom, it is described as ‘we see him trying to help’.

Tom’s father later relates back to the positivity of the comment initially introduced by the SENCO – with regards to Tom responding well to 1:1 support. Utilising this small demonstration of a positive outcome allowed further exploration of how things sometimes are different and how Tom can be understood through an alternative perspective. It appears that Tom’s father is keen to defend the construction of his son as a child able to behave appropriately under the right circumstances.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 97-98 | Father | like you say (.) when he’s with somebody like yourself or me or Amelia or that (.) attention straight away- |
|  |  |  |
| 100 | NN | one on one yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 102 | Father | he’s pretty good and if things don’t go well- |

Following this, Tom’s mother also seems to consider how Tom may be considered in a different way, however her confidence in questioning the school’s understanding is clearly apparent within repetition of the phrase – ‘I don’t know’. She then hands ownership and power back to the school, as she seemingly does not feel that she should make the statement/ challenge them within her role as parent.

### Tom is constructed as a disruptive child who can become angry and hurt other children

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 51-65 | SENCo | with his y’know it was like not knowing where that boundary was and where he was just pushing it too far and maybe hurting other children (.) erm we also felt that in the classroom where you had a choice of where to go he wasn’t always quite sure of where to go and what to do and that would be another flash point where we might see him behave inappropriately to-towards other children or y’know break things up that other children had made or y’know so that was another scenario (..) erm (..) and then the other scenario was sort of (.) when he was with other children not always y’know when things don’t always go the way that he wants it to (.) so that- we sort of felt that when he’s with other children there was two different erm scenarios where sometimes it was play that had just got a little bit out of hand gone a little bit too far but then there was definitely other times where we felt that Tom did something because he wasn’t pleased about the situation y’know it hadn’t gone quite how he wanted it so he would do something because he was angry about it (.) so do so does that make sense about the two different- |

At the end of this sharing of information, which openly depicts how the school staff understand and construct particular areas of difficulty that Tom experiences, his parents are invited into the conversation. Here we see the parents seemingly agreeing with how he has been described, without any challenge. The discussion begins with an acceptance of Tom himself being understood as the focus of why he behaves the way he does. His parents provide group cohesion through their offer of additional examples of how Tom interrupts them within discussion at home and a sense of negativity begins to develop in the consensus of constructing Tom as a child who acts as a difficulty to other children, to his parents and to those who teach him.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 119-120 | Mother | I don’t know whether it’s cos he isn’t fully aware or whether he’s just over exuberant (.) he’s really excited- |
|  |  |  |
| 122 | NN | Yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 124-125 | Mother | and then he realises maybe afterwards oh maybe I went a bit far I don’t know (.) well obviously you know you’re in his form and- |
|  |  |  |

A potential counter discourse seems to be quickly dismissed by the group when Tom’s mother’s attempts to normalise his behaviours are not acknowledged or supported by the school staff. This perhaps leaves her less empowered and more likely to hand over more ownership to the school as suggested within the phrase ‘well obviously you know’.

### Tom is constructed as being ‘confusing’

Tom is presented as a child who doesn’t understand, is not fully able to communicate with adults and is a concern. The school staff describe this combination as ‘confusing’. The word ‘situation’ here appears to relate to times when Tom has done something wrong and the school staff are speaking to him about his behaviour. Assumptions appear to be made regarding what Tom is thinking and how much he understands about the situation he is involved in. Tom’s parents listen and then begin to actively contribute supporting evidence that relates to Tom lacking understanding of whether he has been ‘good’. A medical discourse begins to emerge which suggests that there may be something wrong with Tom’s speech. Again strengthening the discourse of deficit surrounding Tom. An alternative discourse, which would perhaps question how Tom might feel within such ‘situations’ and the potential impact on a child through their possible desire to avoid anxiety, is not explored.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 134-137 | NN | and he’ll and sometimes it’s erm confusing cos you’ll think no you do know and then you’ll realise he is is actually just saying the wrong word he does say the opposite to what he actually means (..) I don’t know if you’ve ever picked up on that? |

The group’s understanding begins to be shifted by the school staff towards one that suggests Tom must have a difficulty or need, which is preventing him from communicating and interacting effectively. There is no discussion of the framework of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in which Tom is embedded within at school or consideration of why he may be unable to clearly vocalise his ideas at school – or indeed other different situations. Further into discussion regarding Tom’s understanding and use of language, the issue of Tom presenting with a stutter at school is approached. The SENCo appears to cautiously approach this topic – providing detail of when they have seen Tom stutter and then relating back to the parents. Here it is acknowledged that when Tom is with his mother, he doesn’t appear to stutter, whereas at school he does it quite regularly. Whilst this appears to be quite significant information, again it feels that an area of exploration is perhaps missed. Why does Tom stutter so much more at school?

### Tom is constructed as having speech and language ‘needs’

Further description informs the parents that Tom’s stutter does seem to be getting better but that he finds stressful situations, when he is being questioned about what he has done, very difficult.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 208-211 | SENCo | I think also in our discussion we did talk about his (.) his language (.) and his communication erm and y’know (.) I think you sort of touched on the fact that y’know sometimes we’re not one hundred per cent sure whether he’s actually fully understanding what- |
|  |  |  |
| 226-228 | SENCo | I’ll say yes (.) y’know (.) erm (..) and also there’s the sort of (..) y’know there are issues with the way he communicates with us and when he’s put in a stressful situation- |
|  |  |  |
| 230 | NN | Yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 232-233 | SENCo | that’s when he really finds it hard to speak coherently and we get a bit of a stuttering and- |
|  |  |  |
| 235 | NN | Mmm |
|  |  |  |
| 237-239 | SENCo | erm (.) I don’t know I (.) cos I know when I’ve seen him with (.) well you mum (.) you don’t see that at all (.) you don’t see the stuttering at all (.) whereas in school we probably see it quite regularly really (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 241 | NN | yeah (.) |

Again the SENCo presents factual information as a way to construct Tom, yet these needs are not explored. We do not develop a greater sense of why Tom may not ‘stutter’ with his mother. Understanding appears to be avoided in order to construct his speech ‘needs’.

### Tom is constructed within an emerging mental health discourse

From an emerging discourse of ‘needs’ also comes the emergence of a growing pathological discourse – a shared understanding that something is ‘wrong’ with Tom. Tom’s father leads this through linking talk regarding Tom’s difficulty with coping under pressure with his apparent ‘temper’.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 280-281 | Father | under pressure and that (.) he ain’t good under pressure (.) he’s not good under pressure (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 283 | SENCo | yeah- |
|  |  |  |
| 285 | Father | he’s got a temper (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 287 | NN | [yeah] |
|  |  |  |
| 289 | Mother | [yeah] |
|  |  |  |
| 291 | Father | that’s the thing (.) he’s got a right temper (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 293 | SENCo | you see that’s interesting (.) because with us (.) he controls that doesn’t he (.) |

Repetition of the words ‘pressure’ and ‘temper’ work to create a discourse around the child that becomes more threatening and presents a potentially unpredictable and wholly undesirable view of the child. Each member of the group (myself aside) contribute to encouraging this understanding – the listener feedback increases and appears to encourage the speaker (Tom’s father) to say more. The construct is then repeated and reinforced “that’s the thing (.) he’s got a right temper”.

This provides an example of the group jointly constructing who Tom ‘is’ through shared description of his action, “To build his mind each of them has to build a version of his world” (Edwards and Potter, 1992:142).

Whilst this construct is largely confirmed by the group, a challenge of home /school or parent/teacher split is also introduced with the suggestion that Tom ‘controls’ this when he is with the school staff. This firstly suggests that Tom has full control over his actions and therefore is potentially being constructed as a child who is positioned within a ‘bad’ child understanding of behaviour- manipulating different situations for his own gains due to a moralistic deficit (Macleod, 2006). Secondly, it could function to potentially communicate a sense of undermining the parents' ability to discipline, teach and cater for the emotional well-being of their own child.

Tom’s parents did not respond to this comment and potentially in response to this, the SENCo shifted the focus back to a within-child model, focussing on Tom’s difficulties/deficits – this time introducing the idea of Tom presenting as an anxious child. This was also spoken of through an explanation of the potential negative impact of the classroom environment on Tom’s well being.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 301-305 | SENCo | (.) is he overly anxious in the classroom where he’s got that level of choice (.) y’know we were trying to sort of (.) decide whether why is he going up to children and trying to sort of get their attention and spoil what they are doing and we wondered whether he wasn’t sure what to do or where to go or cos there’s quite a lot of free-flow- |

Whilst this appears to be an important understanding of Tom to the SENCo, it doesn’t appear to be fully explored before the Nursery Nurse begins to explain how Tom must understand the consequences of his actions as he has been consistently disciplined over a significant length of time.

A wealth of discipline strategies are shared between school and home. Discourse of discipline embedded within language of behaviourist operant conditioning and behaviour modification such as the popular work of Skinner (1972) appears to be dominant. Similar language within classroom practices was also recognised by Millei (2005).

### Tom is constructed as ‘bad’

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 307-309 | NN | cos he does (.) cos he does understand like I say that there are consequences (.) if he does something then he misses part of his playtime or the whole of his play time – |
|  |  |  |
| 313-314 | NN | depending on what he’s done (.) or he has to sit on the red mat y’know for five minutes (.) while he calms down (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 336-339 | Mother | we’ll take his toys off him (.) we’ll take his teddies and his friends or he doesn’t get to go out on a bike or scooter (.) |
|  |  |  |

In discussion of the strategies they use both at home and at school to teach Tom what they understand to be right and wrong, parents and school staff take turns to share the conditional language they use with Tom to explain their approaches. In doing this they ‘use’ the voices they would perhaps use with the child. This becomes particularly apparent with Tom’s parents, as they appear to try to ensure that the school staff recognise their efforts in supporting the school’s disciplinary approach- a demonstration of their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986):

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 343 | Father | but then he nags and nags and nags and nags and we say well if you do this (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 352-352 | Father | you say to him (.) look if you want to do that then you sit there (.) be quiet (.) calm down (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 356-358 | Father | and then if you’re good (.) then you’ll get something back or you can go out and that and then eventually it’s like (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 417-419 | Mother | yeah we do say if you don’t play nicely at school you won’t get invited to parties (.) nobody will want to play with you (.) no one will want to be your friend (.) |

Repetition of the word ‘nags’ perhaps highlights the struggle that parents are communicating when trying to support Tom. It seems that they are attempting to present Tom in conflict against them – and that they are on the ‘side’ of the school. This works to reduce the chances of the school attributing blame on the parents for Tom’s behaviour – thus for them, alleviating the threat of anxiety and developing a comfortable growing sense of consensus within the group (Edwards and Potter,1992). However, in the midst of this emerging group dynamic, a negative discourse of disobedience and pathology is beginning to strengthen around their understanding of Tom.

### Tom is constructed as a child who can and wants to be ‘nice’

A counteracting discourse of shared understanding that Tom can be ‘lovely’ is also present within the conversation.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 379 | NN | yeah (.) that’s the thing cos he can (.) he can play lovely and y’know and erm- |
|  |  |  |
| 380-381 | SEN | he’s lovely with the other children a lot of the time (.) y’know he does want to be (.) nice- |
|  |  |  |
| 383-384 | NN | he wants to be their friends (..) and y’know I don’t know about yourself but I’ve tried to say to him (.) but if you hurt him them they won’t wan to be play- |
|  |  |  |
| 386 | Father | Yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 388 | Mother | oh we say that (.) yeah we always say it |

This extract provides an example of emerging positive language, which finds strengths in Tom’s behaviour, yet is quickly shifted in tone back to a focus onto a negative discourse of disobedience and deficit. This becomes apparent within the line “but I’ve tried to say to him (.) but if you hurt him they won’t want to be play”. Use of the word ‘but’ as a coordinating conjunction harshly emphasises the contrast within language such as ‘lovely’ and ‘friends’ against ‘hurt’ and ‘won’t want to play’. This perhaps encourages Tom’s mother to use the extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) “oh we say that (.) yeah we always say it”, present within the following lines. It seems that the power of the language used through the Nursery Nurse’s contrast of description would potentially feel like the parents were contributing to ‘hurt’ if they did not demonstrate that they were doing what the school were suggesting to do.

As the discussion continues the school staff appear to contribute more of the formulations regarding Tom’s behaviour and their understanding of it. Using a range of rhetorical devices, Tom is presented as a child who is playing and hurting others without further depth of reason.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 483-484 | NN | it isn’t for the (.) he isn’t doing it to get your attention (.) he’s doing it to play- |
|  |  |  |
| 486-487 | SENCo | yeah he isn’t doing it to push boundaries and test where we’re all stopping (.) I don’t think he’s that aware y’know aware of us (.) I think (..) |

### Tom is constructed within discourse of the ‘only child’

The school staff continue to take a lead in their descriptions of understanding Tom, with his parents remaining relatively quiet within this part of the discussion. This is potentially as Tom’s behaviour is positioned outside of the school environment again – with understanding being grounded within discourses of the ‘only child’. The metaphor of the ‘puppy’ appears to work in two contrasting ways: to construct Tom as a playful, fun, harmless and sweet child and in contrast as animalistic – not belonging in school, difficult to control, disobedient and in need of strict discipline. Tom’s mother confirms that she ‘understands’ this interpretation of Tom in relation to his dislike of sharing with others. His father however remains silent.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 504-509 | SENCo | the only thing I can sort of think of is the fact that of y’know (.) being an only child (.) I always think about puppies (.) I always liken things to dogs (laughing) but you know when puppies are growing up and when they’ve got their siblings around them and they nip each other don’t they if they’re getting out of line (.) and that’s sort of their (.) measure isn’t it if you like (.) of when erm (.) when to stop- |

When Tom’s father does speak, a number of minutes later, the discussion has already moved fluidly in and out of talk regarding structure, difficulties coping in free-flow classrooms and his ability to play without structure at home. Tom’s father has not joined in with this discussion. He speaks to seemingly shift the narrative back to a positive:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 621 | Father | he likes school though doesn’t he (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 623 | Mother | oh (.) he loves it (.) he hates it when it’s half term (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 625 | NN | he doesn’t want it to be summer holidays- |
|  |  |  |
| 627 | Mother | neither will I (laughing) |
|  |  |  |
| 629 | SENCo | (laughing) |

Whilst this does temporarily remind the group of an alternative way to approach the discussion, which is confirmed by others, it seems that the group does not have content to add through discussion of why or how Tom could enjoy school more – and potentially why this could be as important as the other topics of conversation. Instead the construct of Tom as a positive pupil, who is enjoying school, comes to an immediate end. The SENCo who has laughed along at this stage, opens the next line with a reintroduction of a medical discourse – potentially a difficult subject matter to approach the parents with, but introduced at a time in discussion when the group seems to be relaxed (demonstrated through laughing) and seemingly positive about the school.

### Tom is constructed as in need of further specialist assessment

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 634-635 | SENCo | I did wonder about how you would feel about us sort of accessing perhaps speech and language support just for – |
| 659-661 | SENCo | I think I’ll probably refer him with the y’know the stuttering when he’s trying to (.) in stressful situations but I think they can look at more (.) y’know it’s not just always the sounds that they make – |
|  |  |  |
| 670-675 | SENCo | I think it would benefit us just to have that y’know just assessment (.) just to check (.) just to see what er he is understanding and whether we can do anymore to support him with his language and his comprehension (..) so that will probably be (.) well she’s coming in this week actually but I’ll mention it to her then but it will be when we have out planning meeting in September that we would formalise that really- |

In suggesting that the school may need medical advice for supporting Tom, the developmental deficit is again drawn upon to explain and construct his behaviour. Interestingly the phrase ‘benefit us’ (the school) is used rather than benefit Tom. This seems particularly important considering that Tom’s behaviour is seen as disruptive but his individual needs are potentially being missed. The school SENCo does specifically explain that the referral to the Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) Service would be to “refer him with the y’know the stuttering when he’s trying to (.) in stressful situations”. However, no explanation is given to communicate to parents what has been done within school to specifically target support to ensure that Tom does not feel overwhelmed in such situations. Ownership of the ‘problem’ is passed to a different group (SALT) and away from the school. Thomas (2005) suggests that a ‘need’ provides a route for schools to ‘direct their clients towards some existing professional specialism’ (p.59). Perhaps to provide evidence that something proactive is being done to bring about change but in a way that does not cause too much disruption to the everyday running of the traditional school routines and values. In approaching the parents with the need for a referral, the claim of the severity of Tom’s difficulties is also constructed further. He is presented as a child that the school alone does not have the resources to cope with.

The discussion about Tom potentially needing SALT support indicates the school are suggesting that he may have Special Educational Needs, which require additional support within the areas of communication and social-emotional well being. However, the strategies discussed to respond to his behaviour in school are presented in contrast to these needs:

### Tom is constructed as in need of daily monitoring and surveillance

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 717 | SENCo | mmm (.) well I think when he goes out we put erm- |
|  |  |  |
| 719 | NN | he has a hi-vis on- |
|  |  |  |
| 721 | SENCo | a hi-vis jacket on so that we (.) well you can keep an eye on him (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 723 | NN | (laughing) it’s just so that we can see where he is (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 735 | NN | just so we can see where he is and he’s quite happy to wear it and- |
|  |  |  |
| 737 | Father | I was going to say does he mind wearing it (.) yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 739 | NN | no he doesn’t mind- |
|  |  |  |
| 741-742 | Father | I I have to say I’m not really (.) I’m not really sort of a fan but I can see why you want to do this- |
|  |  |  |
| 744 | NN | yeah he’ll go out and he’ll come running back in- |
|  |  |  |
| 746 | SENCo | yeah he’s not the only one either- |

Tom’s Nursery Nurse speaks on behalf of Tom by stating that ‘he’s quite happy to wear it’ and does not respond to his father’s opinion when he states that he isn’t ‘sort of a fan’ of the approach. The discourse presented – one that speaks of monitoring: ‘keep an eye on him’ and ‘see where he is’ relates to those present in social institutions (Foucault, 1977) including prevalence in early childhood classrooms (MacLure et al, 2011 and Millei, 2005). The phrase ‘he’s not the only one’ appears to be an attempt to normalise the practice to make the idea more acceptable and supports the action through suggested coherence to the approach (Edwards and Potter, 1992).

The line ‘they’re all wearing the same clothes’ suggests that without a mark of difference in their clothing, the children are not identified as individuals in the playground. The playground is presented as a different domain. The principles of teaching children do not appear within the shared language, instead monitoring and regulation become key discourses. Interestingly the language at this stage carries a light-hearted tone, as can be seen in the laughter of the different participants. Although this part of the discussion could be seen as challenging, the group presents itself as allies through shared laughter: “In reacting to humor, affiliation is not only manifested in sharing laughter, but also in substantive agreement” (Jefferson, 1984: 26).

### Tom is constructed as a child whose challenging behaviour has developed from home

This theme appears to develop within discussion of what games Tom’s parent’s play with him at home. The conversation moves towards Tom’s rough play and his like of play-fighting and imaginative play such as Marvel Avengers. Description of such play is offered by the parents until it is interrupted by the Nursery Nurse who seemingly adopts a position of authority over their decision to play such games with Tom. This is instigated through offering an opinion regarding their choice of games – without being asked. At first this opinion appears to be a confirmation that they are doing the ‘right’ thing as parents. However this is immediately overturned with the statement “y’know it’s difficult then when you have to go and tell another parent… y’know” alluding to the idea that such play is the reason that Tom hurts children at school – with the school having to explain to other parents what has happened. Here we see a sense of covert blame and shame within the rhetorical devices that the Nursery Nurse has utilised. In doing so she has continued to construct Tom as ‘problem’ to the school and to her as an individual. She has also handed responsibility for Tom’s behaviour over to the parents – subtly suggesting that by not playing such games with him at home, it will transform him as a child and resolve all difficulties.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 806-807 | Mother | he’ll pretend to be Spiderman or someone and he’ll be jumping and leaping and throwing himself around the room – |
|  |  |  |
| 809 | NN | which I don’t have – y’know we don’t mind that (.) that’s absolutely fine- |
|  |  |  |
| 811 | Mother | yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 813 | NN | if that’s as it is (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 815 | Mother | yeah (.) yeah (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 817-818 | NN | y’know it’s difficult then when you’ve got to go and tell a parent – another parent (..) |
|  |  |  |
| 820 | Mother | Yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 822 | NN | y’know (..) |
|  |  |  |

This understanding is further emphasised, firstly by the Nursery Nurse and then by the SENCo, who explain their understanding of why Tom is behaving the way he is. Tom’s mother appears to acknowledge and agree with the statements but does not expand on her thoughts. This potential ‘blame’ situation perhaps creates a sense of negative feeling – leading to the ‘disclaimer’ (Hewitt and Stokes, 1975) “I mean I’m not saying… that’s the reason”, a device used to ward off potentially harmful attributions.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 861-863 | NN | but then maybe (.) I think maybe actually that then (.) cos he’s doing that with you and you’re an adult (.) he isn’t able to differentiate between you and another child- |
|  |  |  |
| 865 | Mother | [and a child yeah (.)] |
|  |  |  |
| 867 | NN | do y’know what I mean? |
|  |  |  |
| 869 | Mother | Mmm |
|  |  |  |
| 871 | NN | I mean I’m not saying- |
|  |  |  |
| 873 | Mother | Yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 875 | NN | that’s the reason- |
|  |  |  |
| 877 | Mother | oh yeh |

When the SENCo contributes to this area of discussion, her colleague has already outlined the reasons for such play being perceived as problematic by school staff. Perhaps this provides a space for her to be much more forceful in her approach to the matter, as presented in the statement “maybe try and knock that on the head”. Here the SENCo presents herself as an expert who holds the solution to Tom’s behaviour and who is telling the parents how to change their ‘wrong’ practice in order to make a difference. This seems far from a reflective egalitarian approaches, which may consider everyone’s view, and instead risks introducing the deficient parenting discourse to the group.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 912-917 | SEN | so perhaps I think maybe to maybe try and knock that on the head so that he is (.) he is understanding y’know we’re not doing this because you’ve been y’know because you’ve been doing it at school and it’s hurting people (.) erm (..) and just see whether it actually has (.) y’know with you not actually doing that and not doing physical rough play at home (.) whether it does (.) cos it might like you say have a negative impact – |
|  |  |  |
| 919 | NN | it might yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 921 | Mother | Mmm |

### Tom is constructed as behaving unnaturally

It is recognised by the group that Tom can be a ‘lovely’ child and is ‘learning’ to be a friend. The language used however constructs Tom as a child who isn’t natural.

