"People call me a nerd, that means they're saying I'm clever"

Using Personal Construct Psychology to explore the self-awareness skills of pupils with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.

An Action Research Study

Gemma Watson-Butterworth

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Department of Educational Studies

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ABSTRACT

Research suggests that those with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may have increased levels of mental health difficulties (e.g. Simonoff et al, 2008), though there is a poor evidence base around how professionals might be able to support these needs (e.g. National Autistic Society, 2010).There is some suggestion that Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) might have some utility in addressing these issues (e.g. Attwood, 2007), though this lacks thorough investigation.

In line with a pragmatic approach to research, I chose an action research methodology to investigate how I could use PCP to extend the self-awareness skills of pupils with a diagnosis of ASD, an area often linked to positive wellbeing.

I used various PCP activities with secondary aged pupils, adapting and modifying the methods according to their responses, skills and areas of need. The data included my own reflections and observations from the sessions, transcripts and notes of session content, as well as evaluations from the pupils relating to the activities they completed.

Template analysis, a matrix framework and thematic analysis were used to analyse the two cycles of data. Findings related to processes of application (practitioner skills), and use of PCP (how activities helped the pupils to make extensions to their self-awareness when made accessible). Compared to the range of comments pupils made during the first session, all pupils showed extensions to their self-awareness following PCP, though with a wide variation in the extent of complexity shown. This study therefore yields practical implications, both for my own practice as well as for the EP profession.

There is a continuing need for pupils with ASD to access support towards enhancing their emotional wellbeing; this study serves as the basis for practitioners to trial PCP approaches in order to support the development of pupil self-awareness.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My background

Prior to embarking on training to become an educational psychologist (EP), I had worked extensively with pupils classified as being on the autism spectrum, in various different settings and roles.

When working as an assistant psychologist for a specific ASD provision, I worked on a project (Fidler et al, 2013) exploring ways that professionals could better understand or identify 'mental ill-health', developing specific resources to access pupil views. This project led to a new focus within the school, highlighting pupils' emotional as well as educational needs, with a focus on improving holistic outcomes for all. However, as a variety of professionals worked within the school, there was little consensus around which techniques might be useful, or how professionals might engage pupils in these techniques, a view echoed within other research (e.g. National Autistic Society, 2010).

This work developed my interest in the area of understanding how these children and young people are supported to overcome difficulties relating to their emotional wellbeing. I also became interested in the practices that professionals might engage in to develop their skills, confidence and knowledge around the best approaches to adopt. As I had previously used Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) techniques with my intended population with some degree of success, I felt that this warranted further investigation from a more rigorous research stance.

My position in this research study

I first began to consider my research orientation in the context of my current position; that of a trainee educational psychologist on an applied doctoral training programme. I recognise

the practical element of my position, in addition to working as a research practitioner. Therefore, it was important I would be able to apply my research findings and implications to my own practice once qualified, as well as potentially adding value and knowledge to the wider profession. These values helped to shape my research orientation and the design of my study.

Therefore, I align myself with a pragmatist orientation, thus emphasising the importance of conducting a practical piece research that can be applied to the context of practicing educational psychologists.

Overview of thesis

I chose to write this study in the first person, embracing my role as an active agent within the research. I begin with a critical literature review (chapter 2), highlighting key research and perspectives in the area. I address the gaps in knowledge, leading to a research question that I aimed to answer within this research.

Within chapter 3, I give my rationale for choosing an action research methodology and consider issues relating to ontology and epistemology. I then go on to describe my study, outlining the two phases of data collection that I went through; phase 1 - pilot and preparation; and phase 2 (in two parts) - trialling of PCP approaches.

The results section (chapter 4) incorporates procedural aspects of the study within each phase, as well as a comprehensive discussion around the methods of analysis used; template analysis, matrix framework and thematic analysis. I also summarise the findings across pupils, outline the main themes arising from my reflections and explore pupil data as case studies.

In the final chapter [5], I interpret the data, considering how it fits with current literature. I also attempt to validate my claims to knowledge and any limitations before concluding by discussing the implications of my study for my own practice, as well as the EP profession.

CHAPTER 2: CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review briefly discusses challenges faced by children and young people with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Due to a move towards a single unifying category, e.g. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5 (American Psychiatric Association, APA, 2013), I will use the term 'autism spectrum disorder' (ASD) throughout my writing to encompass other terminology, including 'Asperger's Syndrome' and 'autism' (except where authors use alternative terms when describing their research).

I explore current concerns regarding how (and if) their social and emotional needs are supported, raising questions relating to how professionals can support children and young people to develop their self-awareness skills, an aspect arising frequently within the literature relating to this group.

Finally, a Personal Construct Psychology approach will be considered as previous research suggests this may have particular utility in terms of engaging children and young people with ASD, though rigorous research seems to be lacking.

ASD and education

The relative prevalence of children diagnosed with ASDs has increased dramatically over the past twenty years (e.g. Frith, 2003), meaning a rise in the number of children and young people with this diagnosis in mainstream educational settings.

In order to receive a diagnosis of ASD, children and young people should experience pervasive difficulties in social communication and interaction, in addition to restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities, with symptoms present from early childhood (APA, 2013). These difficulties impact upon many developmental factors, including; emotional skills (such as poor emotion regulation and self-awareness), quality of

relationships, engagement with school and academic achievement (e.g. Cederlund, et al, 2010). Therefore, it is hardly surprising that children and young people classified as having ASD are often described within the literature as 'hard to reach' in an educational context (e.g. Willis, 2007). Humphrey and Lewis (2008) argue that the successful inclusion of children with ASD is one of the most complicated and misunderstood areas of education.

The implications of such difficulties means those with ASD are three times more likely to experience bullying (e.g. Humphrey and Symes, 2010), have a higher covariance with the incidence of challenging behaviour (e.g. Matson and Nebel-Schwalm, 2007) and are more likely to be excluded from school, when compared to children with a different categorisation of SEN, or those with no SEN (e.g. Department for Education and Skills, 2006). Green et al (2005) report that 1 in 4 children with ASD have been excluded from school, and for many, this has happened more than once. In addition, Simonoff et al (2008) reported as many as 71% of children with ASD have additional mental health needs, most notably anxiety, depression and obsessive compulsive disorder.

Portway and Johnson (2005) explored the experiences of those with ASD, reporting feelings of loneliness, isolation and being different to peers. The researchers argued that such experiences of 'everyday risks' contributed to 'long term risks', e.g. depression, anxiety or over-reliance on their parents in adulthood.

Clearly, young people with a diagnosis of ASD appear to be experiencing significant barriers in accessing education, as well as difficulties with their social and emotional skills, which has a further impact upon attainment. For example, Zins and Elias (2006) report that pupils with increased positive wellbeing are better engaged with education and have more satisfactory relationships. Weare (2015) argues that "children with greater well-being, lower levels of mental health problems and greater emotional attachment to school achieve higher grade scores, better examination results, better attendance and drop out less often" (p. 12).

Children and young people with ASD: what do they identify as barriers to education?

When considering how to minimise barriers and increase support for those with ASD, it is important to include their voice in research and planning. Historically, this was given little attention; however, more recently, researchers have begun including those with ASD in their studies. For example, Tobias (2009) conducted focus groups with secondary aged pupils with ASD and their parents (separately). Results highlighted the following as important in school: transition support, a mentoring figure, an individualistic approach, flexible planning, communication with parents and support to increase pupils' self-awareness. However, as the research was intended to inform policy and practices within one school, the generalisability of the findings may be poor.

Muller et al (2008) explored the perceptions of adults with ASD, finding the main challenges they experienced included: social isolation, communication difficulties and loneliness relating to a lack of intimacy and social connectedness.

Their research opposed a common belief that those with ASD are not interested in social interaction; authors reported the adults in this study had expended a great deal of energy in attempting greater levels of social understanding and increased self-awareness to improve upon this area. The authors reported themes relating to social support generated by participants, e.g. structured social activities, alternative modes of communication and increased tolerance from others.

Muller et al concluded that these findings could be implemented more widely to increase positive social interactions for those with ASD, including pupils at school, e.g. teachers could introduce supportive groups to develop feelings of social connectedness. While the sample used within this study was small (18 adults), the findings may support further research in this area.

Humphrey and Symes (2010) conducted semi-structured interviews with 36 secondary aged pupils with ASD, concluding the greatest difficulty faced in mainstream education was the peer group; specifically, how schools could promote better peer acceptance and understanding. Greenway (2000) argued that social constructivist interventions (e.g. Circle of Friends, Social Stories), while extremely popular in schools, need more research into their efficacy. Such approaches rarely explore the voice of the child or young person with regard to what support they want or think will be useful.

These studies suggest those with ASD report barriers relating to poor peer acceptance/social relatedness and associated wellbeing factors, i.e. expending time and energy developing their skills (such as self-awareness) to overcome these difficulties.

Critique of research

Much of the previous research involving individuals with ASD has involved interviews or focus groups. As these individuals have difficulties in areas of communication and social interaction, one must question the reliability of a method that involves pupils using complex skills in their areas of difficulty. This raises the question of whether there might be a better method that reduces the potential confounds of social interaction and the use of language.

Greenway (2000) argued that prior research, such as the studies described in the previous section, often lack scientific rigour, including baseline/post-intervention measures and the use of controls. Furthermore, a holistic picture needs to be encompassed within research (e.g. including the views of peers and teachers). It may be the case when designing a research methodology that suitability and quality may or may not require such scientific rigour, but when placed at the forefront of decision making processes, may allow for findings to be upheld and promoted within the field regardless.

Much research also adopts a 'neuro-typical' perspective, where those with ASD want to change their behaviours or develop their skills to 'fit in' with the rest of society (or their peer group). It is important to be aware of how behaviours (whilst seemingly unusual to others) might serve a purpose in meeting an individual's personal needs.

This sensitive, and somewhat controversial, concept is referred to as 'neuro-diversity' (first described by Singer, 1999), which considers atypical neurological development as a normal human difference. Many who align with this view reject the notion that ASD is a disability that should be eliminated. Some adults with ASD have come to identify with a neuro-diverse perspective, embracing and celebrating their natural variance (e.g. Baker, 2011). This is an important consideration when thinking about research with this population.

ASD and mental health

In 2010, the National Autistic Society (NAS) launched a campaign to raise awareness of the mental health needs of children with ASD. They reported as many as 71% have additional mental health needs, including anxiety, depression and obsessive compulsive disorder (Simonoff et al, 2008). This figure indicates that a significant proportion of school aged children are in need of additional support and intervention to improve mental health and wellbeing.

As part of their campaign, the NAS conducted research into Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) at a national level. The sample included children and young people with ASD and additional mental health problems, and their parents. Many parents reported having negative experiences when accessing CAMHS, including the practitioner not having a good enough understanding of ASD or how to communicate with their child, they rarely liaised with their child's school and as a result, many parents felt their child did not receive appropriate support for their mental health needs.

Another issue was the appropriateness of the interventions delivered by CAMHS practitioners. Many required the child or young person to have skills in abstract thinking and more complex forms of communication, e.g. cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). However, young people with ASD often find such techniques difficult, if not impossible, to access as a result of their difficulties. Hence, it would require a skilled and experienced practitioner to deliver or modify them appropriately.

If support was provided from a 'specialist' ASD practitioner, parents agreed their child's mental health improved. This specialist was described as having in-depth knowledge about ASD and an understanding of how to communicate and adapt interventions appropriately. However, this happened in less than half of cases (43%).

When positive change was reported for children and young people, the school were involved as an active agent in delivering interventions designed by CAMHS staff. To increase the chance of a positive change occurring, professionals working therapeutically with pupils may be best served to deliver this within the school environment, sharing the methods and liaising regularly with staff who know the child best.

Within their research findings, the NAS (2010) highlighted several key recommendations for those working in settings supporting children and young people with ASD and mental health needs. Practitioners should have a practical understanding of ASD and how to engage and work with those with the condition. Those with greater knowledge and experience may be able to provide training to less skilled colleagues, including making appropriate adaptations to interventions that are already delivered within their service. The report also suggested that more appropriate techniques warrant further investigation with this population, perhaps explored within an educational context.

The NAS (2010) research appeared to highlight a fundamental gap in interventions available to support the emotional needs of children and young people with ASD. Perhaps there is scope to develop an approach that addresses the social and communication difficulties of these children and promotes positive change for those experiencing poorer social and emotional wellbeing. This important consideration will be developed further within this research.

Practices adopted by CAMHS are likely to be based upon the medical model of disability which aspires towards the reduction of symptoms and conditions, in general opposition to the neuro-diverse perspective. This approach perhaps fails to account for the consideration that the problems exhibited by those with ASD might be as a direct result of a non-tolerant society, rather than an internal deficit (Jaarsma and Welin, 2012).

A failure to explore the unique individual perspectives of the children included in this study seems like a missed opportunity to find out (and subsequently support) their needs from a perspective that is not based upon an assumption that they want to behave in the same way as individuals without ASD. Further research should account for the individualistic perspective of those involved, which was an implicit aim within this research.