For example: “he’s pretending”; “not really a natural response”; “almost over the top”; “exaggerated deliberately’; “really over-exaggerated look of look how nice I am”. Language that works to further pathologise him. The expectation for Tom becomes to “do it more naturally”. It is not considered that Tom *is* behaving naturally – that his behaviours are potentially a response to his environment and his feelings. Unfortunately, not behaviours that fit into their understanding of that particular social situation.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 1052-1059 | SENCo | yeah (.) he really really wants good friends and he is learning to do that really well (.) at the moment it’s not really a natural response (.) it’s quite a (.) right I’m going to be good so you know like I said about the sharing (.) it seems he’s pretending at it at the moment but you see that’s a form of development as well (.) they’ve got to y’know try it and see what they’ve got and then it becomes part of their natural behaviour where they don’t have to think about it it just comes naturally (.) erm I think that the really positive things that we see him doing is almost over the top isn’t it? |
|  |  |  |
| 1061 | Mother | yeah exaggerated deliberately (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 1063-1065 | SENCo | yeah but that’s great that he’s doing that (.) that he’s actually thinking I’m going to do that really well (.) it’s like when he sees me in the corridor (.) he has a really over-exaggerated look of look how nice I am– |

The SENCo explains to Tom’s parents that whilst his behaviour is seen as unnatural and exaggerated, it is “great” that he’s doing it. The discourse of obedience and discipline in schools is dominant here – the school child is taught and encouraged to be passive and ‘happy’, perhaps regardless of their needs and emotional understanding. This is seen to operate within a discourse of ‘control’ under descriptors of what Millei (2005) recognised as ‘appropriate’ and ‘desired’ conduct and classroom practices.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 1075 | Mother | yeah he just needs to do it more naturally- |
|  |  |  |
| 1077 | NN | Yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 1079 | Mother | and do it all the time rather than making a point of doing that (.) yeah |
|  |  |  |

As the discussion considers Tom’s skills in sharing, a ‘but’ presents a contrast structure which breaks the flow of the conversation and moves towards a more negative consideration of how Tom shares: “he does share but he has to tell you that he’s sharing”. This then becomes problematized: “that’s really difficult… do we encourage that sort of neediness”. Again, Tom appears to have become a problem rather than celebrating his growing skills in social interaction and exploring how this could be promoted. Use of such linguistic devices, contribute towards making the ‘problem’ of Tom more convincing (Atkinson, 1984).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 1216-1218 | NN | he does (.) if we’ve done something like we talk about sharing (.) you say he finds it difficult to share (.) he does (.) he does share but he has to tell you that he’s sharing- |
|  |  |  |
| 1220 | Father | mmm he makes a point out of it yeah (.) |

### Tom is constructed as child who is not relaxed at school

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 1282-1283 | SENCo | at school (..) interestingly *when* you when I (.) when you came in to see me and we were in the conservatory- |
|  |  |  |
| 1285 | Mother | Yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 1287 | SENCo | I mean we were only chatting for five minutes |
|  |  |  |
| 1289 | Mother | [yeah] |
|  |  |  |
| 1291 | SENCo | but I saw a different side to Tom then- |
|  |  |  |
| 1293 | Mother | oh right |
|  |  |  |
| 1295 | SENCo | cos he did seem to be quite calm whereas in school he does seem to be- |

A possible counter discourse begins to emerge here as Tom is described as ‘calm’. This followed a part of the discussion in which I was attempting to encourage the group to think about his behaviour in a different way, as I felt that the constructs were becoming increasingly negative and fixed. On reflection of my own contribution, I feel my question potentially led the group to focus on the concept of anxiety and demonstrated my own role in claiming stake. Although I intended to remain a largely reflective participant I also decided to use a rhetorical device to highlight emotional well being to the group.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 1344-1346 | SENCo | I think you know (.) I think what you have said that thing about his being in a heightened state I do think he’s quite like that for a lot of the time in school (..) so y’know when we’ve mentioned sort whether he is being anxious in school – |

Within the discussion about why Tom may be presenting as an anxious child at school, consideration of the impact of close monitoring begins to be explored but then

moves towards how Tom reacts to the consequences he faces after doing something ‘wrong’. Close understanding is shared between Tom’s mother and Nursery Nurse regarding Tom’s physical responses. It is recognised that in different situations he feels “under pressure” and “he can’t talk his way out of it”.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 1408-1410 | NN | in the classroom he’s erm you can tell when he’s done something because he tries to tell you and this is what I was saying earlier about him saying no or yes when he means the opposite (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 1412 | SENCo | Yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 1414 | NN | and he also does this thing with his tongue where he – |
|  |  |  |
| 1416 | Mother | with his cheek? |
|  |  |  |
| 1418-1419 | NN | yeah where he pushes his tongue in his cheek and that’s when I know (laughing) |

In an attempt to gain further understanding of how the adults were making sense of Tom’s behaviour ‘under pressure’ I asked a question and deliberately returned to their term ‘anxiety’ to see if it opened up an interpretation relating to Tom’s emotional reaction to such situations.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 1448-1449 | R | do you think it takes him a little while to calm down or for some anxiety to go down for him to be able to communicate with you- |
|  |  |  |
| 1451- 1453 | NN | I’m not sure (.) I’m not sure whether it is the calming down or if it is the (.) erm (.) he knows he shouldn’t have done it and he doesn’t want to admit that he’s done it and he’s trying not to say it but he has to say it in the end (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 1455-1456 | R | ok (.) so we’re not quite sure if that’s a sign of anxiety or if it’s I don’t want to because this is all too much to deal with or it’s all a bit uncomfortable for him- |
|  |  |  |
| 1458 | NN | yeah (..) |
|  |  |  |
| 1460-1462 | SENCo | it’s interesting that he’ll come and tell you when he’s done something really good won’t he but then he’s withholding that – it’s almost like it’s an image of himself that he [doesn’t want you to see] |

At this stage it feels that the SENCo stands alone in developing alternative understandings of Tom – she does not receive the immediate confirmations that existed within the first interview with Tom’s Nursery Nurse but instead contributes a statement which encourages the group to think: “it’s almost like it’s an image of himself that he doesn’t want you to see”. I perceive this to be a helpful challenge to the dominant discourses as she appears to consider that Tom may fear being ‘himself’ in school. It prompts additional thought regarding why Tom may be struggling – other than Tom simply being ‘naughty’ or having a deficit.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 1479-1483 | NN | well I think obviously he does feel a lot of pressure erm (..) but I also think he knows that he shouldn’t have done it (.) do y’know what I mean? He’s really – he’s done it he’s not meant to (.) he’s sort of lost his temper or y’know or got frustrated or done whatever it is that he’s done (.) and but then (.) he knows he shouldn’t have done it (.) |

Within this part of the discussion we can see the largely unchallenged discourse of discipline dominating through rhetorical devices: “he knows he shouldn’t have done it”. It suggests that whilst Tom is understood to only show ‘remorse’ for letting ‘himself down’ he continues to be treated in the same way when he is found to hurt other children, “and now he’s missing his playtime or he’s not allowed in the construction area or he can’t go back in the conservatory”. Principles of restorative practice and nurturing approaches to encourage social skills are not evident within the language available. Instead Tom is understood to lack empathy, which is claimed through detailed narrative and consensus.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 1520-1521 | SENCo | but I think that he’s more remorseful about the fact that he’s done it –y’know he’s let himself down- |
|  |  |  |
| 1523-1524 | NN | and now he’s missing his playtime or he’s not allowed in the construction area or he can’t go back in the conservatory (.) |
|  |  |  |

Continuing within the discipline discourse, when Tom’s parents question and challenge how Tom is treated at play and lunch times, the school’s response is one of lack of knowledge and awareness of the situation – with responsibility passed to an unknown person/s. The response possibly avoids blame but also potentially has the impact of suggesting to the parents that such information unimportant or irrelevant: “is he? Right (.) ok he possibly does”, positioning school within a powerful position over the parents. It also potentially risks undermining the school staff, as those who are seen to understand the most about Tom in school are presenting as unaware of situations, which could crucially be impacting on his behaviour.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 1630-1631 | Mother | do you still do him going in at the back of the queue going to dinner and he always sits at the end of the table? |
|  |  |  |
| 1633 | NN | erm (.) I’m not sure because I don’t go in with them- |
|  |  |  |
| 1635 | Mother | ah right (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 1637 | NN | I’m not sure about dinnertimes (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 1639-1640 | Mother | that’s what he was doing (.) he says to me anyway (.) he says he has to sit at the end of the table (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 1642 | NN | is he? Right (.) ok he possibly does (.) |

Tom’s mother’s descriptions of how Tom is understood to always stay at the back of the line and sit at the end of the table, could be perceived as non-inclusive and even discriminatory – potentially positioning him as a victim. However, the SENCo’s following descriptions work to normalise such practice and prevent exploration of how such treatment may impact on Tom’s developing sense of self. The discussion does not consider Tom to be a victim of such practice, instead Tom appears to be positioned in the ‘right’ place – considering his behaviours.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 1742-1743 | SENCo | I’ve worked out when my children are lining up for assembly they always fight for the back (.) |

The SENCo is suggesting an alternative narrative for Tom being at the back (without exploring the underlying narrative of punishment and monitoring) claiming that school children want to be at the back of the line. This may be a linguistic device to avoid blame and confrontation (blame can be attributed to the behaviour of the children lining up) or may be a way of normalising practice and encouraging acceptance of school approaches.

When the school environment is discussed further, difficulties are presented regarding providing support for Tom. Here, reason is given as to what may benefit Tom but with each reason comes an obstacle. Contrasts are utilised to emphasise the difficulties that Tom presents to the school:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 1790-1794 | SENCo | yeah (.) in those times or somebody who’s just ensuring that he’s keeping those relationships (.) but it’s the staffing though isn’t it (..) and you see I find play times really difficult because to make them more structured you’re taking away the purpose of the freedom (.) that they need (.) it’s almost right (.) we’re going to have another lesson now (.) a lesson on how to play (.) |

The potential for creative solutions does not seem available and this part of the conversation ends with a tone of helplessness. The system presents itself as rigid and fixed; unable to change for the needs of a child.

Both school staff instead suggest that they “don’t expect *it* to completely disappear” – with *it* representing problematic behaviour. It is perhaps accepted more that he will receive less support to meet his needs because as a boy he is constructed as more likely to behave in such a way: “he’s a boy for one y’know”. The discourse of ‘naughty boys’ is further strengthened by use of the term “I hope for those times maybe become less, the corrections become less.” The concept of ‘boy’ and need for corrections appears to be the accepted understanding of what fundamentally underpins Tom’s behaviours. Tom’s parents are very accepting of this discourse.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 1819-1820 | SENCo | there are children in my class that we have to speak to (.) y’know we don’t expect it to completely disappear (.) he’s a boy (.) for one y’know (slight laugh)- |
|  |  |  |
| 1822-1823 | NN | yeah and you learn your life by pushing the boundaries don’t you (.) that’s how you learn (..) |
|  |  |  |
| 1825-1826 | SENCo | but I sort of hope for those times maybe become less (.) the corrections become less (..) |
|  |  |  |

Interestingly, as the discussion is drawing to a close, the Nursery Nurse reminds the group that Tom is “only five”. This works to bring positivity and hope back to the group- this is reinforced by the SENCOs statement, however her statement (perhaps unintentionally) reminds the group of the controls enforced over Tom to ensure that he follows the school’s rules on behaviour. Her repetitive statement that follows seems to be an attempt to tell the group that ultimately the school want him “to do well”.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 1835-1837 | NN | just in the fact that he has shown signs of understanding y’know (.) and improving (.) he’s just not quite got the control (..) and he is only five (..) and hopefully with a little bit of maturity and y’know help with his speech- |
|  |  |  |
| 1839 | Mother | Yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 1841-1843 | NN | those things combined hopefully (.) he might be able to do (..) just be able to play without wearing a hi-vis (.) y’know (..) we’ve got to think positive haven’t we (.) we’ve got to think we want him to (.) we do want him to do well (.) and we (..) |

As I ask the group if they have anything else to add and if the parents feel comfortable with the situation, Tom’s mother reports how she thinks it “sounds ok”. However, she then explains that this is the “only time I’ve got feedback on sort of what’s been going on and what’s been done and how he’s dealing with it (..) so yeah (..)” This positions her within a passive role as parent but also suggests that decisions have been made with regards to additional support and consequences for Tom without a joint home/school approach. Thus positioning the school as controllers who do not value the voice or involvement of the parent.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 1901 | Mother | I think it all sounds ok (.) |
|  |  |  |
| 1903 | Father | Yeah |
|  |  |  |
| 1905-1911 | Mother | I mean I try and ask Tom what he’s been doing during the day and he’ll tell me one thing and I’ll take it with a pinch of salt (.) I know it sounds horrible but if he says I’ve been really good I’ll say oh right have you cos like I say if you ask him in a different way he’ll probably tell the truth later on (..) erm so from getting feedback from him it’s a bit pointless (..) this is the only time I’ve got feedback on sort of what’s been going on and what’s been done and how he’s dealing with it (..) so yeah (..) |

The emerging interpretive repertoires from the consultation continue to locate difficulties within Tom. The repertoires of deficit and deviant can again be identified, however new constructs can also be located and a repertoire of school related anxiety begins to develop – suggesting a shift in ‘making sense’ from ‘within’ factors towards broader systemic understanding.

## Further understanding of Tom; through a Foucauldian lens

Foucault (1980) suggests that power operates in ‘institutional apparatus’ – which incorporates settings such as schools and the systems followed within them. Use of pathological discourse, developed largely through Educational Psychology discourse and the ‘normalised gaze’ of society present within such apparatus, works to construct Tom. This is expanded in discussion about his behaviours that the key adults around him find particularly difficult. Tom is described as a child who can be ‘frightening’, ‘strong’ and potentially at risk of ‘really hurting somebody’. He becomes understood as something to be feared. Potentially strengthening the claim of understanding of Tom as needing to be controlled.

Similarly Millei (2005) explores the implications of pre-primary classroom control, concluding that educational systems maintain dominant discourses to continue the power that they bring. Discourses limit children’s agency and are dominated by an inherent ‘discourse of control’:

The same discourse formed teacher’s actions towards the conduct of young human beings, disqualified other understandings of conduct and created the only possible subject positions for both teachers and young human beings.

(Millei, 2005:129)

It is interesting to consider the interplay of power and resistance of emerging constructions between Tom’s parents and teaching staff- particularly in relation to the subject of control. Tom’s parents openly express beliefs that the school is a separate institution to home and that the educators should be able to do what they need to do, with regards to Tom’s behaviour, for their (teachers) benefit. However, at times this stands in contradiction to their beliefs regarding how Tom may be feeling and responding to some of the disciplinary practices present at the school as well as their recognition that school had influenced his changing behaviours. An example, discussed previously, being the Hi-Vis Vest that Tom is given to wear every lunch and play time. Tom’s parents questioning of the use of the vest appears to present a resistance to this disempowering and dominant practice. However, they quickly return to their predominantly passive roles when no space is given to discuss an alternative approach. The school staff exert power by informing the parents that the practice exists and that other children are treated the same – thus normalising the system and ruling out a possibility for change whilst simultaneously disempowering the parents.

A strong counter discourse to balance the deficit understanding of Tom does not emerge, nor does refusal of Tom’s parents to take up the position. Instead there exists simply a sense of potential discomfort with the practices that are used to support Tom – presented through a few questions and comments throughout the discussion. Alternative discourses do not seem available to support Tom’s parents in their understanding of Tom’s behaviour or empower their position of why the current strategies and punitive practices in school do not seem appropriate for Tom. The success of these constructs are possibly further strengthened by the claim that Tom ‘doesn’t mind’ the practices that are enforced upon him. By speaking on his behalf the all-important ‘child’s voice’ is seen to be heard and the actions are accepted without further question.

This, appears similar to Kotthoff (2015) analysis of parent-teacher consultations, which also found that negotiating a shared, moderately critical stance (towards the child) turned out to be the general interactional concern within consultations. Through sharing a mildly critical view, meaning was co-constructed on common ground. Parents provided descriptions of their ‘school-oriented’ way of parenting (Kotthoff, 2015). Similarly Tom’s parents present a school-oriented perspective, as described by Bourdieau (1986) as enacting their resources through sharing what social and cultural ‘capital’ they are capable of bringing in.

In relation to dominant parenting discourses of deficiency (Cottle and Alexander, 2014) it could be suggested that Tom’s parents may have felt largely accountable for Tom’s behaviour in school and therefore did not feel in a position to challenge the staff, who ‘deal’ with Tom’s behaviour on a regular basis. Subtle suggestions within the language suggest that the teaching staff draw upon the deficit discourse of parenting to position Tom’s parents. Whilst school staff within discussion introduce the difference of Tom at home and Tom at school, it is perhaps used as an attribution device rather than a means to explore a wider communal responsibility for supporting Tom’s behaviour jointly. This construction of Tom appears to be embedded within a subtle rhetorical force – one that is utilised to direct blame for Tom’s behaviour onto others. It is possible that here we see the contradictory discourses available within the realm of teacher-parent partnership (Cottle and Alexander, 2014) demonstrated through the encouragement of parent agency and then conflicted by discourses of deficient parenting (Blackmore and Hutchinson, 2010), potentially a result of historical conflicting government ideologies and policies (Brain and Reid, 2003).

Several examples are provided to attribute Tom’s behaviours within Tom or on to something ‘other’, thus away from the school, potentially understood by attribution theorists as the “fundamental attribution error” (Ross et al, 1977). Such attribution places negative events and actions on the individual rather than on the institution (Thomas, 2005). In doing so this strengthens both within-child discourse of social emotional and behaviour/mental health difficulties and reinforces the practice of the school as an ideological institution that supports punitive measures, categorisation and surveillance (Foucault, 1977).

As identified within the first interview with school staff, difference and inconsistency described in Tom’s behaviour in different settings becomes constructed as a ‘confusion’ that is located within Tom because he does not fit comfortably into a category which defines who he is across boundaries. This confusion appears to create a sense of uneasiness and anxiety amongst those trying to fully understand who Tom is and why he behaves the way he does. Again, the group’s lack of challenge, disagreement and rhetorical devices to ensure cohesion, appear to reinforce existing and available dominant discourses.

## Does the language used between different adults tell us something about possible opportunities to question or alter how the child is constructed?

Shared language between the group developed an understanding of Tom which was largely driven by the school’s own constructs of his behaviour. Language presented to Tom’s parents suggested that the teaching staff knew and understood Tom’s behaviour. A very persuasive claim of Tom’s major areas of difficulty are provided as well as the reasons for requesting specialist support from external agencies.

Whilst Tom’s parents did take an active part in the discussion at times, the potential need for them to demonstrate their social capital (Bourdieau, 1986) appeared to become a powerful component of the discussion, largely diminishing productive opportunities for inter-discursivity. Their relatively passive and compliant approach to both descriptions of Tom and the practices that were used to ‘support’ Tom, largely restricted further opportunity for the development of an emancipatory discourse. Tom’s parents instead appeared to position *themselves* within the dominant educational discourse ‘docile and obedient bodies’ (Iyer, 2013) through their commitment to the school’s language and in complying with a shared understanding of their son. This was particularly interesting as, following the first interview with the parents, I felt that they could possibly have more to say but refrained from speaking out within the school context. This may be linked to risk of how school would position them as parents or their interaction and resulting experience of disempowerment with the dominant school staff figures.

My role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) potentially became instrumental in encouraging the parents to have the opportunities to speak- thus facilitating a balanced sharing of understanding and collaborative approach to making sense of behaviour and encouraging emerging counter discourses. Each ‘story’ or suggestion was listened to through an emphasis on neutral strategies and avoidance of an expert model (Rimehaug and Helmersberg, 2010). Ideas were mirrored and explored further and participants were invited into discussion at appropriate times. This provided a space for the participants to feel able to express their views and fully explore a range of constructs – thus opening up the potential for challenging discourses and reconstructing narrow or dominant constructs. The dynamic of this space possibly generated a shift towards a more in-depth, thorough exploratory narrative surrounding Tom. For example, additional time was provided to consider how the school environment and other systemic factors may have been impacting on Tom’s behaviour. Whilst dominant constructs were still present the tone of the discussion at times appeared more reflective and open to alternative considerations.

Although I was openly part of the group, I was keen to let the group lead the discussion as much as possible with minimal involvement (Rimehaug and Helmersberg, 2010). When I did provide the group with a question, this appeared to open up a further sense of reflective practice, encouraging the participants to really think about why, rather than deciding on a fixed answer without fully questioning the developing constructs. However, one particular comment appeared to alter the development of understanding quite significantly:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Line | Speaker | Text |
| 1266-1268 | R | Perhaps from what you’ve described (.) at times he may be functioning in an overly heightened state when he’s showing the exaggerated behaviour |

Interestingly the SENCo appeared to immediately follow my lead without further challenge, seemingly demonstrating compliance to a hierarchy in educational systems (with regards to my role as TEP within the Local Authority EPS). I immediately felt the impact of taking the risk of the suggestion being interpreted as a ‘truth’ and was aware that such an approach could easily lead those involved in an unhelpful direction.

Language surrounding understanding of Tom seemed to become fairly ‘stuck’ in a cycle of working out what was ‘wrong’ with Tom to cause his behaviour. With further guidance, but without having to offer a premise of expertise, I feel that the group could have been supported to jointly consider a more in-depth understanding of why Tom may have communicated in specific ways, in certain places.

## Reflective Summary: Experience, Involvement and Reflections:

The consultation provided an alternative discursive space for understanding Tom. Both parents and school staff had taken part in a previous discussion, which provided them with an opportunity to separately discuss their views. Bringing everyone together aimed to provide a space for exploring shared understanding. My role involved listening to emerging understanding and contributing to the process of the discussion (reflecting on the participants ideas and inviting them to contribute). I also used discursive interventions in line with my ethical considerations – during parts of the discussion when I felt that there was a need to attempt to ‘open up’ understanding of the child as constructs surrounding him were becoming constrained, overly negative and potentially harmful with regards to future action (how they would talk about Tom and thus support him, outside of the discussion). Whilst I acknowledge that the interventions will have impacted on the language used within the group – and possibly the whole direction of the conversation, it was important for me to keep the child in mind and to ensure that there would not be an overly negative outcome to the research.

Whilst I found shared construction of Tom fascinating – especially how it emerged differently within a different group dynamic, at times during the consultation I felt frustrated and concerned by the language used and restricted by the reflective position that I had adopted. This was largely related to the parts of the discussion when I felt that Tom was being constructed as a ‘problem’ child and language shifted away from potential counter-discourses and emotional needs and towards understanding of ‘bad’ behaviour. The reaction the language evoked from me is likely to be linked to my past experiences of working with children who have being constructed jointly in this way and who I have strongly felt have lacked the emotional support and understanding that they have needed. I resisted becoming too involved in the discussion and focussed upon attempting to re-direct the discussion only when I was concerned (ethically) about Tom being constructed in a particularly negative way. When I did speak, I found that I felt quite protective of Tom and had to carefully consider what I needed to say without coming across as too forceful. The consultation highlighted to me the need to have more involvement in facilitating and guiding understanding around the joint construction of children’s behaviour – a reflective position did not simply seem enough at this stage of meaning making. Further to this, it also highlighted to me the significance of my own subjective experiences, my need to continue to be aware of why and when strong feelings are evoked in me when supporting understanding of children’s needs and how to most effectively deal with them whilst still effectively communicating a need to challenge negative constructs. Similarly when analysing the large amount of transcript data, I firstly emerged myself in the text through several re-readings and then made myself aware of my own position in the text and parts of the text that I was drawn towards. Whilst I could not fully remove my subjective interpretations from the analysis I attempted to ensure that I provided a thorough interpretation of the many layers of language used – not simply what I was interested in seeing/expected to see.

## Summary

The analysis illustrated the fluidity of discursive constructions surrounding Tom. The different opportunities created for ‘making sense’ of Tom’s behaviour demonstrated how meaning surrounding ‘challenging’ behaviour is not fixed but influenced by dominant discourses, power relations and subjective experiences.

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# Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how meaning is constructed through language and thus how ‘challenging’ behaviour is made sense of in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Through adopting a Social Constructionist approach, the study did not intend to identify existing world truths but to investigate the ‘social world as a text’ (Parker, 2001: 93). Within this exploration of talk as text, the aim was to explore the psychological processes, which function within the world- largely unintentionally (Potter, Wetherell, 1989), through the social construction of discourses.