Self-awareness

Schools are paying increasing attention towards supporting emotional wellbeing in children and young people, e.g. Department for Education (2015a), seeming to recognise the importance it plays in academic achievement. Guidance relating to the development of positive wellbeing refers to a number of components, including raising self-awareness (e.g. Pool, 1997). In addition, there is an increased focus upon developing such skills through interventions in schools (e.g. Department of Health, 2014).

The term self-awareness, in a broad sense, appears to relate to one's ability to know their thoughts and feelings. Other concepts associated, or even used synonymously, with self-awareness include self-understanding, self-consciousness and personal insight (e.g. Richards et al, 2010). However, for purposes of clarity, the term 'self-awareness' is used within this study.

Seminal authors in the area propose that it is only possible to explore the experiential domains of the concept, i.e. 'self as object': 'me' (qualities that objectively define the self) and 'self as subject': 'I' (subjective experiences) (James, 1961). The 'me' includes qualities that define the self, such as physical features, body and possessions, social characteristics, and spiritual qualities (e.g. consciousness). The 'I' relates to more complex features, including distinctness (e.g. awareness of uniqueness of life experiences), agency (awareness of self-agency over situations) and continuity (awareness of one's own continuity). James argued that the 'self' is structured in a semi-hierarchical way, with a person becoming more self-aware with development, showing an extended consideration of how they fit into the social world to which they belong.

To this end, researchers have gained insight into a person's self-awareness through working with them directly to elicit their views, e.g. Damon and Hart (1988) developed a Self-Understanding Interview to support people to express constructs about themselves. However, there remains scope to elaborate on such ideas, creating and evaluating appropriate tools to use with children and young people.

For many decades, authors have highlighted the importance of increasing a person's self-awareness within therapy (e.g. Fenigstein et al, 1975). Killian (2012) discussed 'emotional intelligence' as related to self-awareness, encompassing a person's ability to "identify emotions in self and others, and to manage one's own affective states to enhance well-being and the quality of one's personal and professional relationships" (p.502). Therefore, for a

person to be described as socially competent, they seem to require a degree of self-awareness skills.

Richards et al (2010) explored the link between self-awareness and wellbeing in mental health professionals, concluding with a link between self-awareness and self-care practices, which in turn was found to have a positive effect on wellbeing. This suggests that increasing a person's self-awareness may encourage them to raise the importance of self-care practices, thus improving their overall wellbeing.

While frequent attention is paid to self-awareness in relation to wellbeing, there are few studies to date demonstrating a clear link, particularly with children. However, it seems to be clear the concept is one of many components contributing towards this area, e.g. Coholic (2011) discusses self-awareness as enabling young people to develop their resilience.

In addition, there may also be practical benefits of increasing these skills. For example, helping children to become more aware of when they are becoming anxious may support them to engage in self-care practices, such as using a time out card in class or breathing exercises to regain their composure. This may contribute towards experiences of success in an educational setting.

Self-awareness and autism

Many researchers (e.g. Happe, 2003) raise concerns around whether those with ASD have a different sense of self, compared to typically developing individuals. There appears to be a general consensus that self-awareness is not a unitary entity (e.g. Damon and Hart, 1988), and this concept has been considered separately in relation to those with ASD, Below is a sample of studies highlighting possible differences:

- Research suggests those with ASD are able to pass the mirror test at the same age to peers (Dawson and McKissick, 1984), suggesting they are able to show a degree of physical recognition of themselves. However, other studies noted that individuals with ASD showed some differences, including less interest in their own face and are described as face inexperienced (e.g. Pierce et al, 2005), perhaps reflecting an atypicality in this skill.
- It is well-known that many of those with ASD have difficulty identifying their own emotions (e.g. Ben Shalom et al, 1996), possibly indicating an impaired capacity for reflecting upon internal mental states.
- There are identified difficulties in pronoun usage in those with ASD (e.g. me/you), which may suggest a difficulty differentiating between self and others (Jordan, 1989).
- Lind and Bowler (2009) found that those with ASD performed similarly to controls on a task designed to explore self-continuity, despite 50% of the sample failing a false-belief task. However, those with ASD were significantly more likely to use their first names to describe themselves (rather than 'me'), suggesting some level of difference in their degree of self-awareness.
- Jackson et al (2012) compared self-understanding in those with ASD to neuro-typical individuals, concluding that the former group reported fewer social and psychological descriptions of themselves, instead focusing more upon characteristics within the here and now. However, the authors noted that some individuals with ASD showed 'normal' self-understanding, which could have been developed through deliberate effort. They concluded that that those with a diagnosis of ASD had an "impaired capacity for self-awareness and self-reflection" (p.697) compared to those without a diagnosis.

- It has been argued that those with ASD may show a diminished capacity for action monitoring, that is, the ability to differentiate between self and other actions (which may relate to one's sense of agency). Williams and Happe (2009) found participants with ASD showed no difference in action monitoring compared to a comparison group. However, Jackson et al (2012) suggested that "reliance on routines by people with AS may be a behavioural reflection of the inactivity of 'I', specifically the agency component," (p.704) perhaps reflecting an inability of these individuals to understand their formation, existence or control over themselves and their lives. For example, they reported that in answer to the question "If you change from year-to-year how do you know you are still you?" (p.704), one participant said his routines serve this function and he thus became very anxious if they were disrupted.

While results provide a somewhat contradictory pattern, there are clearly some differences when comparing those with ASD to others in terms of components of self-awareness.

There are a number of theoretical accounts (discussed briefly below) that may allow greater consideration of the complex issue of self-awareness and autism.

Theory of mind

It is largely accepted that those with ASD experience 'mindblindness' or an impaired theory of mind (ToM; e.g. Baron-Cohen et al, 1985); the ability to infer another's mental state in order to explain and predict behaviour (Happe, 2003). There is a wide bank of evidence detailing difficulties those with ASD tend to experience in this area, e.g. Baron-Cohen et al (1985).

In addition, many theorists have begun to consider self-other attributions as inherently linked. Researchers argue that when children are able to report their own mental states, they can report those of others (Gopnik and Meltzoff, 1994). That means if a person has

difficulty inferring the mental states of others, they will also experience difficulty recognising their own mental states (e.g. Happe, 2003).

Lyons and Fitzgerald (2013) propose "the ability to differentiate between self and other is also essential for the development of self-awareness" (p. 751). It could be argued that if a person is unable to infer the mental states of others (as well as themselves), they would be unable to form a self-other distinction as they have no means by which to compare for similarities and differences.

Therefore, this theory proposes that those with ASD show qualitative differences (compared to typically developing individuals) in their self-awareness skills (specifically self-other distinction) due to an impaired ToM.

Central coherence

Central coherence refers to a person's drive for meaning in their experiences. For example, when interacting with another person, one would generally look for overall meaning to make sense of what is going on. Individuals with ASD are said to have a weak drive for coherence (e.g. Happe and Frith, 2006), meaning that they are more likely to focus upon specific detail, rather than the whole picture.