Focus has been given to the cultural resources (Parker, 2001) of text/talk construction alongside a Foucauldian interpretation of the ways in which discourses ‘systematically form the objects’ (Foucault, 1969: 49) and relate to wider understandings of institutions, power relations and the transmission of ideology (Parker, 2001). Whilst this analysis explores the historical and cultural implications of discourse and power upon an individual life, caution should be practised with regards to how such power is understood. Indeed, with regards to this school-based study, care should be taken: “not to treat such an exercise of power as deliberate, or to neglect the ways in which those who exercise power are also enmeshed within it” (Foucault, 1975, 1976, cited in Parker, 2001).

Considering the historical implications of the outcomes of children categorised as displaying ‘challenging’ behaviours the purpose was also to identify opportunities to challenge dominant discourses. These may contribute towards “senses of the self, which may be negative, destructive, oppressive” (Potter and Wetherell, 1995: 104) and to enable linguistic practices to be altered so that a shift can occur towards change. Change that could avoid homogenous understandings or SEBD/MH and potentially liberate young people who are negatively constructed.

## Conclusions

The research contributes towards the development of critical understanding of what ‘challenging’ behaviour is and how it is dealt with in schools. For instance, the study supported the findings of the MacLure et al (2011) ethnographic study of the construction of ‘problem’ behaviour in the Reception classroom. The study by MacLure et al identified the discursive framing of behaviour against a backdrop of dominant discourses of ‘normal’ development; binaries of good vs. bad and classroom discipline.

Through the exploration of discursive constructions used to make sense of one child’s behaviour, this study has also contributed an in-depth focus of how meaning is shared between key individuals in a Reception-aged child’s life. This provides a ‘micro’ focus and particular linguistic contributors to understanding discursive framing of ‘problematic’ behaviour.

The analysis suggests multiple discursive constructions of Tom, however many of these constructions contributed to a wider understanding of: ‘Tom as having a deficit’, ‘Tom as deviant’ and ‘Tom as pathological’.

Developing understanding of the multitude of often contradictory constructions of Tom within different social spaces and settings (home, school, consultation) provided a background of where understanding arose from and how certain discourses became more dominant due to existing power positions. Exploring the use of rhetorical devices enabled further understanding of subject positions and development of discourses in action.

The study demonstrated that with limited TEP/EP facilitation, discursive constructions continued to be constrained by power relations, the defensive needs of social institutions and individual subject positions. This was emphasised through a range of dominant discursive strategies:

|  |
| --- |
| **Discursive strategies identified within the consultation** |
| Parent deficiency |
| Consensus created through humorous banter: potentially stifling opportunities to challenge oppressive constructs |
| Deployment of cultural capital by parents |
| Attempts at normalisation at the point of potential action planning to support solutions |

Whilst partnership and reflective practice is regularly understood to promote synthesis and solution working, the study highlighted how ‘knowing’ the child is not simply an act of gathering people and information. The meeting space is a potential context in which the child can perhaps be ‘known’. This requires the intervention of a skilled consultant who is able to provide a balance of allowing space for in-depth meaning to be shared and to appropriately challenge negative or oppressive discourses.

## Implications for EP Practice

Increasing numbers of primary aged exclusions and EYFS children identified as displaying ‘challenging’ behaviours have significant implications for the role of the EP – with increased requests for support from schools and pressures of increased need for creative solutions. The understanding of such behaviours is central to EPs work in supporting schools, parents and children, and deeply embedded within dominant discourses. It also appears that it is becoming increasingly common for EP practice to become swept along with the rapid pace of change within the system, that children who are categorised with such behaviours find themselves caught in. Identifying needs, immediate interventions and signposting to other specialist services often become the best intentions of a service, which is itself under pressure, striving to make changes and move on as quickly and effectively as possible.

I would argue that additional emphasis needs to be placed in slowing down the process. Supporting children at the crucial stage of exploring understanding within language and supporting the key adults around the child in identifying discourses that may be contributing to the construction of the ‘problem’. Fundamental to this process of understanding, is the time, space and sensitivity provided to allow those who are held within the ‘problem’ opportunities to reflect on the situation and connect reflexively with the child. This would appear to encourage a step away from institutional level thinking and towards individual child-centred thinking. Further to this, consideration of the space provided for discussion could provide additional opportunities to open up understanding, alter negative constructions and support a collaborative approach for positive meaningful understanding and actions to support a child.

Developed from the findings of the study, the following table provides suggestions for EP practice regarding how the constructions *may* be altered. Further research is needed to fully understand these effects.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **How constructions might be altered:** | **Link to Literature/Analysis:** |
| Providing a space for all adults to feel equal, listened to and encouraged to speak openly and honestly. | * Reflective Consultation (Helmersberg and Rimehaug, 2010) * Reflections on the Discursive Analysis: Discussion between teaching staff * ‘Reflections on the feedback to participants’ (Appendices) |
| Slowing down the speed of ‘making sense’ of children to allow for in-depth understanding and further development of the empathic relational perspective. | * Thomas (2005) * Reflections of Discursive Analysis: Discussion between parents |
| Encouraging it to be ‘ok’ for a child not to fit within a specific category of need. | * Thomas (2005) |
| Encourage adults to identify discourses that could be contributing to the construction of the ‘problem’. | * ‘ Feedback to the Participants’ (Appendices) |
| Further opportunities to reflect on the situation and to connect reflexively with the child. | * Discursive Analysis: Discussion between parents |
| Encourage movement away from school system thinking and towards child-centred thinking. | * Discursive Analysis: Discussion between School Staff |
| Lead in supporting school staff to avoid within-child understanding of ‘challenging’ behaviours. | * Maclure et al (2011), Pomerantz (2008). * Discursive Analysis: Consultation |
| Encourage avoidance of closed attribution and blame – instead encourage a systemic understanding of the child. | * Maclure at al (2011), Cottle and Alexander (2014) * Discursive Analysis: Consultation |
| Challenge dominant parent deficiency discourse. | * Cottle and Alexander (2014), Smidt (2007) * Does the language used between different adults tell us something about possible opportunities to question or alter how the child is constructed? |
| Ensure parents have opportunities to explore their views. Facilitate further discussion around parent contributions to empower their voice. | * Kotthoff (2015) * Discursive Analysis: Discussion between Parents * Does the language used between different adults tell us something about possible opportunities to question or alter how the child is constructed? |
| Where cultural capital is deployed, support the parent/s through further opportunities to explore their own views to address the power balance. | * Kothoff (2015) * Discursive Analysis: Consultation * Does the language used between different adults tell us something about possible opportunities to question or alter how the child is constructed? |
| Intervene to open up discussion when dominant discourses appear fixed/stuck. This could be facilitated through reflective questioning and a sensitive re-directing of understanding towards the child’s emotional experience. | * Reflective questioning (Helmersberg and Rimehaug, 2010) * Examples provided in Appendix B |
| Provide opportunity for those involved to reflect on the subjective experience of engaging in such discussion. What feelings did it evoke? What parts of the discussion were particularly poignant? | * Avdi (2012) and Burr (2003) and Davis and Harre (1999). * Reflections on the Feedback to Participants |

Although this study did not directly engage consultatively in a systematic way, exploring the development of discourses has, for me, emphasised the possible opportunities that could be provided by EPs at a consultative level. EPs are in a position to promote discussion for exploring and expanding understanding of the focus child. This aspect of consultation appears key and perhaps reminds EPs of the potential in providing a space for listening and understanding without simply offering expertise. It could be suggested that those involved with the child benefit from developing agency and should be supported in seeking to understand their own reasoning and decisions rather than to be told what to do through an expert model of consultation. Through this process the EP can guide through the use of questioning and encourage the views of all involved to ensure that: a wide breadth of understanding is explored; an element of social critique is provided to expose unequal power relations and emphasis on identifying counter discourses to empower and provide resistance against oppressive discourses (Willig, 1999).

With regards to the complexity involved with young children identified with ‘challenging’ behaviour, I would suggest that an EP’s further role is one of providing additional reassurance to school staff, who may experience the feelings associated with ‘confusion’. Such discourse may be drawn upon when understanding surrounding the child is contradictory and does not appear to fit within an available category or discursive frame. Indeed the associated rush to find a category and not allow the EYFS child time to be an individual, can lead to children becoming associated with inappropriate and oppressive discourses that construct who they are and define action around them. It therefore seems key that EP’s take a lead in supporting schools to avoid within-child understanding and ensure they do not ‘speed ahead’ in decision making that may provide a fixed route for the child. Instead, focus on understanding the child as an individual – who is responding to their entire world - would perhaps be a more useful place to start. A place that avoids blame, but considers the child systemically.

Finally, as a TEP working regularly with young children who are understood to present as ‘challenging’ I feel part of this research at a deeper level. As I write this I reflect on recent conversations with Head Teachers and parents who have expressed how utterly lost they feel with what to do next to support the very young children who present with such ‘extreme’ behaviours in school. My past experiences of working in schools to support children who present with such behaviours also allows me to relate to these expressions of difficulty and realise how ‘stuck’ the situation can appear when a child has become negatively constructed over time. Such emotionally charged cases have often resulted in access to EP support once the child is identified as being at risk of permanent exclusion, when the child already has many negative constructs surrounding them. I therefore suggest that further work needs to be considered to provide preventative level EP support in schools to develop understanding of behaviour within child-focussed reflective discussion groups that follow a discursive approach to consultation. In developing awareness and understanding – opportunities can be created to support practice and alter constructions before a reported crisis stage is reached.

## Recommendations for future research

This study has provided a glimpse of how discourses function at an interactional level and at a wider ideological level (Billig, 1997). The multiple constructions analysed suggest discourses are fluid, constructed socially and have the potential for being altered. A useful continuation of this study would be to specifically explore the role of the EP in challenging dominant negative discourses within the Early Years context. Further to this, research could explore how encouraging reflexivity amongst parents and teachers may help to provide a space for altering understanding and avoiding restrictive discourses.

The study explored both how language is used around children to construct meaning and how that language can guide opportunities for possible future outcomes. A Foucauldian focus emphasised the potential dominance of underlying power relations within the school-parent partnership, which may have restricted opportunities for challenging oppressive discourses. Further research into how language can be further utilised during consultations to empower the parents of children described as ‘challenging’ may be particularly interesting. Finally, in-depth discursive exploration and closer examination of teacher and parent subject positioning may also contribute understanding into how meaningful and potentially emancipatory opportunities may be achieved for children identified as ‘challenging’.

## Limitations

Whilst a strength of Discourse Analysis is that it produces a critical insight into the social context of the construction of discourses; it could be suggested that in focusing just on discourses it brings about a number of limitations. Parker (2001) suggests that Discourse Analysis is essentially limited by its focus on language and reluctance to explore the surrounding complexities of human action and experience that surround and impact on language. Further to this, within it’s preoccupation with the construction of discourses, does the methodology fail to fully recognise the implications of the researcher’s control and thus power in analysing and reconstructing the discourses that are produced within the data?

…As researchers we construct our own image of the world when we reconstruct ‘discourses’; and we have some responsibility for how our analysis will function

(Parker, 2001:106)

It was integral to the social constructionist epistemology of this study that I demonstrated acceptance and awareness of my researcher subjectivity (Burr, 2003). To not claim truth but to provide a critical framework for understanding how within this specific situation language was used and meaning was constructed. Whilst a limitation could be identified as the inability to replicate and the generalizability of the research, it is also key to keep sight of the underlying principles of qualitative research:

Contrary to the view of positivist science, however, the situations that we are analysing are never replicable (were they ever?) Meanings are not just unique to a person; they are also unique to a relational encounter.

(Hollway and Jefferson, 2013: 74)

Although I was able to distance myself from becoming significantly involved in the interviews (by beginning a conversation and then observing/ adopting a reflective position) my role as interviewer will have still inevitably impacted on the discourse constructed. Further to this, the meanings generated within the analysis are my own- developed from a close analysis but irremovable from my own subjective experiences.

Indeed I have engaged fully in understanding my role within the research and attempted to remain ‘close to the data’ throughout the analysis process. My aim was to secure an awareness of my contribution to the reconstruction of discourses and my intentions in doing this; to also remain ‘sincere’ (Tracy, 2010) to the snapshot of social life that I was capturing. To support this process I embarked on a reflective journey whilst producing this research: keeping a reflective diary; regular revisiting of the transcripts; peer supervision and close reflexive consideration of my connection with the language, my positioning and past experience with ‘challenging’ discourses.

Willig (2008) suggests that a psychoanalytic approach is potentially needed to fully understand participant and researcher discursive positioning (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013).

Davies and Harre (1999) suggest that emotional meaning within subject positioning could be accounted to individual life experiences and histories. Subjective experience can therefore be understood in this context as a key component of positioning and discourse, which requires further attention to fully understand. I feel that we should perhaps resist seeing psychoanalytic readings as the only approach to fully understand this complex link, as psychoanalytic discourse may also restrict and lead understandings of self. Instead, what appears important is a thorough understanding of how an individual connects with language, and the impact discourses may have had on their experiences and overall construction of their ‘social self’.

I do not claim that thorough understanding of the underlying reasons for preferred subject positions was fully achieved within this study. I feel that this would require further data gathering and analysis, potentially gathered separately from each individual participant. The depth of analysis was also limited by time- each transcript took several days to feel immersed within to the point of saturation. Whilst I feel that the critical synthesis analysis approach was key to this particular study, the approach was particularly time consuming. Combined with the well-recorded experience of feeling a little lost with the lack of structure that Discourse Analysis provides, there were times during the analysis stage that I felt concerned that I was perhaps focusing on some parts of the data more than others and was left feeling that there was potentially too much data to fully comprehend it all. Additionally I was at times limited within my own philosophical understandings when considering the questions posed by Burr (2003):

If there is no truth, only competing discourses, if all readings are equally valid, in what sense is one justified in saying ‘Yes, but some people are (really/in truth) oppressed?’

(Burr, 2003: 175)

I propose that these are therefore my interpretations of the world, and indeed socially constructed through subjective experience. The reader is invited to read their own interpretation of the text and the reasons for my decision to conduct the research.

Whilst the study aimed to capture naturally occurring talk, I was aware this was not achieved to the extent of an ethnographic approach. In producing a space to talk about a child and to explore understanding of constructs developing within and around the school setting, ecological validity was partially lost. This was due to the interview design and the introduction of a topic of discussion to the group, which prevented the possibility of entirely naturally occurring talk. Cameron (2001) suggests that the interview produces a certain form of speech, which discourages the freedom of naturally occurring talk and limits the content of discussion.

Additionally, during the consultation, I found that it was unrealistic to achieve ‘absolute neutrality’ (Helmersberg and Rimehaug, 2010: 195) due to the consultation forming a social act within which all participants use language that cannot be considered outside of subject positions. Neutrality also produced a difficulty for myself as researcher when I felt a need to provide more explicit direction to challenge dominant discourses, ensuring that the discussion ended with Tom’s well being the focus. This clearly demanded ethical consideration as suggested by Minuchin (1991), which I responded to during the research process. It seems that aiming towards a neutral tone during the consultation process worked effectively to provide space to expand understanding, but absolute neutrality may be unrealistic and potentially lead to a continuance of oppressive discourses (Helmersberg and Rimehaug, 2010).

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Stages of Discourse Analysis

Six stage analysis method, presenting a synthesis of both Discursive Psychology and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis: a Critical Discursive Psychology influenced by Pomerantz (2008), Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) and Avdi and Georgaca, (2012).

Stage 1: Description

How is the discourse constructed?

What are the various interpretative repertoires?

Can clusters of terms: graphic descriptions, figures of speech and metaphors be identified?

What can be gained from a linguistic analysis of the text?

How are verbs, tenses and pronouns used?

How is modality (how speakers affiliate with their statements) demonstrated?

How is mood (declarative, interrogative and imperative) indicated?

How is transitivity (the way events are connected or not connected to subjects and objects) presented?

What is the variability of these constructions?

Are there examples of (intertextuality) words and phrases being used across texts?

Are there examples of (interdiscursivity) different discourses being used in the same discourse event?

Stage 2: Interpretation

What is the function of the discourse?

What rhetorical devices/discursive strategies are used?

Can dilemmas of stake: disclaiming, blaming, 'extreme case formulations' (Pomerantz, 1986) be identified?

Is it possible to determine patterns leading to 'established' dominant discourses and

contradictions leading to minority (and possibly emancipatory) discourses?

Are negative or positive feelings evoked through the use of contrasts?

Stage 3: Language as constructive- Discourses

After establishing the different modes of the object’s construction, a broader focus will be located on these constructions within culturally available systems of meaning, that is to say, discourses. This is the first step towards linking interaction with ideology. The focus within this analysis will be the construction of the child, the child’s behaviour and the adult’s understanding of their own knowledge of the child. The broader culturally available systems of meaning could be any language that they bring to the discussion to make sense of the child.

Stage 4: Positioning

Another important notion in the analysis is that of subject positions; that is, the identities made relevant through specific ways of talking. The analysis relies on the notions of discourse, action orientation and subject positioning, and these levels are often performed simultaneously and in conjunction. Subject positioning will be relevant to how those who speak of the child position themselves within the understanding of how and why the child behaves as they do, as well as how they position the child themselves. I will not be speaking with the child so positioning will be with the role of the adults.

Stage 5: Practices, institutions and Power

The analytical questions here concern the role of the specific discourses used in maintaining or challenging dominant institutions and practices. This brings forth considerations of power, often considered in terms of the dominance of certain discourses, and resistance, which can take the form of clandestine use of discourses, refusal to take up the positions implied by dominant discourses or development and use of counter-discourses. Whilst the child cannot develop and use their own counter discourse within this research, as there are a number of adults taking part in the research I will be able to explore the possible emergence of these positions on behalf of the child.

Level 6: Subjectivity

This last level of analysis concerns the effects of discourse on subjectivity. An attempt will be made to reconstitute what it means to be a person located in particular discourses and to understand different subjective experiences of being a part of the social world.

**Email address: Michael@pomeran.demon.co.uk**

## Appendix B:Researcher Discursive Interventions

The table below provides a range of examples of the discursive interventions I used during the consultation. My role involved listening to the discussion, and contributing to the process of the discussion (reflecting on the participants ideas and inviting them to contribute).

A number of times during the discussion I also found myself using discursive interventions in line with my ethical considerations. I felt that there was a need to attempt to ‘open up’ understanding of the child as constructs surrounding him were becoming constrained, overly negative and potentially harmful with regards to future action (how they would talk about Tom and thus support him, outside of the discussion). Whilst I acknowledge that the interventions will have impacted on the language used within the group – and possibly the whole direction of the conversation, it was important for me to keep the child in mind and to ensure that there would not be an overly negative outcome to the research.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Line | Speech (Transcript 3) |
| 4-15 | R: Ok, so today is an opportunity to share your understanding of Tom’s behaviours (.) erm (.) and to consider what you may chose to do next really (.) so we could perhaps start by sharing your reflections and understanding of the situation as it has been and the situation now for Tom (.) erm what I’d hoped to encourage really is for you to be as open and as honest as you can be (.) to really explore different ideas in detail (.) and to share your views on the different things being discussed ok? So just chip in as much as you can or when you want to really (..) erm (.) I think that may lead you towards jointly considering ways of continuing support for Tom and sharing ideas and understanding about this (.) so that’s the next step really (.) to really reflect and think about Tom (.) share understanding and move forward towards what may happen next (..) Ok? So (.) where would you like to start? |
| 501-502 | R: and can you think of any reasons why you think he may be liking this control in certain situations? |
| 1188-1190 | R: I wonder if there’s an alternative way of looking at this exaggerated behaviour? In terms of his exaggerated politeness and kindness and that eagerness to really really please? Any thoughts? (..) |
| 1448-1449 | R: do you think it takes him a little while to calm down or for some anxiety to go down for him to be able to communicate with you- |
| 1477-1478 | R: if you could put yourself in his shoes (.) do you think he’s feeling a lot of pressure in those situations? Or (.) |
| 1574-1575 | R: so we understand that Tom seems to really want these peer relationships- he wants friends- |
| 1777-1778 | R: so with the unstructured times in year one what do you feel might be the pros and cons almost (.) of adding more structure for Tom? |
| 1830 | R: How do you feel about that? |

## Appendix C: Reflections on the research process

|  |
| --- |
| Reflective Box 1: Can we avoid constructions? |
| Following the discussion with Tom’s class Nursery Nurse and SENCo, I reflected on how I began to develop my own personal understanding of Tom through the available language presented to me. Whilst my role as researcher was not to work psychologically to specifically bring about change for Tom, I found myself slipping into the role of considering all aspects of Tom’s life that may be impacting on his well-being and thus behaviour – though not sharing my thoughts verbally. I began to construct who ‘Tom’ was for me through fragments of language and already felt that he was not being fully understood. |

|  |
| --- |
| Reflective Box 2: The construct becomes real |
| When I arrived at Tom’s house to begin the recording with his parents, I was struck by the photographs of Tom in the living room, where the discussion took place. I had intentionally asked not to see Tom in school as I hoped to remain removed from Tom and his lived experienced, to allow myself to focus solely on the surrounding discourses. Although I had partly expected to see photographs in the home, what struck me was the impact of how my own construction of Tom suddenly became a little more real and alive. I became even more invested in Tom as listening to his parents and seeing his framed face began to piece further fragments together. |

|  |
| --- |
| Reflective Box 3: The subjective experience of the consultation |
| I was taken back by the nature of the discussion process. Suddenly the child was a real human being – fully constructed though I had never met him. Tom became transformed in my mind, he was alive and imaginable as a real person- that I felt I knew. Only I didn’t know him and I had to remind myself that my understanding was formed from other people’s words and words alone. I was involved in a system of meaning generation and lived experience, of my own past experiences and of the moment all combining within a social context to develop the ‘child’ through language. I was aware of a need to remove myself from the construction. I hadn’t met him and it felt somewhat inappropriate to begin to form understanding purely from other people. I was struck by the power of how words carefully piece by piece come to create a claim to reality, which is so ‘real’ to everyone in the room. Each individual comes to understand their interpretation of the child and suddenly everyone feels they *know* – know the most or know best.  I found myself caught in between wanting to challenge the dominant discourses used to represent the child, whilst contemplating the realisation of ‘who am I to challenge within a situation so far from the lived experience?’ By this stage, for me, Tom had evolved into Tom: a child who was experiencing speech difficulties; a child who was being segregated; a child who needed further understanding and support of his emotional needs. Whilst I understood that the adults surrounding Tom had provided these constructs, I felt that they were at risk of being overlooked and for me, were most important for Tom’s well being and future outcomes. Once again I felt that the experience of removing myself somewhat from the situation to fully appreciate the language used was very difficult. By this stage I had listened to lots of talk of Tom and his situation and had constructed him into a child, who I felt I had a duty to provide change for. During the hour long discussion, I found that I had to be incredibly careful when I commented and even then I still reached a stage when I felt that I should say something potentially less reflective – for the ‘benefit’(?) of the child. |

## Appendix D: Ethical Approval Letter

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## Appendix E: Participant Information Letter

To\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

As part of my Doctoral training at the University of Sheffield I am carrying out a research project on how language is used to understand Reception aged children who are identified as displaying challenging behaviour. The title of the research is:

**Making sense of ‘challenging’ behaviour in the Early Years: A Discourse Analysis of how a Reception aged child is understood and constructed by key adults.**

I would like to invite you to take part in this research. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others, if you wish. Please contact me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like further information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

**Purpose of the research**

As a Trainee Educational Psychologist, I am particularly interested in working together with schools and families in developing greater understanding of children’s needs, and offering a supportive role to overcome barriers to learning. I feel that the end of a child’s first compulsory year in education is a particularly interesting time to reflect on how children have settled into the learning experience, how they are being understood and how their needs are then best catered for in the future. For children this age who are seen to be displaying more challenging behaviour it can be particularly important to explore how the child is being understood, before they move forward into their next stage of education. I therefore aim to look closely at how adults attempt to make sense of such behaviour using language that is available to us in everyday life. Language used to describe and understand behaviour can shape other’s understanding of the child as well as the child’s understanding of themselves, which is why my interest lies specifically within this area.