Frith and Happe (1999) point out that if those with ASD are not able to reflect on their inner experiences over time, they will not develop "richly connected semantic and experiential experiences that normally pervade out reflective consciousness" (p. 10). This may result in a person being unable to develop a cohesive picture of them self throughout time.

Therefore, a difference in central coherence may mean that those with ASD are unable to connect together experiences and their life story, possibly resulting in a poor sense of continuity, which contributes to one's degree of self-awareness.

Executive function

The term executive function refers to one's ability to plan and monitor goal-directed behaviour, which is argued to be impaired in those with ASD (e.g. Pennington and Ozonoff, 1996).

Though results vary, there is evidence to suggest that some with ASD show difficulties in action monitoring, a component of executive function (e.g. Roberts et al, 1996). For example, Hala et al (2005) explored different aspects of source monitoring (i.e. the ability to identify the source of an action) in those with ASD, finding significant difficulties compared to controls.

It may therefore be the case that difficulties in executive function impact upon a person's ability to monitor and thus attribute actions as self-caused vs. world-caused, leading to an inability to develop a sense of agency (one component of self-awareness).

Development of self-awareness in ASD

While the above theories provide a useful insight and way of thinking about self-awareness in those with ASD, there appears to be an inherent lack of consideration to developmental processes. There are individuals with this diagnosis who have developed a degree of these skills, though considerably much later than their typically developing peers. For example, Philpott et al (2013) compared older children with ASD (mean age 9:4 years) to typically developing peers using two false-belief tests. They found no significant different between the groups.

It seems that there may be an atypical trajectory of development of particular skills (e.g. ToM), which link to self-awareness in those with ASD, e.g. some may "possess a late

acquired, explicit theory of mind, which appears to be the result of effortful learning" (Frith and Happe, 1999, p1).

In addition, many (e.g. Frith and Happe, 1999; Lind and Bowler, 2009) suggest that cognitive ability plays a part and those with Asperger's Syndrome or high functioning autism may employ such skills to go through this "painstaking learning process" (Frith and Happe, 1999, p. 2). This is a stark comparison to non-autistic individuals (with or without learning difficulties or disabilities), who appear to acquire such skills unconsciously and apparently with apparent ease.

It remains unclear whether there are certain skills (e.g. some components of self-awareness) that individuals with ASD are unable to develop, despite purposeful effort. This area requires significant development for professionals to expand their knowledge around self-awareness in those with ASD, including a focus upon the cognitive skills that many seem to employ.

Summary

Although not an exhaustive list of the research available, the literature presented above demonstrates the complex interplay between cognitive theories of ASD and development of self-awareness.

There appear to be many factors associated with a 'normal' sense of self, some of which may be impaired in those with ASD, and some that may be similar to peers; research shows a relatively contradictory pattern of results.

There is a general critique that each individual theory fails to account for the complete picture of self-awareness skills in ASD. It seems simplistic to argue that impaired (or atypical) ToM leads to a poor sense of self and it is expected that a somewhat complex interplay between different (though related) cognitive processes could contribute to self-awareness

differences in those with ASD. For example, self-other distinction may be a pre-requisite for one to develop a sense of agency (i.e. being able to identify the source of an action). This has little been explored in research, though some suggest that an impaired executive function may be the cause of ToM difficulties (e.g. Frith and Happe, 1999).

Many of the studies discussed raised questions around the validity of the tests employed, perhaps suggesting a general difficulty in experimentally measuring or accessing components of the self. In addition, Philpott et al (2013) argue that most 'typical' ToM tests show poor ecological validity, meaning they do not reflect everyday functioning. This may partly explain the reasons behind the wealth of conflicting evidence in this area.

Research also suggests that self-awareness in ASD may be delayed or atypical in its development, with some aspects of understanding arising at a much later age than in other children. In addition, those with ASD may appear to consciously employ cognitive skills to learn, e.g. how to attribute the mental states of others (Frith and Happe, 1999). This means that such skills are not necessarily spontaneous and generalisable to all contexts and can therefore lead to specific difficulties with self-awareness.

The implications of an atypical sense of self in ASD may therefore justify the development of interventions in the area, e.g. based upon their findings, Jackson et al (2012) concluded that self-awareness might "be amenable to facilitation and this might well be the primary role of psychological therapies for people with Asperger Syndrome" (p.705).

Happe (1995) also suggested that people with ASD need specific and targeted teaching in areas where they are poor, including self-awareness. It may therefore be helpful to investigate methods designed to target this area towards promoting positive mental health and social adjustment. In fact, Tobias (2009) found that young people with a diagnosis of

ASD would have benefitted from support to increase self-awareness when growing up. This provides a strong suggestion that further research in this area may be beneficial.

Definition of self-awareness

For the present study, the following definition of self-awareness is adopted:

Self-awareness:

- Incorporates physical and mental states.
- Is a developmental notion, i.e. one is not born with the processes underlying self-awareness, but they develop with age and experience.
- Is a complex concept that includes a number of different, but related components.
- Contains components that are linked but not always dependent upon each other (i.e. one area may develop without a linked area developing in parallel).
- Some components lie at a lower level of consciousness, whereas others are more easily accessible at a surface level.

<u>Personal Construct Psychology</u>

Personal construct theory, developed by Kelly (1955) provides a means to understand a person's behaviour. Kelly proposed that we all behave in a way that makes sense to us; we each hold views, beliefs and values about the world that are based upon our experiences; termed our ‘constructs’. A construct is a "bipolar dimension which provides a meaningful discrimination based on the individual's experience" (Beaver, 1996 p. 41). An element and its pole; one cannot exist without the other. For example, one may hold a construct of 'kind-mean'; there can be no kindness, if there were no meanness by which to discriminate it by.

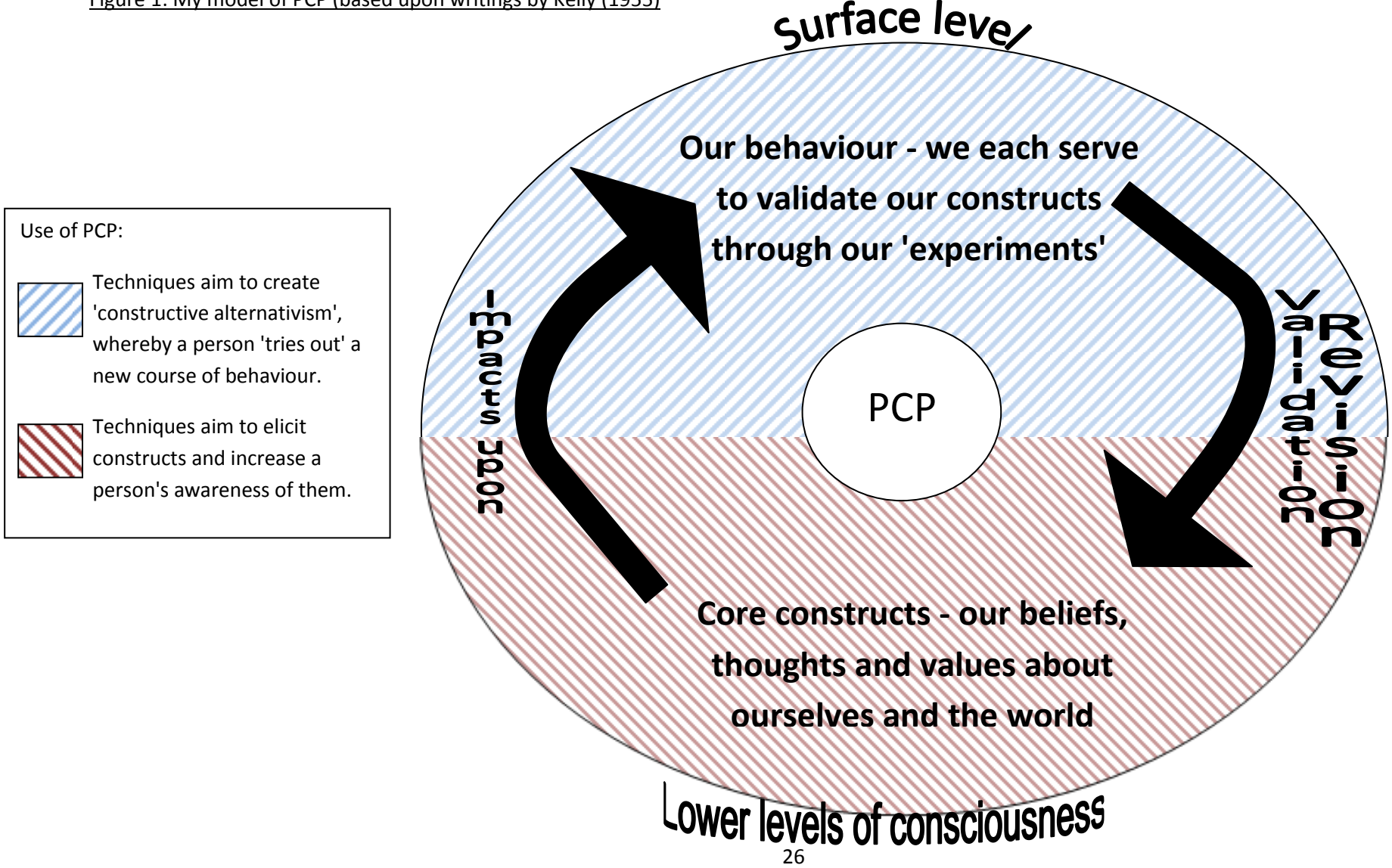
By comparison, another person might hold a different construct, e.g. 'kind-strict', showing how two people might differently interpret the same experience. It is therefore believed that an individuals' construct system is unique, as everybody's sense-making is different.

Constructs begin to develop from a young age; when a baby has an experience, they make discriminations to help them to make sense of what is going on, leading to the formation of constructs (though clearly at a sub-conscious, pre-verbal level).

Our everyday behaviours serve as us 'testing out' our constructs (or hypotheses about the world). If our experiences are validated (or confirmed), the construct system is preserved. If we have an experience that does not provide validation, the construct system is modified to account for this new information (e.g. Kelly, 1955).

I have developed the following model of PCP (figure 1) to share my understandings of the different components within this approach which will be discussed throughout this section.

Figure 1: My model of PCP (based upon writings by Kelly (1955)



Use of PCP - eliciting constructs

According to PCP, to understand *why* a person behaves in a particular way, we must explore their core constructs by using techniques to allow us (and the person in question) to access them. PCP techniques may elicit deeper level [unconscious] constructs, leading a person to become more aware of their values, beliefs and views about the world and themselves.

Authors (e.g. Butler and Green, 2007) propose that our core constructs directly relate to everything we do. Through careful elaboration of constructs, it may be possible to get to the root of a person's motivations and how they see themselves in conjunction to the world and others. For example, a skilled practitioner may be able to find out that hitting and pushing others is their view of appropriate interaction. Such insight may not have been readily accessible for the person, but through discussion they may become more *self-aware* about their behaviour and the constructs influencing it. It may therefore be possible that through PCP processes, a person's self-awareness can be made explicit (Butler and Green, 2007).

This may not have been achieved through other methods, e.g. interview, as such methods do not necessarily encourage a person to reflect or explore their constructions or the influences this has on their behaviour.

Using PCP to bring about change

Kelly (1977) argued "whatever exists can be reconstrued" (p.358). Therefore, PCP may be directly applied to intervening with a person to create a change at the behavioural (surface) level; known as constructive alternativism (Kelly, 1977).

Once constructs have been elicited, the goal of the intervention would be to explore alternative viewpoints to the one currently held by a person, which may potentially be contributing towards unhelpful behaviour. Following this, the person may be supported to

'try out' a new course of action. This may then lead to *revalidation* of an existing construct, thus impacting upon the way the person acts in the future [when they next 'experiment' with this modified construct]. This process is termed 'reconstruing', which suggests that a person's constructs are not fixed, but constantly being refined according to the experiences they have.

As shown in figure 1, one's core constructs are directly linked to their behaviour. One may inadvertently (e.g. by attempting to elicit core constructs) create conditions where a change takes place, i.e. raising a person's *awareness* of such views, beliefs and values, may lead them towards considering an alternative viewpoint and course of behaviour, which may lead to reconstruing, thus creating a change.

Research into the efficacy of using PCP in a therapeutic context reveals promising results. For example, Metcalf et al (2007) conducted a meta-review into the effectiveness of personal construct psychotherapy in clinical practice, including studies involving children. They found, compared to no intervention or standard care, strong effectiveness for the approach, including improved patient anxiety, shyness and trust.

Viney et al (2005) conducted a meta-review into the effectiveness of PCP as a therapeutic intervention. While they were only able to identify one study involving young people, results in the study revealed positive changes in interpersonal construing and reduced levels of disruptive behaviour in school. However, the authors noted that the control group received no intervention, making it difficult to conclude support for PCP specifically as opposed to any intervention that involved a young person developing a therapeutic relationship with an adult. Therefore, the evidence base for use with children seems relatively sparse, suggesting a need for further research.