Information gathering for the research project will take place during June/July 2015.

**Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen to take part in this research project as your child/a child within your class has been identified within school as currently presenting with behaviours that may at times be understood as ‘challenging’. Your involvement would be of great value to this research as it will offer further understanding into how a child defined as ‘challenging’ is understood. The research project is a Case Study, which is focussing on the key adults from home and school in *one* child’s life. This means that the study is unique and other than the participants that you will be aware of (who work/live with the child) there will be no other participants in the study. It is important to know that ***this is a research study; it is not an intervention by either the school or the Educational Psychology Service.***

**Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you agree to be part of the research, two times, dates and places will be agreed upon for two separate discussions to take place and be audio recorded. The first discussion will be between you and a school colleague (if you are a member of school staff) or between you and your partner/a close family member or friend (if you are the parent/carer of the child). The discussion will be encouraged to have a broad theme along the lines of: ‘Why we think *Child* may behave the way he/she does and what else needs to be done to support him/her?’ I will be in the room during the discussion but will encourage the conversation to take place without my input. The discussion will be planned to last between 45 minutes and an hour and will provide you with the opportunity to talk about anything that you feel may be relevant to the above questions. The discussion is not a test and should be seen as an opportunity to share thoughts, ideas and possible plans with each other. If you are the child’s parent/carer, the discussion will ideally take place at your home and I will arrange a convenient time with you, for this to take place. If you are a member of school staff, I will arrange for the discussion to take place in a quiet, private room in school.

The second discussion will take place with all of the participants (two members of school staff and two parents/carers) in a private room in the child’s school. The aim of this discussion is to provide an opportunity for everybody to jointly reflect on: *how we understand the child*. I will also take part in this discussion and will encourage a space to explore ideas. This may be a beneficial opportunity, as it will provide a time for sharing thoughts and information and for reflecting on how we have developed our ways of thinking about a child. It could also provide a space to jointly consider potential new ways of supporting or thinking about a child’s behaviour.

**What do I have to do?**

Simply attend on the planned dates and take part in the discussions as much as possible.

**What are the possible disadvantage and risks of taking part?**

My intention is that participants will be able to feel open and honest during the discussions. However, you will only be expected to discuss information you feel comfortable about. If at any stage you do not feel comfortable with the content of the discussions or feel uncomfortable with the setting and wish to stop, you will be able to do so.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Whilst there may be no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that involvement in the research may potentially offer an opportunity of working together with the other participants to develop new ways of understanding and supporting the focus child. The research may also offer alternative ways of thinking about the child and a reflective opportunity to consider the variety of ways that adults talk about and ‘frame’ children, and how this may be influenced by those close to us, as well as by society as a whole. Understanding this further may help to develop and extend our interactions and relationships with children.

**What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?**

If this is the case, I will contact you to explain the circumstances.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If you wish to raise a complaint at any point during or after the research, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (University Research Supervisor) should be contacted (for contact details see below). If you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you can contact the University’s ‘Registrar and Secretary’.

**Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All the information that I collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications, nor will the focus child. The recorded conversations that you will take part in prior to the joint discussion will not be shared with the other participants. The transcripts of these conversations will also not be published so they will remain a largely private experience.

The audio recordings of your discussions made during this research will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

All records, both recorded and written, will be held and analysed by myself and will be appropriately destroyed when the research is completed. Only anonymised information will be shared with other professionals, unless I was to obtain information that the child is, or has been unsafe, and I believe that sharing this information would be necessary to ensure that the child is safe.

**What will happen to the results of the research?**

Once I have analysed the research data, I hope to visit the participants to feedback a summary of the research findings. This is likely to be in November 2015. The full findings of this research will be published in my Doctoral Thesis (DEdCPsy Educational and Child Psychology), copies of which will be available at the University Library and on the Theses website ‘WhiteRose Online’. Any information published or shared will remain anonymous and you will not be identifiable.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research forms part of the DEdCPsy (Educational and Child Psychology) course at the University of Sheffield.

**Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

The research has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield School of Education department’s ethics review procedure. The University’s Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University’s Ethics Review Procedure across the university.

**Contact for further information**

Rachael Lusby (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Contact details: (deleted)

Research Supervisor: (Name deleted)

Contact details: (deleted)

## Appendix F: Participant Consent Form

**Title of Project:** Making sense of ‘challenging’ behaviour in the Early Years: A Discourse Analysis of how a Reception aged child is understood and constructed by key adults.

**Name of Researcher:** Rachael Lusby

**Participant Identification Number for this Project:**

**Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information letter for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.
3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis.
4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name of participant Date Signature

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Lead Researcher Date Signature

*Once this has been signed by all parties, the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project’s main record, which must be kept in a secure location.*

## Appendix G: Reflections on the feedback to participants

I fed back a summary of the findings of the study to Tom’s mother and the SENCo, in April 2016. I was admittedly a little apprehensive about the meeting as I was unsure how the participants would respond to the findings and I was keen to remain securely within ethical considerations of protecting the participants from harm, whilst ensuring that I was still open and honest with them.

My feedback allowed time for the participants to reflect on the experience alongside a summary of findings and a focus on possible implications for EP practice. The participants appeared very aware that the study would produce a critical analysis of language and they both expressed their interest in the findings. I was sensitive to the amount of detail I presented with regards to the negative constructs of Tom produced, but also felt able to have an honest discussion with them about potential power structures and dominant discourses in existence throughout society. The discussion felt like a helpful end to the research experience. The ability to be honest was particularly helpful as it provided a further opportunity to reflect on practice and to share views of the systems and structures in which we all operate.

During the discussion the SENCo reflected on the experience of being encouraged to spend a significant amount of time focusing solely on one child. She described how she felt that sharing so many different ideas relating to understanding the child had caused her to develop a greater sense of empathy for him. Following the discussions she had felt that she approached him and thought about him in a different way. Interestingly, the SENCo also stated that the study, or indeed the discussions that the school staff had been involved with, had encouraged the school to change their practice with regards to working with parents. This was described as the importance of honesty during meetings and the significance of providing time and space to share views at an earlier stage. The SENCo explained that the school had reflected that a more honest and open approach may help to develop greater understanding between parents and teachers, as well as developing the best individual approaches to support a child.

Tom’s mother reflected that she felt Tom was more grown up and settled. She was happy that Tom no longer had to wear a hi-vis vest. This seemed particularly important for her. She also explained that she was glad that the discussions had taken place as she felt that greater understanding of Tom had been developed.

Whilst a sense of anxiety surrounds the prospect of sharing findings that may uncover power relations and oppressive environments, the feedback highlighted to me that sharing such information may also promote alternative ways of thinking and positive change.

## Appendix H: Feedback to Participants (13/04/16)

* Today I will provide a summary of my research findings and some potential implications for practice.
* Recap: The research focus was a critical exploration of how we make sense of behaviour using language. **Not** a criticism of the participants as individuals. Should be understood as an exploration of how we use the language and systems available in society to produce meaning and share understanding of our social world – focusing on Tom.
* There are so called ‘dominant discourses’ available to use within our culture’s language system. Such discourses produce understanding and shape how we think about things. They are often linked with the ‘norm’. I was interested in seeing them in action – how they are used and what impact they may have on constructing/forming understanding around Tom.
* Provided a space to reflect on ‘Tom’ and the time and space to really consider everything that may be impacting on his behaviour? Did you feel this?
* The way the research took place seemed to allow time to initially really consider Tom with familiar people (eg at home) in a relatively private space.
* At school lots of ideas were shared with regards to understanding of Tom and how he was understood within the school system. There was very much a consensus – potentially a ‘school approach’.
* At home this seemed to take a more individual and emotional approach, where understanding of Tom outside of a school system was captured. At times more challenge was demonstrated – ‘counter-discourses’ eg. ‘Tom is this… but he can also be this…’
* In joint consultation – useful for me to consider the ‘reflective’ position. Perhaps at time the group wanted guidance? During the discussion, joint constructs were produced, potentially some school dominance? (See how school staff feel?)
* Specifically, following analysis, constructs/discourses that emerged: ‘Norms’ and ‘needs’ (within-child), ‘good v bad’ and systems of discipline. These are dominant and historically located within our society. (Explain impact of Educational psychology, history of discipline and tendency to look within the child for answers)…
* Discourses that were perhaps a little missing: exploring more with regards to the school environment and ‘norm’ practices?
* At a macro-level (explain to participants) of analysis – understanding the impact of wider societal power relations upon an individual. Parents perhaps benefit from continued support to feel included, supported and prevent passivity under the dominance of school as an institution. Previous research has shown that discourses surrounding behaviour that is understood to be challenging, can lean towards parental blame. So it’s key that parents feel supported and everyone works together.
* Again at a macro-level, to potentially further consider how school practices may impact upon children’s behaviours. Such as lots of research of school disciplinary systems as a whole. This could be considered as no-one’s ‘fault’ as such, simply a product of 200 years of regulation within education.
* The study highlights language and considers how our understanding of ‘self’ is constructed by how people speak of us. It could remind us to be cautious with potentially negative constructs as they may become how children see themselves.
* Several implications for EP practice: suggestions include supporting schools through challenging dominant constructs, supporting through the ‘confusion’ associated with behaviour, encouraging time and space to connect empathically with a child to fully understand their needs, supporting/empowering parents.
* Questions/thoughts/reflections…

## 

## Appendix I: System of Transcription

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Notation** | **Interpretation** |
| NN | Nursery Nurse |
| S | SENCo |
| M | Mother |
| D | Dad/father |
| R | Myself/Researcher |
| (.) | Pause of less than a second |
| (..) | Pause of a second |
| (number) | Amount of seconds pause |
| - | Utterance that is abruptly cut off |
| [ | The onset of overlapping speech |
| ] | The point at which overlapping speech finishes |
| Word | Stress in voice to indicate stress in pitch |

## Appendix J: Transcript 1

R: So(.) I think I’ll hand over to you really(.) erm Obviously we’re talking about Tom and er you can start where you would like to start really.

NN: Thank you very much

S: I was thinking it might (.) it would do me good to actually think about what he was actually like when he first came

NN: Yeah

S: here, cos I can’t I can’t you know with having my own class me self (.)

NN: Yeah

S: I can’t quite remember (..) what he was like right at the very start cos I only really got involved once (.)

NN: Yeah

S: Once things started [going wrong]

NN: Well when he first came in he was quietish (.) erm didn’t settle with one particular thing he would go to one thing

S: mmm

NN: then go to another thing you know didn’t like stay in any particular place

S: yeah

NN: and then within a couple of days we noticed er he’d take things off other children and

S: Yeh

NN: he started more or less within that couple of days once all the children were in (.) err (.) just showing signs of not of maybe not (..)

S: if I

NN: not wanting to

S If I remember rightly he was taking things off (.) it wasn’t (.) I think I remember you saying it wasn’t (.) always things that he wanted either

NN: Noo (.)

S: was it?

NN: No

S: it wasn’t so much it felt (.) he was doing it for

NN: yeah

S: a reaction

NN: yeah

S: rather than you’ve got that toy [I want it]

NN: [I want it] yeah

S: Yeah

NN: that was (.) yeah (..) but we didn’t know if that was just because it was all new

S: mmm

NN: and it was like a security thing that he wanted to show that he was (.)-

S: mmm

NN: I don’t know-

S: Can you remember where did he come from? Did he come from a pre-school or? Or did he go to (?) (..) before us?

NN: I don’t know (whispered)

S: I can’t remember

NN: it does sound familiar but without looking back (.) I’m (.) you know at his erm you know (.) learning journey I’m not too sure

S: I’m just wondering that you know if he was like that there or

NN: Yeah(.) No I can’t (.) I can’t remember

S: mmm

NN: to be honest, mm, er with not I can’t remember us having any information on him

S: [before hand]

NN: do you know what I mean? Sort of like warners that this was what (.) he was going to be like sort of thing (..) but I know both myself and Sarah noticed and when we spoke to him he didn’t answer in the way it was almost like an automatic answer rather than a thought out d’you know what I mean?

S: [Yeah]

NN: He was he’d say you’s ask him a question he’d say yes and he was really quick to answer yes (.)

S: mmm

NN: and then sometimes he’d say yes when he meant no

S: yeh

NN: and we and we’d found almost straight away that we thought there was something (..)

S: mmm some difficulty

NN: yeah that he wasn’t quite understanding

S: cos didn’t you say that he was quite honest about things that he’d done if you hadn’t seen

NN: yeah

S: he didn’t sort of try and cover up (.) or did he?

NN: er he would erm (.) he would say and erm same again he still does this now he would say he doesn’t know if you were to ask him if there was something for us to you know

S: mmm

NN: if there was something for us to(.) what have you done so (.) I don’t know and you know even now we’d say (.) we’d say well have a think (.) think really hard (.) have you done anything (.) have you done something (.) cos he’s a little bit sad and we need to understand why he’s sad and he would tell you

S: then he does

NN: yeah he would tell you eventually

S: yeah

NN: he wouldn’t lie he wouldn’t say (..) er (.) well he wouldn’t say (.) well yeah sometimes he would say he hadn’t done it but he meant to say no and he said yes (.)

S: mmm

NN: and this is what it is like with him (2.8)

S: mmm (2.3) I think it’s important to say that he does have trouble with speech not just –

NN: he’s got a very bad stutter

S: yeah

NN: very bad

S: I think (.) I find him (.) I don’t know if it’s just cos I’ve got used to him but I do find him a little bit easier to understand now

NN: yeh

S: So I don’t know if it’s whether (..) I don’t know if the stutter has improved

NN: yeah

S: or whether-

NN: I think it has a little bit (.) he still does it but it’s not as severe as it was when he first came in

S: yeah when he first came

NN: [yeah]

S: he was really difficult to understand

NN: [yeah]

S: wasn’t he?

NN: yeh (2.3)

S: so (.)

NN: yeah

S: you know (.) it’s sort of thinking about

NN: yeah

S: whether that’s a (..)

NN: yeah

S: an emition isn’t it? [As well]

NN: [it is yeah] is that something that bothers him and-

S: So when, when you’re thinking about what he’s like now (..) cos he (.) cos it cos they were quite regular outbursts weren’t they? When he first came in the intake(.) So what is he doing when he hurts other children?

NN: hhh (..)

S: what sorts of things does he do?

NN: It can be anything-

S: mmm

NN: er (.) I mean I have seen him jump on top of children and swing them round and you know when you’re sort of in the classroom and you can see out on to the field

S: yeah

NN: and I’ve had to go running out to-

S: do you think that’s play? [Is it rough play]

NN: [I think Tom finds it difficult to (..) understand the difference

S: yeah

NN: in (..) he does know cos I’ve spoke to him about it that you you don’t you know you don’t hurt children and he’ll even say to me my hand my hand won’t hurt anybody

S: hmmm

NN: erm (..) but it’s (.) it (.) when he gets out there he almost forgets it’s almost like it’s a rag doll

S: yeah

NN: and then oh he’s quite a big lad is Tom in’t he it’s not as if he is one of the little one’s he’s quite a big one in the class (.) erm and so (..) the children he tends to play with they’re always smaller than him and er it’s almost like he can’t differentiate between say it’s with dad at home having a play fight and the children

S: [yeh mm]

NN: so he does he does do it in play he does you know hurt other children in play but he also does it (..) when they won’t do something that he wants them to do

S: mmm

NN: d’you know what I mean? It’s

S: yeh

NN: Its not always in play (..)

S: cos we sometimes felt that there’s almost like (.) two other sections d you know where’s there’s like the rough play where he’s going too far-

NN: [yeah]

S: and hurting other children but there’s also there’s I feel that there’s times where he does it he does it to get their attention

NN: yeh

S: and then there’s also times when he’s done it because he hasn’t liked or they’re not doing

NN: [yeah]

S: something that he wants them to do (.) do you think that?

NN: [yeah] I think that I so so yeh yeh

S: that there almost seems to be those three different (.)

NN: yeh

S: types-

NN: yeh and on the other hand the thing is on a one to one with an adult he is absolutely adorable

S: mmm

NN: he helps he does anything you ask him to do he’s really

S: [really eager to please]

NN: [really eager to please] (.) erm (..) but that-

S: you see that’s sort of been my relationship with him hasn’t it

NN: yeh

S: when we’ve sort of been discussing him in the past erm we’ve felt that he did erm (..) he needed to feel the positivity of doing things well which he can (.) which he does do (.) and to seek attention in a positive way rather than in a negative way because we felt probably that a lot of his behaviour was that he wanted attention and he didn’t really know

NN: [yeah]

S: how to get it

NN: [yeh]

S: didn’t we?

NN: yeah

S: so we set up the book

NN: [the book]

S: so we’d be writing in things that had happened in school but trying to keep it-

NN: really positive instead of negative-

S: so we still tell parents about the negative things

NN: [yeah]

S: but we kept it out of the book didn’t we

NN: yeh

S: we just had the book for the positive things and then they were doing that at home as well weren’t they?

NN: Yeh

S: and I think because I had initiated that he sort of sees me as someone who goes day and praises him for doing good things. (laughing) every time I walk into the room he sort of he sits up straight and puts his finger on his lip and he shows me that he’s being a good boy doesn’t he

NN: [yeah]

S: and as he walks past me in school he’ll sort of stand up straight (laughing)

NN: [yeah] (?)

S: yeah look at me how could I not be good (.) there is that there is that eagerness to please and do right-

NN: the other thing I was going to say was (..) when he’s when he’s done something outside

S: [mmm]

NN: or he hasn’t had a good morning or whatever we keep him in

S: yeah

NN: so he’s not with the other children (.) erm (..) we feel that (.) that is working cos he does understand now there are consequences to his behaviour so we feel but I did notice that on a few occasions when he was in the classroom with us-

S: just on your own-

NN: erm he would do things that he wouldn’t normally do like he would start getting things out of the drawers and things and you know we’d have to say noo or he wouldn’t always do what you’d asked him to do it was almost like he was trying to push push those boundaries a little bit (.) I’m on my own now and I’m comfortable

S: [yeh]

NN: I’m gonna see how far I can what I can get away with-

S: what to see what your response was going to be

NN: yeh and y’know and obviously it was always the same

S: mm

NN: no you know I try to be consistent – no I didn’t ask you to do that – put that back – I’ve asked you to read – go and get a book and read – go and get a book please - and he would do it for a minute and then you would see him leading off to see what else he could do (.)

S: Is he still doing that then?

NN: He does yeh (.) not he knows that we (.) we won’t let him so he (.) it’s not as (.) I mean it was never really bad it were just something that you picked up picked up on

S: [yeh]

NN: and you know and you think- I’ve spoke to you quite a few times now Tom it’s time to (.) y’know time to do what I’ve asked you to do (.)

S: So do you think he’s maybe like checking checking like the consistencies of your approach and if you’re always, if you’re always going to say that to me or not

NN: [yeah] or when I can get away with it

S: mmm

NN: yeah I do and he is an only child isn’t he

S: he is yeah

NN: and I sometimes wondered if that’s what he would do at home

S: yeh

NN: at home as he is an only child (..)

S: mmm (2.5) yeah I don’t think if it’s right to say but I do well I sort of well I do have outside contact with Tom because my daughter’s in the same class as well we go to parties and things I’ve observed there it that there’s a lot of very unstructured time for Tom where he just does what he wants to do without any (.) correction (..) erm

NN: don’t you feel that I’m not sure but don’t you feel that there’s a little bit of immaturity as well?

S: yeah (.) yeah (.)

NN: in comparison to say the other children (.)

S: I mean the way he speaks as well-

NN:[yeah]

S: is quite immature (..) erm he’s not very (.) he doesn’t (..) he finds it really hard to express himself clearly doesn’t he?

NN: [yeah]

S: I mean like you say I think at the start we were very much just getting this is what you want me to say

NN: yeh

S: So (..) then but now that he’s a bit a bit more comfortable at speaking and having more of a conversation (.) apart from the speech (.) difficulty that holds him back as well I do think there’s erm (.) he struggles to (..) say exactly precisely-

NN: yeah

S: what he means doesn’t he (.) and to put that into a sentence he seems to sort of flit here there and everywhere doesn’t he [when he’s talking]

NN: [that’s right (.) I think you’re right yeah]

S: he’s really difficult to follow as well his line of (.) his line of conversation

NN: it’s almost like he’s confused himself (.) as to what he’s trying to get across

S: mmmm (.) mmm (..) What’s he like when he’s with the other children? Does he, does he get involved?

NN: He can be absolutely lovely (.) and helpful and kind and

S: mmm

NN: you know we talked about this other little boy that has got severe erm difficulties erm and he’s really keen and (slight laugh) and a funny thing happened the other day (.) if he dropped something he’d pick it up and hand it to him but the other day I was cleaning some things at the sink and I accidently knocked a pot of pencils over and I bent down to pick them up but in Tom’s haste to help me I sat on his head (laughing)

S: oh (laughing)

NN: because I’d sort of bent down to pick them up and he’s come running down behind me onto the floor and I went ooohh

S: yeh (laughing)

NN: then there you go Mrs Jones and he helped and picked all the pencils up but it was funny but that’s what he’s like he’s really keen to help and you know he loves to help (.) to help this little boy you know some one who he feels is in need-

S: Does he talk to them? Does he talk to the other children?

NN: Erm (..) yeah (.)

S: yeh?

NN: Yeah (..) but in a kind of (.) in a kind of er (.) he does it like like an adult would do (.) d’you what I mean when you talk to (.) I talk about him being immature but when it comes to a situation like that like he does he talks to them like they’re a baby and he’s he’s the older one d’you know what I mean?

S: mmmm

NN: he’s very (.) he’s very confusing because he’s got all these different-

S: I was just going to use that word-

NN: yeah

S: It just seemed really confused because it in one respect it er (..) he wants to be helpful (.) but then in another respect especially with the children he’s being particularly unhelpful

NN: yeah

S: in a lot of ways

NN: [yeah]

S: and making trouble and making things difficult (..) has it (.) I wonder if the play sort of behaviour whether that’s just unintentional?

NN: I (..) because in Reception we have a lot of free flow and I I personally I think that Tom can’t cope with free flow

S: Right

NN: He can’t cope with just being able to choose his own thing

S: [he doesn’t know what to do]

NN: our play time (.) when he’s free to play and choose what he wants to do and when he’s outside

S: yeh

NN: when they’re coming in on a morning and they’re on the carpet and he you know that’s when he has his difficulties (..) when he’s sat with a grown up working he’s he’s fantastic he wants to please he wants to do (.) I I think it’s he’s not quite mature enough to understand or erm accept what he should be doing (.) he can’t make all those choices himself (.) do you understand what I’m trying to say?

S: yeah (.) I wonder if there’s almost a bit of a panic or an anxiety throughout those free flow times so he (..) cos sometimes when I’ve watched him he’s he seems quite giddy and excitable doesn’t he?