Effective levels of a PCP intervention

Holland et al (2007) critically reviewed 22 studies adopting personal construct therapy with adults experiencing various physical and psychological difficulties (though without specificity of the difficulty). When adults engaged in an average of 12 sessions of 90 minutes each over the course of around five months, marginally positive results were revealed compared to other or no intervention. However, analyses paid little attention to exploring frequency, duration or total number of sessions offered upon outcome, meaning one cannot be clear about optimum levels of adopting a similar approach.

At present there are no clear findings around effective levels of a PCP intervention. However, more general literature relating to supporting school aged children exists, e.g. Weare (2015) suggests 'mild' psychological difficulties may warrant interventions lasting between 6-10 weeks (one session per week). For moderate to severe problems, interventions may last between 9 months to one year, at least one session per week.

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NIHCE, 2013a) suggests CBT for social anxiety disorder lasting between 8-12 sessions (of 45 minute duration). Other approaches for school aged children, e.g. solution focused brief therapy (SFBT), range in the number of sessions suggested. For example, Corcoran and Pillais (2007) report that one session may help the child or young person to make a positive change. However, in a meta-review, Bond et al (2013) found the most typical number being around 5 or 6, though they offered no advice or consideration around whether this amount provided optimum results.

Recent figures suggest 86% of schools have regular access to a school counsellor (Department for Education, 2015b), though guidance around effective levels of support are unclear, many schools offer weekly sessions ranging between 40-60 minutes, with no maximum or clear exit criteria.

It seems that levels of intervention offered vary according to the specified nature of difficulty and the approach being adopted, though initial support for 'mild' levels of distress tends to be between 6-12 sessions of 40-60 minutes each. This gives a useful starting point for practitioners looking to develop or implement psychological interventions with children and young people.

There appears to be no published guidance around effective levels of intervention for children and young people with special educational needs, though the Department for Education (2015a) suggest adapting available approaches, possibly with the involvement of specialist staff, as needed.

PCP and educational psychologists

In everyday practices, EPs are often presented with a problem [child] that school staff, and often parents, expect them to 'solve'. Ravenette (1972) provided a helpful way of viewing this situation, making the distinction between 'a child causing concern' and the 'person who is concerned', i.e. does the behaviour cause a problem for the child? What is it about this behaviour the adults find concerning? These are important dimensions considered by those with social (vs. medical) model of disability perspectives, where problems can be understood as socially constructed, rather than located within the child.

Ravenette (1988) proposed that problems can arise when a person cannot make sense of a situation (as a construct is invalidated), rather than the situation itself. As everybody has their own individual map (or construct system) including parents and teachers (Ravenette, 1974), this may warrant further investigation. For example, when a teacher complains a child is not learning, they may become the client as they cannot understand why this is the case. This may challenge their sense of who they are; the child's behaviour may be invalidating their construct of 'being a good teacher'.

In this case, elaborating the child's constructs through EP assessment may allow the teacher to better understand them and thus revise their initial constructions, moving from a 'problem' to 'a situation that can be managed'. Perhaps this teacher begins to look for new ways to teach this child based upon what they found out, thus enabling validation to the original construct. Working within a PCP framework with a child may therefore help adults to make sense of them to create implications for action (Ravenette, 1969).

Further to this, Ravenette (1978) proposed that the child who is complained about may also be experiencing a problem (though probably something different to what the adults report). This may be as a result of an 'inadequate' construct system, whereby the child has come to adopt false perceptions about the world (Ravenette, 1979). Therefore, the "behaviour of a child which is problematic for the adults may be the child's solution to some other problem" (Ravenette, 1993, p251). For example, the child showing extreme behaviours in school (often resulting in exclusions) may be seeking to be at home to validate a construct (such as, 'protector of mum'). Without the elaboration of constructs, it would be difficult to find a solution to this problem (which the child may actually be unaware of).

Ravenette (1974) believes that children should be given the opportunity to explore such constructs, arguing we should become "involved with children at the level of their own dilemmas, their unfinished business" (p. 33), therefore focusing upon and working to resolve their concerns, rather than the agenda of the adults.

The implications of this can involve the child learning something new about themselves, arguably meaning that PCP can also be described as an intervention. Ravenette (1980) reports that PCP is not therapy, but can be a therapeutic process by helping children to become aware of, and possibly revise, their constructions, creating a behavioural change. Raising a person's awareness of constructs can help them to see the problem differently and thus move on (Ravenette, 1989). For example, becoming more aware of relationship issues,

may lead one towards changing interactions with a key person and thus revalidating constructs.

One example of a practitioner using PCP as an intervention comes from Hardman (2001), an educational psychologist. Hardman used a variety of PCP methods when working with a young person at risk of permanent exclusion, with an aim to increase his awareness of his behaviour and motivation for maintaining it. Through the work, the pupil identified his ideal self and small steps towards achieving this, and then experimented with a new course of behaviour.

Hardman concluded that the pupil reported a sense of positive achievement and had managed to reduce incidences of difficulty in school through changing some of his behaviours. For example, she reported "it was important for Daniel to recognise the spiral effect in order to break the cycle and begin to consider what the 'trustworthy Daniel' would be like" (p.49).

While the implications of this case study can only be minimal in terms of generalisation, it highlights how EPs might begin to incorporate tools that have the potential to promote change, in addition to assessment and exploration.

To summarise, EPs appear to be in a unique position to use PCP as a means to explore the child's unique views of the world, which can enable adults around them to create positive change. Part of this role may involve helping adults to move away from seeing a 'problem child' towards them seeking out alternative behaviours to revalidate their construct system (which may have been the problem to begin with).

PCP may also be seen as a way to directly intervene with a child in an attempt to help them explore the impact of their constructs upon their behaviour and experience of the world, potentially leading to a change. As both components are inevitably linked, EPs need to be

aware of issues involved in using such approaches, including informed consent, acting in the best interest for the child and ownership of voice. These considerations will be developed further in chapter 3 (ethical considerations).

What are the criteria for a PCP tool?

There are a number of different approaches available to professionals to elicit the views of children and young people. Since Kelly's (1955) original published works, many others have attempted to expand upon and develop additional methods, particularly those for the use with children (e.g. Ravenette, 1980).

Ravenette discussed the use of techniques as not being focused upon a pre-defined problem, but on the individual's own unique map. This would therefore allow the child to resolve *their* concerns, validating them as a person in their own right (Ravenette, e.g. 1968). Outcomes are therefore unknown until an activity has begun. This leaves space to respond flexibly to what the child is sharing following their lead.

Many of the specific PCP methods described in the literature (e.g. Ravenette, 1980; Butler and Green, 2007) tend to be less reliant on verbal fluency, adopting the use of drawings, prompts, visual cues etc. Some PCP methods can be tailored to the child's specific needs, i.e. sentence completion tasks. PCP also does not necessarily question the child directly: a person's constructs can be elicited away from the first person, e.g. by discussing the feelings of characters drawn on paper, which may be considered less intimidating. The methods utilised within a PCP approach may therefore be more appealing than other approaches.

The purpose of PCP is non-interpretive, meaning the practitioner accepts what the child says at face value, rather than looking for a deeper meaning. The aims include eliciting the voice of the individual, not the researcher. Therefore, there is no right or wrong answer, but the

child's words are just accepted. By maintaining a stance of curiosity, the practitioner can check out what the child says, though always believing what they tell us about themselves.

For purposes of clarity in the present study, 'PCP methods will include activities that...'

1. Support pupils to share their core constructs.

2. Explore pupils' core constructs in relation to their contrasting poles.

3. Accept what the person says at face value (no need to interpret/reframe), using their own phrases and terminology.

4. May explore how these core constructs impact upon the person's behaviour/how they see the world.

5. May allow some degree of reconstruing through identifying versions of their ideal self, actual self and how they might move closer towards this (though not the primary aim of this study).

PCP and ASD: a new focus?

Some researchers have begun to explore the utility of PCP with individuals with a diagnosis of ASD. For example, in consideration of the inherent difficulties faced by this population, the approach may address the language and interaction barriers typically observed. In addition, many PCP activities incorporate visual aspects, which are promoted as a feature of best practice for children with a diagnosis of ASD (e.g. NIHCE, 2013b).

Attwood (2007) argues that PCP is "well suited to the mindset of those with Asperger's Syndrome due to its scientific and logical framework" (p.326), with a particular benefit to increasing self-awareness and supporting self-esteem. Attwood further argues that any potential therapist needs to fully understand the inherent difficulties faced by people with

ASD and adapt practices accordingly, including visual resources, e.g. comic strip conversations. One of the long term goals should be to help the person to understand key events in their life and to cope in a world that does not always understand them.

Kelly's description of PCP as a highly individualised and unique process may mean it is particularly applicable and desirable to 'neuro-diverse' populations (including those with ASD) as the emphasis is on the individual and their own views, beliefs and values, rather than comparing them to more typical age and stage theories.

Therefore, practitioners adopting this method may reject neuro-typical expectations by focusing only upon what the person is telling them, rather than holding a preconceived idea about how they should be thinking and behaving. However, it is unclear how one would differentiate between the person's own viewpoint and those imposed upon them by others (which are internalised) and would ultimately be an issue no matter which approach was adopted.

Research involving the use of PCP with people described as having learning difficulties or disabilities, including ASD, has generally revealed optimistic results. Below are summaries of key research into the area:

- Hare et al (2010) used a modified repertory grid (RG) technique with adults with learning difficulties. They concluded that PCP and the modified RG was an effective way to understand and explore the person's constructs as part of assessment and intervention work, concluding that "such a cognitively sophisticated person-centred approach can be successfully used with people with intellectual disabilities with few modifications" (p.196).

- Hare et al (1999) used the repertory grid technique with four adult males with ASD who had all previously experienced mental ill-health. While results varied, they concluded

that PCP was a practical and feasible approach that was "of utility when other techniques have failed" (p.173) to promote positive change for these individuals.

- Moran (2006) adapted the 'Drawing an Ideal Self' technique for use with pupils with ASD. Moran concluded that this research supported the use of PCP with this population as pupils were able to engage at least as well as children without ASD.

- Williams and Hanke (2007) elaborated on Moran's study and developed a new approach, 'drawing the ideal school', based upon the principles of PCP. Authors concluded that the technique was an "accessible and valuable tool", allowing pupils to share their unique views and insights about their school experiences and how their future preferences.

Critique of PCP

Kelly failed to account for how a person's constructs might develop throughout their lives, offering little in terms of a developmental account. However, some argue that this omission may have been intentional (e.g. Fransella, 1995) as Kelly aimed to create a constructivist understanding of human nature, rather than attempting to place people into boxes, compared to other 'age and stage' theorists (e.g. Piaget).

Most of Kelly's theories were primarily based upon his work with adults (University students), meaning he did not consider how the techniques and ideas would apply to children, therefore leaving others to conduct their own experiments and develop their own models of application, e.g. Ravenette (1999).

Failure of Kelly to define and differentiate between the terms 'construe', 'construct' and 'construct system' makes it difficult for those adopting his theories to apply such terms. This means there is room for misunderstanding and misinterpreting Kelly's original premise.

Others (e.g. Ravenette, 1999) have attempted to refine and define such terminology, before putting Kelly's ideas into practice.

There are a number of significant limitations of research involving PCP, particularly those involving children with ASD, e.g. lack of clarity around the cognitive abilities required for individuals to fully engage with the techniques. In addition, there is a lack of attention paid towards the long-term impact of PCP; it is unclear whether those with learning difficulties or ASD maintain positive changes past the duration of the study.

Some of the studies mentioned above also lack scientific rigour, i.e. with no baseline measurement or identified area of impact. For example, the most Williams and Hanke (2007) can report from their study is that pupils enjoyed the techniques and were able to engage well with them. It is unclear as to whether the pupils benefitted in any way from the intervention, or if engaging in the approach contributed towards staff members implementing any of their views.

Therefore, while previous research indicates that PCP approaches may be appropriate, further research would be helpful towards understanding the usefulness for children and young people with a diagnosis of ASD in terms of supporting their emotional wellbeing.

In addition, much of the previous research and literature around the use of PCP lacked clarity around the purpose and intended goals of the research, i.e. was PCP used to develop a better understanding of the person, or seeking to intervene to create a change? This means that many fundamental issues (e.g. informed consent) lacked consideration.

Such factors warrant further exploration and investigation in future research; this may involve researchers thinking about the operationalisation of Kelly's ideas, particularly with those populations where atypical development may occur.

Summary

This literature review highlights the many barriers people with ASD appear to face, including higher rates of exclusion and bulling in school, as well as a higher incidence of mental health difficulties. Research suggests that those with ASD experience a poor sense of self-awareness as a result of atypical development in certain cognitive domains (ToM, central coherence and executive function). It appears it would be useful to develop interventions in this area, which EPs may be well-placed to deliver.

I have acknowledged the neuro-diversity perspective that difficulties faced by this population may be as a result of the low-tolerance for difference within society. However, this perspective generally fails to address how individuals who experience mental ill-health can or should be supported. My view is focused upon how we, as professionals, can improve quality of life for such individuals in a respectful and tolerant way, rather than attributing responsibility or causation to such difficulties occurring.