NN: yeh yeah

S: at those (.) when there’s an adult around he seems to really control himself and reign it in almost

NN: yeah

S: where as in those free times it’s a bit of an explosion like he doesn’t (..) know

NN: yeah

S: so is it that he doesn’t-

NN: you see cos now I’m gonna say something else now that I don’t know whether you’ll remember it was when Sarah was still here it was when we had parents evening and mum and dad bought Tom (..) and because they were talking erm to us er he he couldn’t (.) it was obvious we were talking about Tom and it was and we were keeping it all very positive but obviously things did get mentioned about his behaviour

S: mmm

NN: and he hit dad in front of us and you know mum was embarrassed and erm you can tell that mum is a bit I won’t say nervous but uncomfortable sometimes talking about it (..) erm well certainly she was in the beginning I’m not saying she is now (..)

S: yeah

NN: erm (.) so that was like a conflict of what we’re saying cos he was with all adults and he was the only child [but he was with mum and dad- ]

S: [it’s interesting that you say that though] cos when I was speaking to her about this you know that this would be happening erm she had Tom and it was literally like a five minute chat about what the about the process and about what would happen (..) but he was a very different child to that I normally see (.) he was (.) he wouldn’t sit down mum asked him to sit down he got up and he was wondering around the room and he was picking things off shelves and he was quite (.) he was quite (..) rude to mum I have to say

NN: [yeh]

S: in his response and in the way that if she asked him something he’d he’d be very blunt back well I told you that (.) you know which I would say that I have never seen

NN: [yeah]

S: in him before because he has always been ultra polite-

NN: yeah well that’s the kind of behaviour that we saw a different

S: yeah

NN: a different Tom (..) to what we witness in school even though we know he has difficulties the way he behaved with his parents where he would never do that with us (.)

S: yeah but then interestingly as well he didn’t stutter at all

NN: [no]

S: the whole time that he was again it was only five minutes but he seemed very much more relaxed you his shoulders were down he was very much at ease

NN: yeah

S: erm (..) so that’s interesting as well is it (.) is it that he is completely stressed out by the school environment that we see the (.) the stuttering the lashing out in the unstructured time?

NN: yeah (.) possibly

S: I don’t know

NN: no I don’t I don’t (.) I don’t know what makes him do the things he does I don’t (..) I tried we’ve all tired different things (.) we’ve tried the talking about it and going through how it hurts if he hurts someone (.) you know we don’t want to make them sad (.) we try that we try the firm approach – no we don’t do that- that’s not what we do in this classroom-

S: and having a consequence

NN: yeah erm we’ve tried all different avenues and (.)

S: but at the moment we’re at the stage where we can’t really let him go out for unstructured play times without a grown up with him-

NN: he wears (.) I’ll just say (.) he wears a I’d say he wears a hi-vis so we know where he is if we scan the playground cos obviously it’s a very big area and keeping an eye on all of them wearing the same jumper the same shirt it’s impossible but with this on I can (.)

S: mmm

NN: or whoever’s out there can see him erm and he’s aware that we can see him (.) I’m not saying it eliminate it cos it doesn’t he still does these things (.) erm but it does help that –

S: you can [see him]

NN: [see him]

S: yeah cos I suppose that would help the discussion afterwards wouldn’t it cos it’s difficult to actually if you’ve not seen with your own eye it’s difficult to actually ascertain what actually happened-

NN: yeah

S: what came before hand (.)

NN: yeah (..) mm (..)

S: but the playtime ones (.) but the playtime issues do seem to be with his lack of control-

NN: yeh (.) I think he wants it his way (..)

S: mmm

S: and that’s it (..)

S: mmm (..) and is that because he’s an only child? (2.1)

NN: mmm(.) don’t know (.) possibly

S: he’s got used to not sharing-

NN: yeh but then we have got other children that are n-that are an only child and they don’t behave in the same way (..)

S: hmm (..) and you would have thought that by now-

NN: [yeah]

S: you know sort of a year in (.) all of the things you know the consistency with the response in him doing things like that you would think that he would now begin to learn and the fact that he does like the positive-

NN: yeh

S: praise (..) how does he react when it’s not positive? Does he seem sorry or (..)

NN: (sigh)(..) he (.) but that’s when we get when we get that (.) situation that’s when we have (.) the nos and the yes’ when he- [means the opposite]

S: [mixed up]

NN: he it’s almost like (.) it’s not going in (..)

S: yeh

NN: you talk to him and he’s like looking at yer and he’s saying yes before you’ve even finished what you’re saying (.) d’you know what I mean? He’s going yes yes yes like he’s talk- it’s like an automatic recording almost (.) like I have to say yes and he keeps saying yes and I have to say Tom you mean no (..) y’know like are you going to do it again yes (.) no Tom you mean no (.) no you’re not going to do it again (..) and he does this thing with his tongue when he when you can tell when he’s nervous because he does this (..) where he sticks his tongue in his mouth-

S: [oh ok]

NN: and he’s thinking what can I say (.) what what do I do (..)

S: Do you have erm (..) does he have similar issues when you’re just talking to him about his work? Y’know does he (.)-

NN: No

S: Can you have like a- [conversation]

NN: yeah you can talk and he’s excited (.) it’s when he’s under pressure and he’s done something he shouldn’t be doing he reacts totally differently (..)

S: So it’s not like a (.) we don’t think it’s (.) erm (..) a difficulty in his communication?

NN: No not in that respect only (.) he only does those things when he’s under pressure when he’s when he knows he’s done something he shouldn’t have done and you’re questioning him (..) about it (..)

S: So it does seem that he (.) that he does suffer with (.) high levels of anxiety at certain times

NN: yeah

S: doesn’t he (..)

NN: The other thing I was going to say was we do notice a difference when he’s been on holiday and he’s had a break from school (..) erm not so much on the weekend (.) he tends to be ok after a weekend but when we’ve had a week off or two weeks off or he’s been on holiday or whichever maybe not the beginning (.) we have a couple of days when he’s fantastic and then he it’s almost like he’s back to square one (.)

S: yeah

NN: Can’t control himself again and (..)

S: mmm

NN: and we do notice that when he (.) like I say we’ve had a break from school or he’s been away (.) he does revert back (..)

S: mmm

NN: Y’know quite far back

S: It would be interesting to find out how much sort of (..) how much does he play with other children out of school-

NN: mmm I know he does (..) mm I do (.) I am aware of erm (..) one particular parent has told him (..) he he can’t go (.) they’re friends the children are both in the same class the children are friends but he can be quite mean to this (..) particular friend and he this mum had said that he couldn’t go and Tom even told me that he had to be (.) when he’s a good boy erm I can’t remember what she said what her name is (..) but he said erm she said I can go for tea but I have to be a good boy (..) and I know mum had said he’s not coming until he shows y’know he can be good (.) he can be nice(.)

S: So even on like (.) erm it’s not big groups of children that-

N: No (.) they’re neighbours I think (.) as far as I’m aware (..)

S: So even when it’s just maybe one child or two children he finds it difficult (.) to-

N: And he does love this (.) it’s a little girl and he loves her absolutely adores her (..) but (..) and he does the same for her y’know he does look after her and does nice things for her and helps her (..)

S: mmm

N: But when it’s in a situation when they’re playing (..) he’s (.) not being kind (.) y’know he’s not being kind (..) he’s got like all these things going on and I don’t I don’t (.) I’ll be honest I don’t understand why(.)

S: mmm

NN: Whatever reason it is (..)

S: mmm (..) I mean is it anxiety? Or is it (..)-

NN: Is it control?

S: Yeah [is it just that]-

NN: [Does he need control?]

S: Because he needs things to go his way (.)

NN: mmm he can’t deal with it if it doesn’t (..)

S: mmm (..)

NN: Well yeah (.) it’s a possibility (..)

S: Because really (.) you would deal with them very differently (.) if it was a child who was partic- who was finding those unstructured times (.) y’know difficult and making him anxious then you would sort of go over erm perhaps y’know preparing him for those things y’know what are you going to play outside? And maybe going over some (.)

NN: yeh

S: scenarios with him beforehand (..)

NN: yeah

S: you know making sure that there was a grown up that he could come and speak to and but then if it’s (.) if it’s for control (3.1) that’s that’s a difficult one

NN: yeah

SS: that’s a difficult one to address because it’s (.) he he needs to (..) realise the effects that that has on other children when (.) [or that other children have needs]

NN: [Yeah how do you] how do you deal (..) with that you know when you’ve got someone who needs that control? How what I I mean I have tried (.) to sort of say erm y’know but they won’t want to play with you if you hurt them y’know that’s (.) I wouldn’t want to play with you if you was hurting me y’know but if you’re nice and kind (..) we will want to play with you(.)

S: It’s difficult with younger children isn’t it because I would-

NN: [Yeah}

S: Think with older children you could introduce like the social stories [and erm]-

NN: [yeah]

S: and show him scenarios and how they pan out and what could have been done differently

NN: yeah

S: and that’s (.) but I think that with with younger children I’m not quite sure that they would relate that to-

NN: yeah I know what you mean

S: their own (.) play

NN: mmm (.)

S: sometimes the older children (laughing) don’t (.) Y’know you talk about it with them in a y’know in a (.) not you don’t don’t choose something that’s happened to them (.) but y’know you have a social story that might be about y’know (.) two people falling out or erm one person being particularly bossy and your like why do you think that they reacted like that y’know erm-

NN: yeh (.) yeh

S: and sometimes they don’t really at that or it’s the heat of the moment it’s difficult to actually control it in the heat of the moment but at least if they’ve had that conversation with you y’know about thin-about y’know what that person would be feeling at least it sort of it enters the conscious doesn’t it (.) so that so that when it has happened it’s ohh maybe I shouldn’t have said that so at least then maybe next time you might think twice about-

NN: that’s where I think he he is immature (.)

S: Yeah

NN: Cos some children in that in the class would be able to understand that and would be able to deal with it but he can’t (.)

S: mmm

NN: Y’know in comparison to (.) not that I’m comparing him to all other children they’re all individual but he hasn’t got that maturity to (.) to think

S: mmm (.) yeah (..)

NN: y’know with me I’m hurting my friends they’re not going to wan to be my friend (.) he hasn’t quite got that understanding has he (..)

S: It might be interesting to do maybe a (.) a very simplified social story with him-

NN: yeah

S: or maybe it’s something we could set up for next year-

NN: I think erm (.) Sarah has done that with him (.) with a (.) with a small group (.) I’m sure she’s (.) er done (..) what is it er (.) I can’t think what is it the story one or I can’t think which one it is? What’s the talking one?

S: She does the teach children talking-

NN: teach children talking (.) I think she did that with a small group and I think I’m sure Tom was included in that (.)

S: mmm

NN: Erm (..) I’m sure he was (.)

S: You see those are the sorts of things that he (.) he would benefit from aren’t they the erm

NN: [yeah]

S: Y’know the turn-taking and all of those practices (.) that he’s (.) he seems to be lacking (..)

NN: yeah

S: Sort of-

NN: and I know when they go into class one cos we were talking about transition erm Mrs Kelly is in there and she does her fab group doesn’t she-

S: yeh the phonics-

NN: yeah (..) and even though he is pretty good at his phonics

S: yeh (.) just maybe working in that small group situation [where there’s an adult to direct]

NN: [would benefit]

S: it’s how (.) cos y’know having an adult directing a group (.) that’s fine isn’t it?-

NN: yeh

S: that’s good for the group and it’s it’s allowing that time for Tom to see actually this is what I should be doing (.) erm (..) it might translate straight away into unstructured time where there isn’t an adult there but I think maybe the more we can have adult (.)

NN: yeh

S: led or y’know good role models of how to of how to be (.) then hopefully it might it might sort of sink in and translate to unstructured times as well (.)

NN: I’m just wondering erm (..) who his buddy is (..)

S: mmm year six buddy?

NN: yeah (..) I can’t think who that is (.) cos we don’t have a lot to do with them now (.) cos I was (.) cos obviously year sixes aren’t all angels and-

S: yeah

NN: do things that aren’t exactly (.) y’know a great role model (.) but I was just wondering (.)

S: who his and whether he was a good role model?

NN: yeah (.) yeh (..) to see what you do as I’m older (..) yeah (..)

S: mmm (..) I do think we’re going to have to go down the route of speech therapy (.)

NN: yeah (.)

S: anyway cos I think that is an issue

NN: yeah

S: I’m not sure whether that’s a direct relation to how he behaves (.)

NN: No (.)

S: erm I think there’s probably other (.) reasons or issues but it’s certainly not gonna help is it?

NN: it’s not gonna help (.) if he can’t communicate and he’s frustrated then-

S: I don’t think he’s acting out of frustration is he?

NN: no

S: Not for his speech (.) I think its more (..)

NN: play

S: play (.) [play and control]

N: [play and control]

S: yeh

N: yeh (.) I agree (..)

S: so I think I will recommend that for September anyway that we start on that route and see what-

N: well I’ve already (.) I talk to the class as a whole I well I’ve been doing it a couple of weeks now about (.)

S: next year

NN: next year and what will happen and they are y’know it’s been nearly a year and now it’s time to go into the next class y’know that they’re big so y’know I do talk about it y’know we do things and we do go in there quite a lot and-

S: yeah

NN: we do singing y’know we do singin in there don’t we and we have assemblies as well we take in turns to do an assembly (..) so –

S: I think it would be useful to have a sort of similar conversation like this really with next year’s teaching staff just to sort of (..) explain that we that he needs that extra you know all the little things like the hi-vis jackets to watch him at play time

N: yeh

S: y’know I think that’s gonna have to carry on isn’t it (.) just so that we have got an awareness [of what’s going on at play time]

N: [I think well I think] for the class as a whole I think it would be a good thing to do (.) anyway (..) because there are so many different (..)

S: yeh

NN: issues so they’re prepared

S: yeah

NN: for a for y’know- [everybody]

S: [everyone] (laughing) that goes up

NN: yeah especially the ones that do need that intervention (..)

S: mmm (..)

NN: er (..) yeh (3.2)

R: Ok?

NN: Ok (..)

R: Ok, thank you very much(.) do you think you’ve said everything that you would like to say?

NN: I think so (.)

S: yeah

NN: I can’t think of anything else (.) I think we’ve gone through it all haven’t we? (..)

S: yeah (..)

R: Ok (..)Well, thank you, we’ll stop there then.

## Appendix K: Transcript 2

R: Right then, thank you for taking part today (.) so you’re going to be talking about Tom and how you understand him (.) and I’ll hand over to you now and you can just start where you would like to start really (.) Ok?

D: yeah (..)

M: do you think he’s changed since he’s been at school from not being? (..)

D: erm (..) he’s been up and down erm (..) never (..) he’s just so (..) what do you think? What do you think he is any worse or not? I can’t remember you know what my memory’s like I don’t know-

M: erm (.) I don’t think he’s been too much because when he’s at home he’s the only one so he has the complete undivided attention (.) whereas if he’s like say at school (.) there’s like thirty other children wanting that attention and with him being an only one maybe he’s got his own space he can do what he likes (.) whereas school he has to sort of like maybe follow rules and things like that and he maybe don’t want to do that (short laugh) maybe that’s why he’s been a bit (.) hit and miss with his behaviour and stuff and erm-

D: he likes copying as well doesn’t he?

M: He does like to copy (.) he tends to copy people a bit who aren’t impeccably well behaved shall we say erm

D: [laughing]

M: he seems to gravitate towards the erm (.) boisterous ones (.) so erm-

D: he won’t stay with the ones that just sit and read (..)

M: no (.) he’s not big on sharing is he?

S: no he doesn’t like sharing does he?

M: no (.) but then again that maybe he’s an only one he hasn’t got any other siblings to share with (.) erm (..) but when he is good and when he is behaving-

D: he can be really good can’t he?

M: he’s spot on (.) he’ll do everything that you ask him to do (.) it’s just when he’s having one of them days or whatever where erm (.) he just wants to do everything that he shouldn’t be doing (laugh) erm (.) what do you think?

D: mmm he always likes to be entertained doesn’t he? He can’t just sit here-

M: well he can play on his own alright he will quite happily play on his own and do drawing and writing and play with his toys and that (.)

D: [not for long] not for too long though (.) when I’m at home he likes to-

M: yeah cos you’re at work he doesn’t see you as often does he?

D: mmm

M: whereas with me I’m at home all the time he’s probably fed up playing with me of seeing me which is why he wants to interact with you(.)

D: I think he knows that when I’m at home y’know he goes for a walk goes on his bike or (..)

M: yeh

D: we’ll go outside cos I I don’t stop him (.)

M: no no (..) yeh (..) erm (..) erm (..)

D: but changes since he’s been at school (.) we said that to start that he seemed to have changed since he’d been at school (.)

M: yeah but it’s not that he doesn’t like school

D: [oh he loves school]

M: he loves it he hates it when it’s half term he gets grumpy when he doesn’t go to school I wanna go to school (.) even on the weekend-

D: oh yeh

M: he wants to go to school (.) so it’s not as if he doesn’t like going (.) which is why (.) he’s maybe behaving a bit (..) I don’t know cos erm in his class it’s quite a small class isn’t it? A small room and there’s quite a few teachers in there and there’s quite a lot of kids in there so maybe y’know I know in the past they’ve said if they’re all sat reading (.) they have to sit him at the side (.) because if there’s anyone in close proximity he’ll either touch kick or hit because they’re maybe invading his space or whatever cos I know when we went to parents evening Mrs Shell said didn’t she

D: mmm

M: erm when they go for dinner they always have him at the back of the line (.)

D: mmm

M: so he goes in last (.) but then he’s not interfering or touching or doing anything with any other kids and that seems to work I think (.) erm and at play times (.) he wears a hi-vis vest (.) [so they can see him]

D: [yeah so they can see him]

M: huh they should just gravitate to where it’s all kicking off shouldn’t they?

D: (laughing)

M: erm (..) erm (..) but yeah I know he’s been saying he’s been playing out in the morning two or three times and it seems to be in the afternoon where he’s been misbehaving (.) according to him I don’t know I mean I’m only going by what he says I mean he could tell me one thing and it could be the opposite (. ) erm (..) but yeah so it’s not as if he’s doing it because he doesn’t want to be in school or he doesn’t like school or anything like that (..)

D: cos he’s good at his reading in’t he (.) it’s not as if he can’t do things cos he’s good at reading he’s he likes to sit down and do writing if anything he’s doing well at school (.)

M: yeah it’s just maybe the behaviour sort of side of things and-

D: [yeah]

M: erm (..) I think maybe the er hitting y’know the early part of the hitting has about stopped I think maybe it flairs up every now and then (.) cos I know erm in his home-school book it said the other day he was playing outside (.) got a bit rough playing fighting so they had to erm bring him in then (..) erm (.)cos they’ve been gradually er sending him out to play like instead of the first five minutes oh we’ll just bring him in (.) they send him out for another five minutes and then they build it up so he’s coming in when everyone else is coming in erm

D: [right]

M: erm yeah I’m just trying to think if they’ve said anything else (.) they was on about it at parents evening weren’t they? Sort of little things that they’re trying to do to get him to do and erm and I think they’ve always said that if you do this you’ll get that sticker or you’ll get team points or whatever and they’ve said that er if he’s done something he will go tell one of the teachers so he does get praised so he does get like rewards (.) erm I’m just trying to think of any other (..) I don’t know whether you can think of anything else? (..)

D: you speak to the teachers I never do well I don’t ever but I very rarely do (.) you go to the school and I go to work I should be there now (..) but erm (..) yeah (..)

M: erm (..) but even when he’s playing outside on the front with the others cos there’s quite a few of them in the same class in’t there?

D: yeah oh yeah

M: and they all go to school together (.)

D: there’s three of them oh no there’s one over there, and two next door

M: yeah (.) and they all play alright don’t they (.)

D: yeh well (.) yeah-

M: it’s just when he’s y’know getting tired or whatever that’s when you we can tell he’s not doing much good-

D: yeah he’s had enough hasn’t he? He seems to hit out straight away don’t he?

M: yeah (..)

D: very (.) er (.) cos sort of-

M: he does have a bit of a bit of a temper (.)

D: he does have a temper (.) definitely a temper (.) erm-

M: but that’s more when he’s tired I think isn’t it?

D: he’s with him being big as well he’s strong as well isn’t he so (.) he can (.) I don’t know(..)

M: but I don’t know whether though cos we do like we call it like that’s it we do sort of like controlled play fighting in’t it? I don’t know whether we’re doing that with him is good or bad so on one hand I’d rather do it at home but not at school but then again if he’s doing it at home is he doing it at school thinking it’s ok? But\_

D: that’s me and Tom like having a rough and tumble on the floor I think me dad used to call it a rough and tumble y’know-

M: but it’s controlled though if he starts hitting or biting-

D: yeah I’m not doing it with him at the minute-

M: or anything then we stop it (.)

D: yeah

M: it’s more just him running towards you and jumping and-

D: yeah

M: but whether that’s a good thing to do or not I don’t know (.) erm-

D: did you say you’ve noticed that he’s better when we’ve got when I’ve done that with him or (..) I don’t know (.)

M: erm (.) well obviously he enjoys it cos he thinks it’d good doesn’t he?

D: yeh (.) he loves it

M: but it’s how he is at school with it

D: yeah

M: I don’t know whether if it’s a good thing or a bad thing us doing it at home at all or whether we need to get it out of his system-

D: he has loads of energy don’t he (.) which all kids have haven’t they

M: yeah (..) erm (..) can you think of owt else? (..) erm (3.5)

D: erm (3.5) mmm (4.5)

M: just trying to think if I can think of anything else (4.5)

D: erm (2.5) I mean the only thing I can think of is with his toys he’s rough he seems to be quite rough with his toys don’t he? I know-

M: That could be like a boy thing though (..) fighting (..) erm-

D: well he likes his figures and he (.) he doesn’t seem to be so (.) he plays sort of nice but he’s sort of rough with them y’know he’s careless-

M: well yeah he sort of like role plays with them don’t he likes fighting with them (..) I think it’s just one of those things that they do don’t they

D: Maybe so (.) yeah (..)

M: I suppose when it comes to playing with his toys he can be (.) not aggressive (.) that’s a bit of a strong word but like if he’s playing cars with you he always has to crash them

D: mmm

M: they always have to crash into each other and stuff like that but again it could be just a boy thing but we haven’t got anything to compare him with or to have we so (..)

D: mmm

M: we don’t know if that’s normal or (..) er (4.7) er (6.8) trying to think (10.5)

D: he likes his teachers at school though doesn’t he?

M: that’s what I mean cos he loves going to school he likes going to school (.)

D: Miss Brown he always mentions (.) it is Miss brown in’t it?

M: yeah (..) erm (.)

D: and he does pictures (.) he likes doing pictures for people don’t he?

M: yeah (..) erm (..)

D: erm (..)

M: I’m just trying to think (3.4)

R: Could I ask about what kind of support he’s given at school? Or what support you’re aware he’s given at school?

M: erm (.) erm (.) the only things I’m sort of aware of is like erm when he’s going in for dinner they would keep him at the back and they would walk at the back with him like so he’s not interfering with other children erm and if he’s misbehaving in the morning he doesn’t get to go out (.) he’ll help the teachers get things ready and do things like that so that he’s not just sat there looking out at the other children (.) they’re the only sort of things I’m aware of rather than any sort of specific one to one treatment as it were (.) erm yeah I think they’re just sort of minimising any sort of possible disruptions (..) I’m not aware of anything else (..)

R: Ok (..) what do you think about the support? do you think that it’s helpful?

M: er well if it’s helping them at school then that’s fine with us

D: mmm

M: you know cos they said about trying different things (.) cos when I went in in October (.) cos he likes playing out and if he can’t behave stop him playing outside if that’s what he likes doing stop him doing it (.) then he might realise what he’s doing is wrong so he can get to go out (..) erm

D: I’m not sure on the hi-vis thing (.)

M: but then I you don’t know if they have to do that or if it’s for their benefit or whatever I don’t think that’s gonna make any difference to how he behaves is it?

D: no

M: I think it’s more for the teachers benefit (.)

D: yeah

M: so they can see where he is (.) so they can keep an eye on him that way (..) erm but apart from those bits I’m not aware of anything else or we’ve not been privy to that information have we?

D: not that I can think of no (.)

M: erm (5.1) no I can’t think of anything else (..)

D: no I can’t think of anything else especially for him (.) all we know is about the traffic light sort of thing but that’s for all the children

M: yeah that’s for all of them-

D: yeah obviously they do that (.)

M: when they’re misbehaving yeah (.) erm (..)

D: but er we generally try asking him what colour he’s been today but he just don’t know-

M: he can say one thing and it can end up being a different thing (.) if I ask him in a different way if he’s been good (.) or is everyone else stopped in green he’ll say oh no so and so hasn’t (.) and I’ll say has anyone else? Oh yeah me (.) I haven’t stopped in green (..) but if I say have you been good all day and he’ll say yeah I’ve been green all day but if I ask in a different round about sort of way he’ll be like oh no no (.) as if he’s forgot (laughing) oh yeh me as well (.) it’s like oh right (..) so I never know what to believe when he says things which is why we’ve been doing a home-school book (.)

D: mmm

M: where they write down good things what he’s been doing and things like that cos we do it as well don’t we? [so they-]

D: [yeah] (.) yeah I think that’s good as well to be honest (.)

M: yeah I like that so then I know what’s happening –

D: yeah what the teachers say he’s been good in the morning he had a good start to the day (.) I I I must admit reading a home school book (.) it says generally it says not all the time it says he’s had a good start to the day and then gradually he’s got y’know not so good later on in the day (.)

M: yeah I’ve noticed that he seems to be alright in the morning but in an afternoon-

D: yeah sometimes he’s had good days and that but I think that if any time it’s normally in the afternoon when he-

M: that’s how it appears (.0

D: yeah or it’s bad from the start (laughing)

M: (laughing) yeah (..) erm (..) cos I think Tom says he goes out to play in the morning (.)

D: mmm

M: so I don’t know whether that’s anything to do with it (.) I don’t know (.) I don’t know I’m just trying to find some reasoning behind him or why it appears in an afternoon (..) rather than a morning (..)

D: what about (.) it’s just looking at the book and that the school book and that like I say then we know exactly seeing that we know (..) erm (..)

M: what he’s been like-

D: what he’s been like at school (.) we aren’t going from what he said cos some reason sometimes he says (.) I’ve been good today or I’ve been bad today I think it depends when he’s been rushing round and he just sort of says things to you doesn’t he?

M: yeah

D: and sometimes it’s truthful isn’t it? But sometimes he sort of (.)

M: yeah

D: yeah

M: erm

D: but it’s like I was saying it’s his temper (.) that’s the thing that he can he can be real good then all of a sudden he’ll just (finger click) pew (.)

M: it can be a bit frightening (.) a bit Jeckyll and Hyde (.)

D: yeah he can be Jeckyl and Hyde can’t he he can be real good then all of a sudden he’ll just he’ll just lamp you-

M: not very often (.) not very often though (.) he can lash out but not very often (..)

D: yeah (.) no no not (.) no (.) that would be a bit harsh (.) but yeah he can be real good but then if you just do something (.) y’know (.) you gotta (laughing) sometimes watch him (..) he’s got a (..) mmm (3.4)

R: Have you looked at what kind of things might – you said that if you do something it can sometimes make him – have you looked at what kind of things make him react like that or whether you feel it’s nothing in particular?

D: what triggers you mean?

R: yeah

M: it could be anything (.)

D: yeah you can’t really pin-point (.) erm (..) even if you say y’know (.) if you say y’know tidy up or do this y’know sometimes he does do it (.) but then (..) no (..) erm or (..)

M: he’ll just start throwing his toys about or you could just be sat watching TV or you could just say are you ok (.) and he’ll just snap at you and sort of flick his arm at you (.) there’s no there’s not one thing where we’re like oh we won’t do that cos that triggers that it can be anything really (.)but it’s not very often he does it but-

D: no no (.) we have been a bit (.) y’know maybe erm a little bit harsh-

M: yeah

D: but he’s generally alright but I think tiredness does make a difference like this morning he walked in here over the moon didn’t he? He was happy and (.) but some mornings he’s- you think

M: oh yeah

D: he can be a- you don’t think a good night sleep’s hit him-

M: [it’s like us really] (laughing)

D: mmm.. but (4.8) yeah (..) but if he is naughty we always say that if you if you do that again y’know we’ll take your toys off you (..) or-

M: oh yeah we’ve done that a few times-

D: or you can call his friends cos he’s got a lot of little teddies and things like that (.) Roo is his favourite isn’t it?

M: yeah

D: so we take Roo off him and Robbie that’s his rabbit (.) not a proper rabbit by the way it’s just a fluffy sort of toy he hasn’t got any pets (.)

M: no

D: erm (.) that’s how we punish him here (..) if you’re naughty if you do that again (.) we won’t do it straight away unless it’s (?) -

M: [oh no he does get a couple of warnings]

D: and then (.) that’s it-

M: take everything off him(.)

D: yeah sometimes he has (.) y’know it’s completely bare toys and things from the shelves cos we put them all in the garage (.) but that’s not very often when it all goes is it?

M: no it’s not (.) no no (..) or sometimes if we take (.) like you say (.) his teddies off him (.) he’ll be really good for the rest of the day so he’s aware he’s done something that he shouldn’t do and then if he’s really good the rest of the day and he’s done what he’s told then he will get them back so he can take them to bed so little things like that er but there have been times where he hasn’t (..) we’ve had them off him for maybe a day (.) a full day-

D: maybe longer sometimes (.) isn’t it really?

M: yeah (.) depending on what’s what (.) yeah (.) but erm (..) erm (.) yeah (..) but if he’s good he knows he gets treats he gets to go out and do what he wants so there is a flip side of that isn’t there (.)

D: mmm

M: er (..) like yesterday morning on the way to school he was running off (.) I said if you run off you don’t get a treat today (.) he ran off so I said right you don’t get a treat and he was alright with that when he came home he remembered (..) well he actually said can I have a treat and I said oh no (.) and he said oh no cos I ran off (.) I said yeah (.)

D: mmm

M: he said ok so he wasn’t overly bothered about not having a treat (..)

D: sometimes-

M: sometimes he is but then you can’t say one thing but then go back on it cos he needs to learn that when he’s done something wrong (..) he has to learn to recognise that he’s done something wrong (.) he can’t have what he wants when he wants it and be rewarded for not good behaviour (..)

D: mmm

M: erm (12.4)

D: he likes helping though don’t he (.) we’ll go shopping and he’ll come and he likes sorting and you said that before that he likes tidying up and that and he likes shopping and he’ll say do you want this mum? do you want this dad? And he’ll take things off the shelves (.) no we don’t want that (.) alright ok (.) and he likes pushing the trolley and he likes being helpful doesn’t he?

M: oh yeah (.) yeah (..) well he even has to take his own little shopping list (.) he has to do his own little shopping list-

D: yeah he likes to do a shopping list yeah (.)

M: he has to take it (.)

D: yeah (.) did you say (.) he did his fruit salad the other day or something?

M: oh he did his own yeah (.) the other day yeah (.) yeah he chopped his own banana up (.) put his own grapes in there (.) (laughing)

D: yeah (.) so he likes to be independent doesn’t he?

M: yes

D: getting dressed and things like that-

M: well (.)

D: well saying that he asked me for some help with getting dressed this morning-

M: yeah (.) but then again you’re not normally here when he gets dressed so it could be the novelty of you being here and-

D: well he wanted me to take him to school this morning didn’t he (.)

M: yeah (4.5) yeah cos I say don’t I that cos he’s a Gemini (.) he has a split personality (.) cos Gemini is a sign of the twins and like you say jekyl and Hyde split personality (laughing)

D: (laughing) it does seem a bit like that don’t he really though (5.6)

R: do think there’s anything more that could be done to support Tom then?

M: what here or at school?

Me: either really or both?

M: well school wise (.) we don’t know if we know everything that they’re doing (.) so it’s a bit hard to say what they could be doing what they should be doing erm (..) erm here I don’t know (.) can you think of anything that we could maybe do different? I don’t think there’s much else we could do differently is there- (..)

D: no (.)that’s probably one reason why we sort of want yeah maybe a meeting with the school and y’know to get some ideas and that cos y’know you’ve talked to other parents and stuff like that and they only do similar to what we do-

M: yeah (.) the norm (.) it seems to be the norm (.)

D: yeah (..) we haven’t tried him on the naughty step but I think keeping him on the naughty step would be (.)

M: I think I think that ship has sailed really-

D: yeah

M: I think to do stuff like that like you need to do it from when they’re probably toddlers

D: yeah it’s too late now what with him being five-

M: he would just totally rebel that would he?

D: oh yeah definitely (.)

M: yeah (..) erm (..) so yeah it’s hard to say what school should be doing when (.) cos we don’t know what they’re doing (.) when we don’t want to be saying you should be doing this should be doing that cos pointing the finger cos it’s not fair cos I know they’re trying to maybe trying to work it through themselves what they should be doing what they could be doing and trying different things (.) erm I think it’s all a try and lets see how we go isn’t it?

D: trial and error maybe?

M: yeah (..) erm (12)

R: ok (.) was there anything else that you would like to add? I could give you a few minutes more to have a think if you like (.) I don’t want to rush you but I don’t want you to feel stuck

M: I can’t think of anything more at the minute (.)

D: No

R: do you think you’ve been able to talk about quite a broad picture of Tom and who he is?

M: yeah, well most of the time he is good isn’t he?

D: we are saying all the bad things about him but he is a ni- he is a good little lad isn’t he (.) a lot of the parents and that say he’s very- like I was talking to one of the neighbours down the road and y’know the lady down there and she said that he’s very polite (.) he’s very polite is Tom-

M: oh yeah

D: cos the other children down there (.) there’s some of them (.) that’s what we’re like we say-

M: please and thank yous

D: and you know if you take something he very (.) y’know if you give him something he will soon say thank you-

M: y’know you say what’s the magic word he will say-

D: he is polite (.) he’ll like to yeah (.) erm (..) it’s just (..) erm (.) like I keep saying about his temper (.)

M: I know

D: that’s what it is (.) it’s just his temper really (..) it just seems to (..) yeah (..)

M: but you don’t know whether it’s sort of (..) the norm (..) do you whether other kids can-

D: oh yeah that’s right yeah

M: flare up in different ways do you? It’s not as if he expresses his temper that often (..)

D: yeah

M: I think it’s usually when he’s tired (.) half (.) y’know (.) three quarters of the time he will when he’s tired (.) or when he can’t have what he wants (.)

D: hmm

M: if we’ve maybe taken something off him (..) but then we say (.) you know what to do if you want to have something back (.) you need to behave you need to be good you need to listen and do as you’re told you need to think about what you’ve done and (.)

D: yeah

M: and you acting like that isn’t good and you’re not going to get treats or do what you want to do behaving like that or (.) acting like that (.) so he does know but (.)

D: and he does come back and say sorry cos he does come back and say sorry (.) y’know sorry mummy or sorry daddy –

M: yeah

D: but that doesn’t sometimes (.) y’know mean that he’s going to be good after that (.) he can just sometimes sort of switch again like that can’t he?

M: sometimes not often though (.)

D: nah (9)

M: yeah (.) that’s about all really isn’t it? Can you think of owt else? (3)

D: nah (4.3)

R: ok (..) that was great thank you (.) I think I’ve got a really clear picture of how things are from your point of view now (.) so thank you (..) I’ll just stop these (..)

## Appendix L: Transcript 3

R: Ok, so today is an opportunity to share your understanding of Tom’s behaviours (.) erm (.) and to consider what you may chose to do next really (.) so we could perhaps start by sharing your reflections and understanding of the situation as it has been and the situation now for Tom (.) erm what I’d hoped to encourage really is for you to be as open and as honest as you can be (.) to really explore different ideas in detail (.) and to share your views on the different things being discussed ok? So just chip in as much as you can or when you want to really (..) erm (.) I think that may lead you towards jointly considering ways of continuing support for Tom and sharing ideas and understanding about this (.) so that’s the next step really (.) to really reflect and think about Tom (.) share understanding and move forward towards what may happen next (..) Ok? So (.) where would you like to start?

S: (laughing) well I think when we had our chat (.) I mean we took sort of a good half an hour? As we’ve said but I think that we (.) our conclusions from it when we talked about all the different types of behaviour that we see (.) erm (..) y’know we decided that he likes adult one to one-

NN: yeah

S: attention and actually when he’s got that we see really good-

NN: [yeah very positive]

S: behaviours we see (.) y’know we see him trying to help-

NN: keen to please-

S: yeah and he wants to help the other children and to show you that he’s doing jobs (.) erm (..) I think you know that I have sort of set up quite a positive relationship with him cos I’m the person who sees him when he’s doing good things (..) so when he sees me in the corridor (.) y’know I –

NN: [laughing]

S: get the shoulders back (.) fingers on lips-

D: you said that the other day didn’t you (.) yeah (.)

S: erm (.) because he knows I’m that person that’s looking for good things erm but I think the sort of (.) we seemed to kind of come to three different scenarios where he finds it difficult and where things generally seem to be going wrong (.) erm and that was play times (.) erm we felt that play times in a lot of cases it was him not quite knowing where to stop-

NN: yeh

S: with his y’know it was like not knowing where that boundary was and where he was just pushing it too far and maybe hurting other children (.) erm we also felt that in the classroom where you had a choice of where to go he wasn’t always quite sure of where to go and what to do and that would be another flash point where we might see him behave inappropriately to-towards other children or y’know break things up that other children had made or y’know so that was another scenario (..) erm (..) and then the other scenario was sort of (.) when he was with other children not always y’know when things don’t always go the way that he wants it to (.) so that- we sort of felt that when he’s with other children there was two different erm scenarios where sometimes it was play that had just got a little bit out of hand gone a little bit too far but then there was definitely other times where we felt that Tom did something because he wasn’t pleased about the situation y’know it hadn’t gone quite how he wanted it so he would do something because he was angry about it (.) so do so does that make sense about the two different-

D: oh yeah (.) oh you’re describing him to the tee actually there-

M: yeah (.)

D: yeah I can see that-

M: it’s a bit like that at home in’t it?

D: he is yeah (..) well if we’re talking-

M: he hates it (.) he has to butt in-

D: he can’t stand me and Amelia talking he’s got to but in (.) we’ll just be talking (.) nothing even to do with him and (.) sometimes we are talking about him but he always has to butt in (.)

NN: yeah

M: but then even when you say what do you want he’ll say like erm well erm and he’ll be trying to think of something-

NN: yeah something to say

M: in the conversation it’s almost as if he feels left out or we should be constantly homing in on him twenty four seven or-

NN: yeah

M: erm (.)

D: like you say (.) when he’s with somebody like yourself or me or Amelia or that (.) attention straight away-

NN: one on one yeah

D: he’s pretty good and if things don’t go well-

M: cos I was saying that on Friday morning cos he’s an only one he’s got no siblings to learn when to wait or when to share or how to share and how to play nicely (..) erm and that’s where the play time thing in the home-school book that seems to be the recurring thing (.)

NN: yeah

M: he starts off well and then at play time he (.) yeah (.)

NN: yeah

M: yeah (.) so he does get a bit carried away sometimes-

D: he does (.) he does yeah (.)

M: I don’t know whether it’s cos he isn’t fully aware or whether he’s just over exuberant (.) he’s really excited-

NN: yeah

M: and then he realises maybe afterwards oh maybe I went a bit far I don’t know (.) well obviously you know you’re in his form and-

NN: yeah (.) yeah (.) well one (.) the other thing that I mean that we’ve noticed is that when you ask Tom if there’s been a situation and you ask him the question he generally answers the opposite to what he means (.) he’ll say yes when he means no (.)

D: hmm

NN: and he’ll and sometimes it’s erm confusing cos you’ll think no you do know and then you’ll realise he is is actually just saying the wrong word he does say the opposite to what he actually means (..) I don’t know if you’ve ever picked up on that?

M: well I know that sometimes if I say have you been good today he’ll say yep I’ve been in green all day (.) but then I’ll ask it a different way of has everybody stopped in green er well so and so hasn’t and so and so hasn’t oh and me-

NN: yes

M: almost to say oh (?) I didn’t realise

NN: yes

M: oh and me and I’ll say what did you do that wasn’t very good? Oh can’t remember (.)

NN: yeah

M: it’s almost I’m not at school now it almost doesn’t matter-

D: [doesn’t matter]

NN: mmm

M: so that’s why I wanted to start the home-school thing cos then I know for definite what he has been doing and what he hasn’t been doing-

NN: well the home-school thing is –generally we try to keep that as positive as-

M: yeah

NN: we don’t want to be just writing in oh he’s done this he’s done this (.) you know we want to keep it –

M: yeah

NN: y’know a positive thing rather than a-

S: we felt that because of the (.) well that if attention was an issue (.) we thought that if we can be giving it to him for positive things rather than the negative things then we might sort of see erm you know a change and I think there is there was (.) there has been a change hasn’t there?

NN: yeah

S: from the start of the year-

NN: he does seem as if he understands er (.) now (.) that if he hurts somebody because he will say to me I won’t y’know my hands won’t touch anybody and y’know that’s fine (..) doesn’t mean to say they won’t-

M: yeah

NN: but he does seem to have an understanding that he isn’t supposed to do it-

M: yeah

NN: and then obviously the situation where he goes outside or wherever it is y’know er (.) he he forgets-

M: mmm

NN: he gets excited (.)

M: yeah

NN: and plays extra (.) extra rough

D: yeah

NN: and (.) I don’t really know (..) I don’t (.) you know that’s the confusion for me (.) I’m not sure (.)

S: I think also in our discussion we did talk about his (.) his language (.) and his communication erm and y’know (.) I think you sort of touched on the fact that y’know sometimes we’re not one hundred per cent sure whether he’s actually fully understanding what-

NN: [yeah]

S: what we’re explaining to him to him or not you know when we talk about a situation afterwards (.) we sometimes just get the nodding and the shaking and y’know (.) -

NN: yeah

S: we don’t know whether that’s a true reflection of his thoughts of whether it’s just the (.) she wants me to say something so (laughing)-

D: yeah

S: I’ll say yes (.) y’know (.) erm (..) and also there’s the sort of (..) y’know there are issues with the way he communicates with us and when he’s put in a stressful situation-

NN: yeah

S: that’s when he really finds it hard to speak coherently and we get a bit of a stuttering and-

NN: mmm

S: erm (.) I don’t know I (.) cos I know when I’ve seen him with (.) well you mum (.) you don’t see that at all (.) you don’t see the stuttering at all (.) whereas in school we probably see it quite regularly really (.)

NN: yeah (.)

S: I don’t know (.) do you (.) do you agree? (.) would you say that does he stutter at home?

D: he has done at home but he doesn’t seem as bad just lately does he?

M: no (.)

D: he does (.) we’ve mentioned that one before (.)

M: he does (.) I think sometimes when it happens he knows what he wants to say (.) but he’s that excited to say he’ll like miss a few words out and then say uh uh and then he’s having to re-think what he’s trying to say-

NN: yeah

M: you say slow down just think what you’re saying and say it slowly (.) erm erm erm erm erm yeah and then he’ll say it –

NN: yeah

M: but then he’ll be like ohh (.) he’ll be a little bit frustrated with himself cos maybe he got a bit carried away and missed a few words out (.)

NN: yeah (.)

M: but it doesn’t happen very often though does it?

D: no (.) he’s better (.) like I say he used to stutter a lot-

S: he is better at school-

NN: he is (.) yeah but-

S: I think it is those stressful [times]-

NN: [situations] where he’s (.) been questioned about what he’s done-

D: under pressure and that (.) he ain’t good under pressure (.) he’s not good under pressure (.)

S: yeah-

D: he’s got a temper (.)

NN: [yeah]

M: [yeah]

D: that’s the thing (.) he’s got a right temper (.)

S: you see that’s interesting (.) because with us (.) he controls that doesn’t he (.)

NN: yeah

S: but if we’re talking (.) if we’re talking to him (.) I mean that’s general for all children I mean the way they are with the parents is very different to the way they are with their teachers but his (.) but he might be feeling that bit of (.) anxiety (.) I mean that was something else that came up in the discussion last time (.) you know (.) is he sort of y’know (.) is he overly anxious in the classroom where he’s got that level of choice (.) y’know we were trying to sort of (.) decide whether why is he going up to children and trying to sort of get their attention and spoil what they are doing and we wondered whether he wasn’t sure what to do or where to go or cos there’s quite a lot of free-flow-

NN: cos he does (.) cos he does understand like I say that there are consequences (.) if he does something then he misses part of his playtime or the whole of his play time –

M: yeah

NN: depending on what he’s done (.) or he has to sit on the red mat y’know for five minutes (.) while he calms down (.) so he does understand there are consequences and we (.) so we finding that he is (..) better (.) when y’know when we look back to September we was a little bit concerned about his behaviour (.)

M: mmm

NN: whereas we are finding that he is better with it now (.)

M: mmm

NN: erm (.) but we still have those where he just can’t control it (.) he can’t keep it (.) y’know (.) together (.)

D: yeah well like you was saying about taking sort of things off him like not going to-

NN: yeah

D: we take his sort of toys off-

M: we do that at home (.)

NN: yeah

M: we’ll take his toys off him (.) we’ll take his teddies and his friends or he doesn’t get to go out on a bike or scooter (.)

NN: mmm (.) yeah (.)

D: but then he nags and nags and nags and nags and we say well if you do this (.)

NN: yeh yeh

D: and it doesn’t seem to sort of register does it?

M: no (.)

D: you say to him (.) look if you want to do that then you sit there (.) be quiet (.) calm down (.)

S: mmm

D: and then if you’re good (.) then you’ll get something back or you can go out and that and then eventually it’s like (.) yesterday he had a little moment didn’t he in the afternoon didn’t he (.) in the afternoon? At dinner time weren’t it?

M: he wasn’t too bad –

D: and he just (.) he calmed down after a bit

M: yeah

D: and then y’know (.) we did go out later in the afternoon didn’t we (.)

M: yeah

D: and he were playing out (.)

M: yeah (.) he were fine he were playing nice (.)

D: he were spot on weren’t he (.)

M: yeah (.) yeah (.)

NN: yeah (.) that’s the thing cos he can (.) he can play lovely and y’know and erm-

S: he’s lovely with the other children a lot of the time (.) y’know he does want to be (.) nice-

NN: he wants to be their friends (..) and y’know I don’t know about yourself but I’ve tried to say to him (.) but if you hurt him them they won’t wan to be play-

D: yeah

M: oh we say that (.) yeah we always say it

D: yeah

NN: y’know they won’t want to be your friend cos they want you to be nice to them y’know?

D: it’s like with Mollie (.) cos he was playing with Mollie-

M: and Rebecca (.)

D: oh and Rebecca (.) cos they’re our neighbours you know-

NN: yeah they are

D: Rebecca lives next door and Mollie lives two doors down (.) anyway yesterday they was fine weren’t they?

M: good (.) yeah they was alright (.)

He had a little (.) well (.) I think it might have been Joe actually just winding (.) just winding him up and saying but Tom has just told me he’s going to hit me or something like that but (.) but I never actually saw it and I knew (.) but I don’t know about Joe (.) he’s sort of-

M: yeah

D: yeah sometimes he might just tell you (.) I don’t know (.)

M: yeah we do say if you don’t play nicely at school you won’t get invited to parties (.) nobody will want to play with you (.) no one will want to be your friend (.) but I want to (.) but you know what you want to do then (.) you have to be really good and play really nice (..) but in the morning sometimes he’ll be really excited about coming and be like I’m going to try really really hard and be a champion (.) I’m going to try and get a hundred team points cos I’m going to be really really good (laughing) (.) little things like that (.)

NN: I mean he does get team points erm (.) cos he works (.) like we say on a one to one when he’s working with an adult or whenever he’s really good with that (.) y’know so he does get his team points (.) erm (.) and he is getting better for sitting (.) he doesn’t (.) sit (.) he does sit on the carpet but he’s sort of in his area (.) d’you know what I mean?

M: so no-one’s invading his space (.) he hasn’t got the temptation to (..)

NN: yeah and he’s (.) he does tell us (.) he comes a lot to say that someone (.) so and so it doing something that they shouldn’t be doing or so and so touched something or y’know (.) Tom as long as you are doing the right thing I’ll deal with that you go and sit back in your space (.) so he is aware that things shouldn’t be done cos he’ll tell us (.) cos someone else is doing it-

D: he seems to be pushing his boundaries all of the time-

NN: yeah (.) children do push boundaries though (.) I mean that’s what they do (.)

S: I don’t (.) well I don’t know about you but I don’t get the impression that that’s what he’s doing though (.) I (.) when I’ve sort of watched him I don’t feel like he’s doing it to see what our reaction will be (.) I think-

NN: yeah (.) I think the situations are when he gets frustrated or cross –

S: it’s a lack of control (.) isn’t it I think (.)

NN: yeah

S: I don’t think he does it for our-

NN: I think he (.) he goes out to play for example at play time (.) he goes out to play and wants to play (.) and the games boys do generally play (.) fight (.) don’t they?

S: yeah

NN: we tell them not to -

S: yeah

NN: all the time but they do (.) they all do it (.) I can’t think of any boy especially who doesn’t want to do it (.) and we tell them not to (.) but erm like we said earlier he just takes it that little bit too far and looses control (.) and then he’s throwing someone on the floor (.) d’you know what I mean?

D: and having a strop (.)

NN: yeah (.) well he’s a big lad

D: he is yeah

NN: and a lot of the children he plays with are smaller than him (.) so (..)

M: (laughing)

NN: it’s like having a rag doll (.) you just see this (.) this child being thrown (.) and they want to play with him (.) so it is it is that (..) just (.) it isn’t for the (.) he isn’t doing it to get your attention (.) he’s doing it to play-

S: yeah he isn’t doing it to push boundaries and test where we’re all stopping (.) I don’t think he’s that aware y’know aware of us (.) I think (..)

Me: do you think he’s trying to get some control?

S: I think he does like control (.) I think he likes to be in control of the situation-

NN: yeah

S: and when they don’t do what-

NN: it’s on his terms yeah

S: he wants them to do (..)

R: and can you think of any reasons why you think he may be liking this control in certain situations?

S: the only thing I can sort of think of is the fact that of y’know (.) being an only child (.) I always think about puppies (.) I always liken things to dogs (laughing) but you know when puppies are growing up and when they’ve got their siblings around them and they nip each other don’t they if they’re getting out of line (.) and that’s sort of their (.) measure isn’t it if you like (.) of when erm (.) when to stop-

NN: yeah

S: and I wonder whether because he’s sort of grown up on his own whether cos he’s not had- whether y’know that’s the stage that he’s at (.) whether he’s now waiting y’know he’s at the stage but the children are having to say no-

NN: yeah

S: and he’s having to say learn that that’s not-

M: yeah he’s not big on sharing half the time (.) he doesn’t like to share (.) like say if he doesn’t share (.) he can get a bit a bit frustrated can’t he (.) so yeah I can totally understand that and –

NN: yeah

M: yeah and get that yeah (..) but then sometimes he will make a point of deliberately sharing-

NN: yeah

M: he’ll come to be and say oh would you like this and you say oh no no thank you (.) and he’ll say ok ok I’ll put it down there for you (.) if you want it you can just have it (.)

NN: yeah

M: it will be something that he has just been playing with as well (.) so it’s almost as if I’ll I’m gonna make a point that I want to share with you but then at other times he won’t have it (.)

NN: mmm

S: so I wonder if things are starting to sort of sink in (.) cos I think y’know there’s no magic wand (.) you can’t instantly change a child’s behaviour can you (.) it’s just that repetitive y’know constantly giving that same message that you hope will eventually you hope that they start to self regulate rather than us having to do it-

NN: yeah yeh

S: having to regulate their behaviour (.)

NN: like you said he is showing signs of (.) he is only five (.) he is showing signs of (.) learning –

S: mmm

NN: y’know (.) that’s what he needs and like I said he does seem to know what he has to do (.) it’s just putting it into practice and y’know remembering when he’s when he’s got this free play or whatever situation (.)

M: yeah (.) I remember you saying at the parents evening (.) if he’s been told what to do he’ll do it fine(.) if you give him the freedom to do whatever it’s like uhhhhhh what do I do? What do I do? There’s too much to (..)

R: do you see that at home as well? Do you see a change if there’s more kind of structure?

M: erm (.) well at home I think it’s different because he’s an only one he’s got everything to himself anyway so he doesn’t have to share (.) he doesn’t have to leave somebody alone to play while he finds something else (.) he does get (.) he is quite happy playing on his own a lot of the time in’t he (.) he will entertain himself (.)

D: yeah

S: so he’ll happily choose whatever he wants?

M: he’ll play whatever

S: or do you kind of say (.) why don’t we get the y’know so and so out?

M: oh no no he will (.) what we will say is if you want to play with that why don’t you tidy that up first (.) and then play with that (.) and a lot of the time he will do that and he will tidy up when he’s finished (.) y’know sort of things like that (.) so (.) so yeah erm (.)

S: cos we just thought it was those times in the classroom where he has a choice-

M: yeah, mmm

S: that he’s not always quite sure what to do with it (.) that we sometimes (.) y’know that means we see more situations-

NN: yeah

S: y’know more unwanted behaviour in those sort of situations-

NN: that’s right yeah (.)

S: cos he does seem unsure about what to do and where to go (.) mmm (.) I mean that will become less of a problem next year as it is more structured (.)

M: yeah (.) he’ll probably like that then (.) being told what to do (.) this is what you have to do (.) he’ll probably prefer that rather than freedom (.)

S: It’s not the same (.) yeah it’s not the free flow like in Reception (.) in free flow there’s set activities where they have to go and work with an adult and the rest of the time there’s activities out (.) whereas in year one there’s focussed activities where if you’re at that table you have to do that (.) you might not have a teacher with you but you’ve got to do that and y’know (.) so it’s erm (.) yeah there is a bit more structure (.) so it will be interesting to see-

M: yeah

S: how sort of the classroom dynamics change will change (.)

NN: yeah (.) whether it would make a difference (.)

D: he likes school though doesn’t he (.)

M: oh (.) he loves it (.) he hates it when it’s half term (.)

NN: he doesn’t want it to be summer holidays-

M: neither will I (laughing)

S: (laughing)

M: yeah so it’s I want to go to school and I’m no you can’t it’s school holidays (.) aww but I want to go to school (.) I’m sorry you can’t (.) erm (.)

S: I did wonder about how you would feel about us sort of accessing perhaps speech and language support just for –

M: well I did ring up a while ago I think when he did stutter and they said well he needs to have his ears tested first (.)

S: mmm

M: and his ears was fine (.)

D: very good aren’t they (.)

M: oh yeah cos he had them done here (.) and then we had an appointment to go to Hull didn’t we?

D: yeah yeah

M: they said perfect (.) nothing wrong with them (.) but I’ve noticed if he’s had a cold he does cos he does suffer with like blocked ears (.)

S: mmm

M: and I think that maybe affects him as well (.) so yeah cos they said cos his ears are fine he doesn’t need to go to speech and language (.)

S: I think I’ll probably refer him with the y’know the stuttering when he’s trying to (.) in stressful situations but I think they can look at more (.) y’know it’s not just always the sounds that they make –

M: yeah

S: it is sort of the way they communicate (.) erm their understanding of language (.) cos y’know I think it would (.)

NN: yeah

S: I think it would benefit us just to have that y’know just assessment (.) just to check (.) just to see what er he is understanding and whether we can do anymore to support him with his language and his comprehension (..) so that will probably be (.) well she’s coming in this week actually but I’ll mention it to her then but it will be when we have out planning meeting in September that we would formalise that really-

M: yep

S: I don’t know how you feel about that really?

M: Yeah fine yeah

D: that’s fine (.) yeah we just want the best for him really (.) like we were saying that’s why we’re having the meeting (.) we were saying on Friday that all we want is for him to stop pushing children and get friends (.) like I say as I was saying before (.) if you carry on pushing people and being angry and that with children (.) they’ll say don’t go over there he’s not very nice he’s not a very nice boy (.) we just want him to be set up (.) there’s Tom let’s play with Tom (.) and have lots of friends that’s what we want (.) and obviously to do well in school-

NN: yeah

D: I presume he’s doing reasonably well at school? Writing and reading?

NN: he does yeah(.) he tries hard and does yeah (.)

D: yeah he seems to like his reading and writing-

M: he’s a bit obsessed with handwriting at the moment (.)

NN: yeah

D: yeah he were doing it yesterday weren’t he (.)

M: oh yeh yeh

S: that’s really good

M: yeh (..)

R: You mentioned playtimes as one of the key kind of periods in school where you feel that he’s not quite getting things right and it seems more of a struggle with his behaviour at play time (.) I wonder if you could tell us a bit more detail about what is happening at play time and what kind of behaviours you are seeing (.) and the whole situation regarding playtime (.)

S: mmm (.) well I think when he goes out we put erm-

NN: he has a hi-vis on-

S: a hi-vis jacket on so that we (.) well you can keep an eye on him (.)

NN: (laughing) it’s just so that we can see where he is (.)

M: just follow where it’s all kicking off and he’ll be in the middle of it-

NN: yeah (.) it’s easier said than done-

S: (laughing) yeah

NN: they’re all wearing the same clothes-

M: (laughing)

NN: just so we can see where he is and he’s quite happy to wear it and-

D: I was going to say does he mind wearing it (.) yeah

NN: no he doesn’t mind-

D: I I have to say I’m not really (.) I’m not really sort of a fan but I can see why you want to do this-

NN: yeah he’ll go out and he’ll come running back in-

S: yeah he’s not the only one either-

D: oh is he not? I see (.)

NN: no he’s not (.)

D: mmm

NN: and it isn’t a long term thing (.) it’s just while he’s (.) certainly in Reception erm (.) we know where he is and it lets him know (.) it reminds him that we can see him (.) so in a way that helps him to

D: that’s why it-

NN: think about (.) y’know they can see me (.) they see if I behave (.) so I’m not saying it works all the time but it does help to make him think about –

D: mmm

NN: what he’s doing (..) so erm (.) but that’s what I was saying earlier (.) he is (.) it isn’t a deliberate- it is deliberate because obviously he’s meaning to play in that way but he isn’t meaning to hurt (.) he isn’t wanting to- I don’t think that he is wanting to hurt them (.) he just loses the control of the situation (.) the game whatever and he gets overexcited and he wants to be in-charge (.) it’s his game-

D: is it certain children that he goes towards?

NN: er (.) it is yeah (..) erm (..) he does tend to play with Jack-

M: oh he mentions Jack

D: oh yeah (.) we know Jack don’t we-

NN: and Jack is on the little- again he’s on the little-

D: we know a lot of the kids from here (.)

NN: he erm (.) he does play with Jack a lot and Jack is happy to play-

M: yeh

NN: and he’s playing along with the game but like I say Tom takes it that little bit too far (.) and it’s play-fighting (.) isn’t it?

D: yeah

NN: always play-fighting (.) like Power-Rangers-

M: oh it’s Marvel Avengers (.)

NN: Marvel Avengers-

M: oh yeah they play Marvel Avengers (.) that’s his thing at the minute (.)

NN: yeah

M: well he does that at home (.)

D: yeah (.) he was this morning wasn’t he (.) he –

M: he’ll pretend to be Spiderman or someone and he’ll be jumping and leaping and throwing himself around the room –

NN: which I don’t have – y’know we don’t mind that (.) that’s absolutely fine-

M: yeah

NN: if that’s as it is (.)

M: yeah (.) yeah (.)

NN: y’know it’s difficult then when you’ve got to go and tell a parent – another parent (..)

M: yeah

NN: y’know (..)

M: cos we were saying that on Friday we do something (.) what he calls (.) where you’ll stand at one end of the room and you’ll be knelt down and he’ll just run and charge (.) it’s controlled (..) if he starts kicking punching nipping biting (.) that’s it we’ll stop (.)

D: that’s with us by the way-

M: yeah that’s with us-

D: well really with me but I can’t do it at the moment because I’ve got a bad back (.)

M: so we was thinking is that a good thing for us to do that at home (.) if he’s taking it to school but then if he doesn’t do it at home is he going to have more energy and wanting to lash out more at school (.)

D: he just seems to have that much energy doesn’t he (.)

M: yeah (.)

D: he’s just grrr (.) he gets really revved up (.) really revved up and runs straight towards you (.)

M: but it’s play (.) it’s like playfully though in’t it? He doesn’t do it with anger (.)

D: er yeh (.) I think sometimes he gets a little bit angry-

M: like you said though he gets a little bit carried away (.)

NN: mmm

M: he’ll start off fine (.)

D: mmm

M: and then he keeps going and going and then he crosses that line –

NN: but then maybe (.) I think maybe actually that then (.) cos he’s doing that with you and you’re an adult (.) he isn’t able to differentiate between you and another child-

M: [and a child yeah (.)]

NN: do y’know what I mean?

M: mmm

NN: I mean I’m not saying-

M: yeah

NN: that’s the reason-

M: oh yeh

NN: I’m just trying to-

M: yeah

D: yeah well we were the same with sort of making it up (.) we were the same as you-

M: well we’ve often wondered whether it’s a good thing to do or not-

D: cos like I say I haven’t done it for a week or so (.) it doesn’t – we don’t – we go through fits and starts of doing it (.) it’s not a regular thing though is it (.)

M: oh no no no no (.) maybe once a week (.) if that (.) or something (.)

D: but er like I say it’s been over a week now hasn’t it?

M: yeah (.)

D: two weeks almost (.)

M: but if he has all this energy pent up (.) not frustration (.) but is he going to do it more here and really hurt somebody here and **really** hurt somebody here (.) it’s sort of a catch twenty two (.) isn’t it (.) do we do it or don’t we do it (.) I don’t know (.)

S: I think with erm (.) y’know when we’ve been talking it seems his (.) or it seems to me and I don’t know whether it’s right or not (.) but that he’s at that stage where he’s trying –he’s starting to learn about boundaries and about what he can and can’t do (.) and that’s maybe the issue that he’s just having to learn those (.) boundaries (.)

M: yeah (.)

S: so perhaps I think maybe to maybe try and knock that on the head so that he is (.) he is understanding y’know we’re not doing this because you’ve been y’know because you’ve been doing it at school and it’s hurting people (.) erm (..) and just see whether it actually has (.) y’know with you not actually doing that and not doing physical rough play at home (.) whether it does (.) cos it might like you say have a negative impact –

NN: it might yeah

M: mmm

S: but it would be interesting just to see whether-

NN: yeah (.) unless we try we don’t know do we-

D: no

NN: that’s what we always say (.)

M: oh yeah

NN: y’know it might not work or it might also make it help him to understand that (.)

M: yeah (.)

S: you see we don’t know do we (.) just get inside the child’s head (.) is he lashing out because of pent up energy that’s coming out as aggression (.) or is he lashing out because he’s not learnt those boundaries? Y’know that’s the difficulty isn’t it-

NN: [yeh]

S: of not knowing the reasons for him doing that (.)

NN: you see I (.) it’s a different thing altogether but last week we talked about (.) we mentioned it today about him wanting to be really helpful on a one to one (.) and he does he just wants to please (.) but I I mentioned that he (.) does (.) when he’s in the classroom if he’s not gone out to play (.) with myself or whoever (.) if you ask him not to do something (.) he’ll try to (.) he’s trying to push those boundaries and he keeps trying to have another go (.)

D: mmm

S: and I’ve said no (.) and we do we stick to what we say y’know (.) we do stick by what we say and we’ve said no and that’s it (.) it’s a no (.) erm (.) but I have noticed cos he’s comfortable with us now-

M: yeh (.)

NN: he is (.) just tries to push it just that little bit (.) and you just have to remind him-

M: yeah

NN: it’s a no (.)

M: yeh well if we say no we say no and I don’t budge (.) I don’t budge (.) I don’t care if he’s crying screaming (.) the answer’s no (.)

NN: he doesn’t cry and scream-

M: oh I know but-

NN: he’s just trying to just see if he can just get away with it a little bit (.)

S: so maybe there is an element of that (.)

D: mmm

S: y’know earlier we were saying we didn’t think (..) there does seem to be different scenarios and different situations where we’re seeing this unwanted behaviour (.) erm (.) for different reasons isn’t there (.)

NN: yeah (.) it’s like you were saying earlier about when you’re talking and he’s trying to interrupt (.) I mean that’s quite a common thing in the classroom isn’t it?

S: (laughing) yeah

NN: you get that all the time (.) you get the tapping and the constant nagging from all of them not just from Tom (.) but as a (.) as a classroom we just say you have to wait and we (.) if we’re talking to another child or an adult they have to learn and it takes a long time-

M: (laughing)

S: (laughing)

NN: (laughing) believe me but they have to learn (.) it takes a long time but they have to wait (.)

S: we’re still teaching some of the year two-

NN: I know (.) it does take a long time (.) it is they don’t get it (.) and he does do that (.) but like I say so do all the others (.) it’s not unusual in that sense (.) at all (.) so yeah (..)

R: I’m interested in this idea of play and when you were talking about his understanding of language (.) how there may be some difficulties in him fully understanding language (.) erm and whether there is perhaps some overlap here in terms of his understanding of play at home and school (.) how do you feel about the suggestions made for supporting his understanding of play at home?

D: do you mean to stop doing it?

M: mmm

D: like I say it wouldn’t bother me at all to stop doing it!

S: (laughing)

M: (laughing)

D: it might do him (.) but like I say we don’t do it that regularly-

M: no but we have often thought shall we do it shalln’t we do it?

D: he does ask quite often doesn’t he (.) but he does know that (.) erm (.) he still dives on me though doesn’t he (.)

M: yep (.)

S: I think you’ve been sort of doing it out of good that you’re trying to get rid of that pent up energy haven’t you (.)

M: oh yeah yeah

D: yes cos he seems to have that much energy (.)

M: he’s really strong willing (.) like you say there’s a lot of little ones (.) I’m always thinking (.) oh if he gets carried away he’s going to really hurt somebody (.) y’know and I don’t know (..)

R: I wonder if he understands what is meant by playtime (.) it’s interesting to think about what he may associate with the word play (.) it’s just a thought really (.) and I think it’s interesting that you’ve picked up on things like his understanding of language and his sense of boundaries erm (..) was there anything more that you’d like to say about his peer relationships (.) his friendships?

S: yeah (.) he really really wants good friends and he is learning to do that really well (.) at the moment it’s not really a natural response (.) it’s quite a (.) right I’m going to be good so you know like I said about the sharing (.) it seems he’s pretending at it at the moment but you see that’s a form of development as well (.) they’ve got to y’know try it and see what they’ve got and then it becomes part of their natural behaviour where they don’t have to think about it it just comes naturally (.) erm I think that the really positive things that we see him doing is almost over the top isn’t it?

M: yeah exaggerated deliberately (.)

S: yeah but that’s great that he’s doing that (.) that he’s actually thinking I’m going to do that really well (.) it’s like when he sees me in the corridor (.) he has a really over-exaggerated look of look how nice I am–

M: (laughing)

S: but y’know it’s good that he’s thinking –it’s good that he’s got that understanding that this is what they want to see (.) y’know so when I ‘m like this it’s good-

NN: yeah he’s got the he has got it (.)

M: yeah he just needs to do it more naturally-

NN: yeah

M: and do it all the time rather than making a point of doing that (.) yeah

S: when he’s making a conscious decision to be (.) that way then (.) but I don’t (..) those sort of things do tend to happen more naturally don’t they y’know he’ll just (.) the more praise we can give him when he is being exaggerated you know over the top good (.) the more you would hope that you would see that behaviour more regularly (.) erm and then as it becomes more regular and more natural y’know because it’s a natural response (.)

D: yeah y’know when he does good things at home and that we always sort of well done Tom and high five him-

NN: yeah

S: [yeah]

M: [yeah]

D: we don’t sort of say oh great well done (.)

NN: yeah he (.) well we’re very similar in the class you know (.) we do tend to y’know really go for it (laughing)

S: (laughing)

M: (laughing)

NN: but you try not to make such a big deal out of the negative (.) obviously you have to deal with it y’know (.) generally now I just say I’m very disappointed I’m really disappointed (.) better go and sit on the red mat and that’s it (.) I think that if it’s an outside situation he’s been told and he’s been sent in (.) and I don’t (.) I don’t I say I don’t make a big deal out of it but I don’t make a massive deal out of it whereas if he does something good (.) it’s like they’re like (.) y’know I’m a little bit exaggerated as well (.)

D: yeh yeh (.)

NN: I make it sound even better than what it actually is y’know-

M: yeah

S: he responds so well to praise-

NN: oh yeah

S: you see some children it makes them quite uncomfortable (.) but it doesn’t Tom wants-

NN: Tom loves it-

S: he laps it up (laughing)

NN: he loves that praise (.)

D: he likes his stickers (.) he likes the Friday table (.) oh he went mad didn’t he when we found out about the Friday table

NN: yeah

M: real pleased (.) pleased as punch

D: I don’t know how he managed to get on that bloody table (laughing)

M: (laughing)

D: I really don’t

S: aww

NN: he tells us all the time that if he’s done something and it’s good he does tell us that he’s done something (.) but yeah I have to say that he is improving (.) he has come a long way in the fact that you know I can go and say we get to play time and come up to me and he’ll say can I go out to – he’ll ask now (.) can I go out to play? And I’ll look at him and I’ll say but I haven’t spoke to you all morning Tom (.) y’know I’ll say I haven’t noticed that you’ve done anything has Miss Craven had to speak to you? Y’know are you in the green? yeah? So you can (.) of course you can go out to play (.) and you know so it’s like those times when (.) initially it was like a constant thing (.) we were talking to him all the time (.) so from September to now he has come on-

M: yeah

NN: and he is like I said he is starting to get there (.) it’s just learning to be natural and controlling y’know controlling that-

S: and I think in terms of the other children if we’re talking about his peers (.) I think he’s erm (.) it’s not like there’s certain children that push his buttons (.) he seems to have children that he really wants to be friends with that he sort of again it’s almost a bit of an exaggerated need isn’t it (.)

NN: yeah

S: y’know he really wants them to be friends with him (.) erm and again we see this exaggerated kindness and over the top in how much he wants to help them (.) erm which can sometimes be a bit overbearing for some of the children but when he is playing with them (.) even though he absolutely adores them and loves this child-

NN: yeah

S: y’know he’s still not knowing where to stop and he gets (.) y’know that then makes him upset when he’s upset them y’know (.) erm so I don’t think that he’s got any particular bad relationships with any children (.) he wants to be friends with everybody-

NN: [yeh]

S: doesn’t he (.) erm (..)

R: I wonder if there’s an alternative way of looking at this exaggerated behaviour? In terms of his exaggerated politeness and kindness and that eagerness to really really please? Any thoughts? (..)

S: In terms of (..)

R: why he might be behaving in that way and understanding why he might be going above and beyond in trying to please (..)

S: mmm (.)

R: because it sounds like you feel he understands the behaviour that adults do and don’t want to see and he also wants to please others (.) so I wonder if there’s anything more we could understand from what his behaviour is communicating (.) that exaggerated behaviour (..)

S: I don’t know (.) you’ve got me there (.)

N: yeah (laughing) (..)

S: to me it just seems that he is just really trying to make it obvious that that’s the way he is behaving (.) but I know that we’ve talked about the need for attention (.) is it just a need for him to get positive attention-

M: I was just going to say that (.) that sort of one on one praise (.) it’s sort of like focus on me I’ve done something good I’m here (.) I ‘m going to make a thing about it (.) I don’t know I’ve never thought of it in a different sort of way (.)

NN: he does (.) if we’ve done something like we talk about sharing (.) you say he finds it difficult to share (.) he does (.) he does share but he has to tell you that he’s sharing-

D: mmm he makes a point out of it yeah (.)

NN: he has to come and say I’ve given so and so those wheels (.) I mean he has to make a point-

S: that’s really difficult isn’t it because in terms of attention (.) when they’re sort of gaining or require unnecessary attention your response to that is to not give them the attention isn’t it (.) but then it’s giving it for positive things (.) so it’s really hard (.) do we encourage that do we encourage that sort of neediness that sort of need for a response for when he’s done positive things (.)

M: so you think maybe the praise maybe needs to be toned down a little bit (..)

NN: I don’t know (.)

M: so he learns to do it more naturally in other situations or (..)

NN: I don’t know that’s really tricky

S: hmmm

NN: because obviously if he’s done something good you want to let him know-

M: oh yeah

NN: that he’s done something and that you’re really pleased with him-

M: yeh yeh yeh oh yeh

NN: I don’t know (.) that’s really-

M: but then I suppose if we did tone it down he might go hmmm they weren’t that happy about that (.) I may as well just carry on (.) go over there and kick somebody (.)

NN: yeah I get more attention that way (.)

M: yeah she will talk to me then yeah (laughing)

S: well that’s exactly it isn’t it (.) we’ve always sort of said that we want to give him the praise for the good things (.)

NN: [the positives]

M: mmm

R: it sounds like he could be thriving from that positivity? (..) Perhaps from what you’ve described (.) at times he may be functioning in an overly heightened state when he’s showing the exaggerated behaviour (.) I just wondered if there was something else in that (.) in terms of understanding and supporting him?

S: yeah I do (.) erm I would say you’ve probably hit the nail on the head (.) he does seem to be sort of (.) and when he’s when we’re getting the stuttering at school that’s sort of he tries to say things at a hundred miles an hour and that’s he’s trying to sort or erm (..) everything seems quite quick with him isn’t it?

NN: yeah

S: he’s sort of-he is in a heightened state I would say a lot of the time (.)

NN: yeah

S: at school (..) interestingly when you when I (.) when you came in to see me and we were in the conservatory-

M: yeah

S: I mean we were only chatting for five minutes

M: [yeah]

S: but I saw a different side to Tom then-

M: oh right

S: cos he did seem to be quite calm whereas in school he does seem to be-

M: I should be in his class all day then!

S: (laughing) yeah!

S: yeah you could stand in a corner (..) I mean yes he did want to look around the conservatory and things but his shoulders seemed to go down and his speech seemed to be more natural (..)

NN: but yet when you spoke to me the other day (..) was that the day he wasn’t sleeping he was a bit grumpy (.)

M: mmm

NN: he didn’t he wasn’t comfortable with that was he? He was a little bit (.) y’know (.) cos you said I’m only talking to your teacher (.)

M: oh yeah (.) he said what are you doing (.) what are you doing here?

NN: yeah he just seemed a bit-

M: I said don’t worry-

NN: yeah

M: but then the following day he said will you tell my teacher I’ve got headache and I’ve got neck ache (.) cos (.) well I thought I’d best say about him not sleeping in case (?)

NN: yeah (..) it was different but then maybe that was because you were telling me he was grumpy

S: (laughing)

NN: and he didn’t want me to know he was grumpy(.)

M: yeah

S: and if he is grumpy he’s not going to be happy with that is he? but then you know in another situation if he’s hurting-

NN: yeah if he’s getting a lot of sympathy (laugh)

M: yeah (.) yeah (..)

D: he’s got a good excuse to be a pain (.) well if he warns you he’s gonna be a pain (..)

S: I think you know (.) I think what you have said that thing about his being in a heightened state I do think he’s quite like that for a lot of the time in school (..) so y’know when we’ve mentioned sort whether he is being anxious in school –

NN: hmm (.) yeah (.)

S: didn’t we before-

NN: yeah

M: is that in every situation in the day that you think he might be?

S: you see I only see very (.) I don’t see him on all the time but I think that when I do see him he is (.) oh god she’s here (laughing) so maybe that’s why-

D: I wonder why with you he’s like that and with – is he maybe (.) I don’t know (.) why is he like that with you?

S: I think the only contact I’ve had with Tom-

D: you haven’t lamped him one have you? (laughing)

M/NN: (laughing)

S: no (.) he’s really (.) he likes to please me doesn’t he and I think because of that-

M: it’s that deliberate thing of showing that he can be good and mmm-

S: yeah (.) yeah (..) does he think that I’m checking (.) y’know I don’t know (..) am I the checker? (slight laugh)

NN: you see we’re watching (.) all thirty one children (.) yeah so he knows that we’re not just there for him whereas when he see’s-

M: he associate you just for him (.)

NN: yeah

S: and I’m not always down there just for Tom anyway but he does maybe in his head he thinks that I’m there for him (.)

NN: hmmm

S: for checking up-

M: which is quite smart in a way

S: mmm

M: because if he knows oh I’m going to be good now (.) oh I’m going to play now (.) it’s quite crafty (.) quite clever (.)

D: swap over (.)

M: yeah what ever you say now please (laughing)

R: I wonder about his awareness of right and wrong and good and bad and these kind of structures that we have in school and (.) how he reacts to them (.) erm so we’ve talked about the good and it seems that he feels that he should put on this very good kind of role at times (.) erm we know he’s not quite in control of the behaviours that as adults we perhaps don’t appreciate as much (.) but how does he respond to when he’s told off or whatever consequence might result from these behaviours?

NN: in the classroom he’s erm you can tell when he’s done something because he tries to tell you and this is what I was saying earlier about him saying no or yes when he means the opposite (.)

S: yeah

NN: and he also does this thing with his tongue where he –

M: with his cheek?

NN: yeah where he pushes his tongue in his cheek and that’s when I know (laughing)

M: tell-tale sign (laughing)

NN: erm that’s when I know (.) and he’s under pressure then cos he-

M: he’s not really sure (.) he can’t talk his way out of it (.)

NN: no he’s not sure (.) he knows he he knows he’s done something he shouldn’t have done and (..) yeah that’s generally his reaction (.)

M: is it –has he ever done something wrong and come and said oh I’ve just hit that person or I’ve-

NN: he does eventually (.)

M: oh right

NN: you have to talk to him-

M: yeah

NN: and ask him (.) occasionally he will come in and just tell you (.) that he’s been sent in or we might happen to be in a classroom and you can say to him what have you done and he’ll go (..) and you can say come on you need to tell me the truth (.) what have you done and eventually he’ll say I’ve taken something off so and so or I’ve hit so and so or I’ve thrown or I’ve (..) he will tell you (.) eventually (.)

R: do you think it takes him a little while to calm down or for some anxiety to go down for him to be able to communicate with you-

NN: I’m not sure (.) I’m not sure whether it is the calming down or if it is the (.) erm (.) he knows he shouldn’t have done it and he doesn’t want to admit that he’s done it and he’s trying not to say it but he has to say it in the end (.)

R: ok (.) so we’re not quite sure if that’s a sign of anxiety or if it’s I don’t want to because this is all too much to deal with or it’s all a bit uncomfortable for him-

NN: yeah (..)

S: it’s interesting that he’ll come and tell you when he’s done something really good won’t he but then he’s with holding that – it’s almost like it’s an image of himself that he [doesn’t want you to see]

NN: [it’s completely different] and when he’s telling someone or he’s done something or he’s put that away he’s picked up all the colours-

S: he wants you to see doesn’t he?

NN: yeah it’s completely different (.) completely (..)

S: yeah

NN: completely different (.) y’know his facial expressions and everything are different (.)

R: if you could put yourself in his shoes (.) do you think he’s feeling a lot of pressure in those situations? Or (.)

NN: well I think obviously he does feel a lot of pressure erm (..) but I also think he knows that he shouldn’t have done it (.) do y’know what I mean? He’s really – he’s done it he’s not meant to (.) he’s sort of lost his temper or y’know or got frustrated or done whatever it is that he’s done (.) and but then (.) he knows he shouldn’t have done it (.)

R: ok (..)

S: I feel like it it’s (.) it like a (.) it’s really hard (.) I do think he feels remorse-

NN: yeah

S: doesn’t he about things that he’s done (.) but it’s yeah I feel like it’s more that he’s let himself down-

NN: yeah

S: than let someone else down (.)

NN: yeah

S: I don’t know if he recognises that (.) what he’s done (.) what effect it has on-

NN: mmm

S: them (.) as such (..) I think it’s (.) that sounds quite complicated but I don’t think-I’m not sure he goes to say sorry because we tell him to and it’s something we always require children to do and if a child’s hurt someone we always say look they’re crying (.) sort of encouraging that empathy-

NN: yeah

S: isn’t it (.) that what you’ve done has had an affect on another child (.) and I’m not sure that Tom is quite there yet (.)

NN: no

S: he will say sorry cos we we sort of encourage him to-

NN: yeah

S: but I think that he’s more remorseful about the fact that he’s done it –y’know he’s let himself down-

NN: and now he’s missing his playtime or he’s not allowed in the construction area or he can’t go back in the conservatory (.)

D: that sounds about right that (.) yeah it does (.) do you think that?

M: yeah cos if he knows he’s done something wrong then he knows he won’t be able to do what he wants to do (.)

NN: yeah (.) that’s right (.)

S: he doesn’t come across as angry about it-

NN: no

S: at school (.) he’s not angry that you’ve stopped him doing that (.)

NN: no (.) I’m never- you never see him angry (.) like you say I’ve never seen him lose his temper (.) I mean I’ve seen him get frustrated with children and take things off them or break something that was made-

M: yeah (.)

NN: erm (.) but generally when he hurts them it’s not an anger (.) would you agree? It’s more of a-

S: loss of control (.)

NN: loss of control with the play and gone too far (.) so I’ve never seen him get angry as such (..)

S: and we also wonder when he’s sort of breaking up models and you know if he’s done something because he wants to upset that child (.) or whether he wants to see their reaction rather than actually I’m angry with you (.) I’m going to break that up to show that I’m angry (..) It’s sort of sometimes a bit (.) right let’s see what happens now (slight laugh) (..) sometimes (.)

NN: yeah (.) and then there’s the situation where if he breaks a model erm because he can’t have what they’ve got so right well you’re not having it so-

M: that’s what I was thinking-

NN: I’m going to break it (.) you’re not going to have it if I can’t have one like you so do y’know what I mean it’s like a-

D: not sharing sort of thing (.)

NN: yeah (..)

S: mmm (..)

R: so we understand that Tom seems to really want these peer relationships- he wants friends-

M: yeah

R: he’s often really kind and helpful with other children and adults (.) and he can form these relationships (..) it seems he is a very kind and lovely little boy (.) it seems you feel he’s just not quite getting things right all of the time (.) there are certain situations that you’ve identified which seem to be particularly difficult for him erm(.) play times (.) unstructured periods and with peers when things aren’t quite going his way (..) positive one to one interaction and attention can be particularly helpful for him (.) you mentioned he can really thrive in that situation (..) so in going forward and kind of looking at how Tom’s needs can be really supported (.) perhaps you could share your ideas now about what else could be done to try and ensure that things are really right for him as an individual (..) erm I feel like you’ve offered some thoughts already but I wonder if we could get an idea of your understanding of what you feel could happen next? (..) how do you feel? Do you feel that you’re beginning to get a clearer understanding of Tom and his behaviours?

S: of the reasons why? Yeah (.) I think we’ve sort of talked about next year and maybe there’s certain intervention groups that we can do that encourage sort of sharing (.) you know sort of turn taking-

NN: yeah

S: erm that language between peer to peer erm when they’re y’know in a game situation (.) but it is a very structured situation with a grown up sat there and maybe sort of four or five children (.) if we do a group like that we tend to we tend to pick one or two children that maybe need the encouragement (.) and then we have maybe three or four children that are actually really good role models at it (.) erm so it’s-

M: so they get to copy and see how it should be done (.)

S: yeah it’s a mixture of (.) it’s not all children that would be struggling with that skill (.) it’s erm-

NN: yeah

S: it’s a mixture (..) so that was something that we had in mind (.)

NN: yeah

S: and the speech therapy is probably one which we would want to pursue next year in September (.) but then for me I was sort of wondering how to – because he seems to be much happier in those structured times (.) do we put more structure in there for him –

NN: mmm yeah

S: but then in my head I’m thinking but that’s not teaching him to –how to behave in those unstructured times (.)

NN: that’s right yeah (.) you’re always going to have an unstructured time aren’t you (.) playtime dinnertime(.) both those situations are-

M: do you still do him going in at the back of the queue going to dinner and he always sits at the end of the table?

NN: erm (.) I’m not sure because I don’t go in with them-

M: ah right (.)

NN: I’m not sure about dinnertimes (.)

M: that’s what he was doing (.) he says to me anyway (.) he says he has to sit at the end of the table (.)

NN: is he? Right (.) ok he possibly does (.)

S: I think that’s quite interesting (.)

D: yeah

S: why does he do that? Y’know?

M: unless if he sits at the end of the table he’s only got one person on one side to sort of- I’m quite surprised cos normally if there’s food in front of him normally that’s it (..)

R: is he being told to sit there or is it choice?

NN: I don’t know I’d have to speak to dinner time staff (.)

S: it’s something we maybe need to look into-

NN: yeah I’m not sure (.)

S: because if it’s his choice-

M: I don’t know if it’s his choice he’s just sat at the end of the table everyday (.)

D: is that all what he’s said?

M: that’s what he’s said (.)

D: yeah (.)

NN: so you don’t know why he’s at the end of the line either because (.) erm (.) I don’t think he is (.) because when they go for lunch the healthies go in first (.) I don’t know what it is (.) if they’re a sandwich or a yogurt or whatever they’re healthies-

S: we call them healthies I don’t know why it’s not as if the others are not healthier (laughing)

NN: yeah we don’t have them in order of how healthy they are (laughing) you’re really healthy and you’re really unhealthy (laughing) no (..) that’s not what I mean sorry (.) I didn’t explain myself very well (.) so the ones that are having healthy meals go first and the ones that are just having the normal school lunch go behind them and the pack ups go right to the end (.) so I can’t see that he is (.) there have maybe been occasions where he has had to go at the end and walk with the adult who is at the end of the line but I don’t think- I will double check but I don’t think that’s a normal daily-

M: no

S: cos if he’s choosing to be at the back is that because he’s feeling anxious so he wants to keep an eye on everybody (.) do you know (.)

NN: yeah (..)

S: is he having to sit on the edge because of the table because he feels too much pressure when he’s enclosed? Y’know (..)

NN: yeah

S: we keep coming back to the anxiety thing don’t we (..)

NN: but I will look into that for you and I will sort of (.) see what the situation is at lunchtime (.)

M: because I do wonder whether he was put at the end of the table (.)

NN: yeah

M: or whether it was his choice (..) because he always says (.) cos I’ll say oh who did you sit next to at dinner time and he’ll tell me (.)

S: it’s generally too difficult to be sorting out individual children in that way

NN: yeah

M: he might want to sit there himself (.)

NN: I’ve not really heard (.) well I’m in the classroom (.) when they get back from lunch I’m in the classroom and I take them outside (.) erm and I haven’t really heard (.) I don’t get any feedback of him doing anything that he shouldn’t be doing (.) I do from (.) I do have others but (.) I can’t say that yes everyday I get someone else coming to me oh Tom’s done this Tom’s done that (..) I don’t (.) generally I don’t get that (.) but as for sitting at the end of the table I will look into it for you (..)

M: yeah (.) he doesn’t seem bothered by it (.) it just

D: well he’s got food (.) like you said as long as he gets fed he ain’t bothered (.)

NN: some children (.) you know how some children like to be at the front of the queue (.) some children will actually fight about being at the end (.)

S: mmm

NN: they’ll like go back and you go there no you go there no I’m going here-

S: I think sometimes there are advantages (.)

NN: yeah

S: I’ve worked out when my children are lining up for assembly they always fight for the back (.)

NN: first out the door?

S: well it’s when they’re coming back from the hall it comes back back line first so they get first choice for where they’re sitting on the carpet (.)

M: oh right (.)

S: so that’s why they fight over the back cos it means they’re first back into class (.) so there are generally some advantages (.)

NN: you see that doesn’t work with us because we go into a horse shoe when we go into assembly so it’s the children who are sat there in that corner and they wouldn’t be able to work out where in the line to be to be in that position (.)

M: (laughing)

R: ok (.) so you’d like to start some sort of social group intervention and then with your consent the speech and language therapy referral (.) and then you were perhaps toying with the idea of adding more structure but concerned whether he’ll learn skills needed for coping in unstructured times-

NN: I mean he has only got two more weeks with us (.)

S: yeah this will be more for September 15

R: [for the future]

NN: and in September I mean he’ll be year one there’ll be more structure (.) it will be more structured anyway (.) y’know generally that is what they do (.)

R: so with the unstructured times in year one what do you feel might be the pros and cons almost (.) of adding more structure for Tom?

S: it will be interesting to sort of see (.) to sort of observe him because although there’s the structure of the different activities on different tables and they move around (.) and some of them are adult led (.) it’s better for them to access it independently so some of them could be construction things and they’ve been asked to construct a circus or something to do with their topic (.) it would be interesting to observe him in those at those activities where there isn’t an adult (.) where he’s been given direction (.) so he knows what he needs to do so obviously there’ll be other children as well (.) all doing the same thing (.) Is it that he needs an adult-

NN: guidance (.)

S: yeah (.) in those times or somebody who’s just ensuring that he’s keeping those relationships (.) but it’s the staffing though isn’t it (..) and you see I find play times really difficult because to make them more structured you’re taking away the purpose of the freedom (.) that they need (.) it’s almost right (.) we’re going to have another lesson now (.) a lesson on how to play (.)

NN: yeh

S: do y’know what I mean? And if we feel that Tom has got a lot of energy that he needs to be burning off-

NN: shouldn’t that be the time he’s burning it off?

S: so do we just continue with keeping a very close eye and correcting unwanted behaviour at those times (.) or do we make it even more structured in that an adult guides them through play? I think I would probably (.) think what we’re doing at the moment is right for now (.)

NN: yeah

S: possibly because I do just feel that he’s at that stage in his development where he’s learning those boundaries (.) I think that he’s (.) that if it continued then maybe we need to look at it a bit more (.)

NN: but at this moment he showing signs of (.) of improving (.) of understanding (.) to compare him to a year ago (.) he is showing signs (.) so if he continues in that way hopefully this time next year hopefully we won’t need to have this conversation anymore (.) he’ll just be part of the class and not have to –

S: there are children in my class that we have to speak to (.) y’know we don’t expect it to completely disappear (.) he’s a boy (.) for one y’know (slight laugh)-

NN: yeah and you learn your life by pushing the boundaries don’t you (.) that’s how you learn (..)

S: but I sort of hope for those times maybe become less (.) the corrections become less (..)

R: how do you feel about that?

Dad: yeah (.) what you say I think is spot on (.)

M: yeah yeah (..) it’s all trial and error isn’t it (.) you don’t know until you try yeah (..)

NN: just in the fact that he has shown signs of understanding y’know (.) and improving (.) he’s just not quite got the control (..) and he is only five (..) and hopefully with a little bit of maturity and y’know help with his speech-

M: yeah

NN: those things combined hopefully (.) he might be able to do (..) just be able to play without wearing a hi-vis (.) y’know (..) we’ve got to think positive haven’t we (.) we’ve got to think we want him to (.) we do want him to do well (.) and we (..)

S: yeah and the older children do the play leaders don’t they (.) and I don’t think they take Reception children do they?

NN: yes they do (.) it doesn’t happen everyday and I think it’s stopped now (.)

S: right (.)

NN: it’s like during the winter and when they’re on the play ground (.)

S: the year five children get trained to be play leaders and they set up games erm but to make it a bit more controlled they have set years on different days and it’s their choice to go as well isn’t it?

NN: oh yeah (.) it’s outside in your playground (.)

S: so they’ll set up a game and say are there any class R children who want to come and play y’know and any class one children the next day erm (..) so there are some times where we could have quite structured play (.) hopefully with those older role models to guide them through that (.0 but like I say it’s not going to be every day (.)

NN: and like I say we did have (.) we have had those situations erm where (..) generally it was winter time wasn’t it?

S: yeah (.) I think when they’re all on the play ground (.) we don’t generally tend to have issues with the children as a whole as a whole school (.) the more issues we have tend to be in winter when there’s more children in a smaller area (.)

NN: yeah we’re obviously not on the field and at lunchtime everyone is out at the same time in the same area (.) so just taking that group off into a different area just gives them a little bit more space on the playground (..)

S: mmm (..) so there is that erm (.) that I think would help Tom (.) especially because he is now learning more and more (..)

R: it sounds like you’ve thought about lots of different aspects of his school experience not just one particular part of things – you know in the classroom and different parts of the school environment have been considered to guide your understanding (.) and it sounds like you’re kind of monitoring quite a lot now in terms of what’s going on and what else can we do if this isn’t working (..)

NN: mmm (.) yeah

R: so there’s lots about Tom and his behaviours that has been considered (..) Was there anything else that you would like to talk about or bring up today in terms of sharing your understanding or Tom or thoughts about how to support him further? (..)

NN: no (..) I don’t think so (..) I think I’ve said everything (..)

S: yeah (.) same (..)

R: and does that feel comfortable to you in terms of where we are now and how Tom is being understood (.) and the kind of things that are being put in place (..)

M: I think it all sounds ok (.)

D: yeah

M: I mean I try and ask Tom what he’s been doing during the day and he’ll tell me one thing and I’ll take it with a pinch of salt (.) I know it sounds horrible but if he says I’ve been really good I’ll say oh right have you cos like I say if you ask him in a different way he’ll probably tell the truth later on (..) erm so from getting feedback from him it’s a bit pointless (..) this is the only time I’ve got feedback on sort of what’s been going on and what’s been done and how he’s dealing with it (..) so yeah (..)

NN: yeah

R: ok (..) I think we’ll stop there then (.) it sounds like we’ve got lots of positive ways forward (.) I think it seems really important for you to continue to work together to support these potential solutions (..) so thank you (.) thank you for all of your contributions towards a very positive discussion (.) and we’ll stop there (..)