PCP may offer a useful way of working with individuals with ASD and research suggests utility in the approaches. However, there is little research in this population demonstrating high scientific rigour. In addition, PCP acknowledges and celebrates difference, encouraging professionals to adopt a stance of curiosity, treating people as individuals rather than as a means to solve a socially constructed problem.

The aims of using PCP in this study are to test out techniques for eliciting dimensions of self-awareness, rather than to directly intervene in response to a 'problem' situation. However, I acknowledge the invariably linked notions within PCP and will consider key ethical requirements throughout. Data will be collected to allow for analysis of change during the action research process relating to pupils' increments to constructs of their self-awareness in response to the use of PCP techniques.

In the present study, I therefore aim to explore the use of PCP with secondary school aged pupils with ASD and find out more about the usefulness of PCP tools for pupils, including the views of those involved. By adopting an action research framework, an opportunity will be sought to investigate and refine tools that could be applied in future situations (i.e. developing important practices to run alongside other efforts, such as working with the systems around a child). It is intended that this research will allow pupils to be active agents in a process of development and evaluation of a set of tools within a PCP approach.

Within the current research, there appears to be a strong rationale for considering the following points:

- The usefulness of PCP approaches in extending the self-awareness skills of pupils with ASD.
- Consideration of accessibility and usefulness of such approaches from the pupils' points of view.

Research questions

My overarching research question for this study is:

How can I use PCP to elicit the self-awareness skills of pupils with a diagnosis of ASD?

The following more specific sub-questions will also be addressed:

- Which PCP tools allow pupils to show greater extensions to their self-awareness?
- What modifications are helpful and how did I decide which adjustments to make?
- Which areas of self-awareness are open to extension using PCP methods?
- What do pupils take away and how did they rate the techniques?
- What sense did I make of my role in the process?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY - RESEARCH ORIENTATION AND DESIGN

Overview of chapter

Within this chapter, my research orientation is discussed, including the rationale for my chosen methodology (action research), issues of epistemology, ontology and quality research. I outline the design of my study, pilot and development work, recruitment of pupils and ethical considerations.

The procedures of phase 1 and 2 are discussed alongside their corresponding analyses in chapter 4.

Research orientation

Why Action Research?

Based upon my pragmatist alignment, an action research (AR) methodology appeared well-suited to my research aims of testing out and developing techniques in a practical way. However, here I explore other alternatives to set out and argue my rationale for choosing AR to address the research question.

Experimental designs offer the means to test the efficacy of particular techniques or interventions (e.g. the use of PCP upon a person's self-awareness), limiting the effects of confounding variables upon results. This may allow for the production of reliable evidence with wider implications based upon tested cause and effect relationships (Breakwell et al, 2002). However, this was not the primary intention of my research question. In addition, this would have required a much greater number of pupils, which was unfeasible within the available timescales.

This methodology did not appeal to my values about research as I would have been unable to find out about the individual needs of pupils and explore techniques to suit them as

individuals, rather than fitting their 'label'. My research question is particularly focused around how I can use PCP methods, therefore allowing me to address the individuality of those taking part.

In addition, experimental approaches lack consideration towards context, e.g. Styhre and Sundgren (2004) argue that to better understand human behaviour researchers must enter the real life setting, encompassing the context and individuality to which it belongs. Within this study I wished to work as naturally as possible, allowing pupils to shape the situation and outcomes and did not aim to produce a conclusive, generalisable 'best fit' technique. Following these considerations I knew that my study was not aligned with an experimental approach.

On the other side of the continuum, I felt that a constructionist position would prevent me from translating my results to wider theory generation. I believed that my research questions were not in line with 'wondering' or approaching data from a complete unknowing position. Rather, towards extending knowledge that builds on existing theory to move towards a place where I can have a greater impact within my work as a practitioner (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010).

Another framework potentially appropriate to answer my research question was mixed-method case study, which would have also allowed me to explore my research question at an in depth level, within a naturalistic setting (e.g. Willig, 2001). However, my research aims and questions were focused upon my own learning as a practitioner, meaning AR was more suitable, incorporating multiple phases and processes of reflection and subsequent adaptation to the initial technique.

Based upon the above considerations, I concluded that AR was the most appropriate methodology to address my research questions and study aims, in particular: recognition of

practitioner reflexivity, flexible problem-solving and contributions to theory generation, which I discuss in greater detail below.

Assumptions of AR

Practitioner reflexivity:

"Putting the 'I' at the centre of research"

McNiff and Whitehead (2010, p.34)

AR suits a stance in which a practitioner is trying to improve what they are doing within a particular context (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011). It therefore allowed me, as the researcher to become an active part of the research process, as well as accepting and valuing the context within which the knowledge was being developed. My own reflections and observations were part of the data I collected, allowing me to consider how my thoughts might have shaped my actions etc. In this way, I was able to create knowledge and work towards improving my own practice through my own cycles of plan, do and review.

Flexible problem-solving:

"Messes can only be partially addressed and partially resolved"

Brydon-Miller et al (2003, p.21)

McNiff and Whitehead (2011) state that initial research plans are not fixed, as they may develop and change during cycles of AR. The methodology is therefore a flexible way to address a complex problem, as it can incorporate what is happening during each stage of action, e.g. modifying and adapting practice based on the individual needs of those taking part.

The EP role often involves working in 'messy' situations, where multiple factors are intertwined and difficult to resolve. In the world in which we practice there is therefore often no clear solution, and as such, adopting research practices that seek to determine

cause and effect relationships appear redundant. This means that AR can be a helpful approach to learn when working as a research practitioner, testing out and adapting our hypotheses as information comes available to us.

Further to this, McNiff (2013) argues researchers must work in a way that is right for them and can therefore create their own model. This flexibility appeals to my practical side, enabling me to try different methods within an exploratory framework. In particular, Burr et al (2012) propose that AR is particularly suited to PCP methods, where avenues of change are included in the aims of a study.

Contributions to theory generation:

"Experience teaches that it is important to let go of the need for certainty"

McNiff (2013, p.7)

While AR does not produce generalisable results, I hope that through transparent methods of research enquiry and reflective discussion, i.e. explaining what I know and how I came to know it (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010), my results add value to wider theory generation and professional knowledge development. Researchers (e.g. McNiff and Whitehead, 2011) argue that while the results of AR are not directly relevant to the population outside of the study, other practitioners may associate with the practices/methods involved and choose to try them out in their own practice, enabling them to enter into their own cycle of 'plan, do and review'.

My results may also lend themselves to directing the next level of research in the area, i.e. to develop more generalised knowledge, e.g. proposing hypotheses for the use of PCP to support those with a diagnosis of ASD to overcome some of their barriers. As there is very little empirical research in the area of my study, I hope that this research will generate ideas and interest in furthering practitioner awareness and understanding.

Foundations of pragmatism and my research orientation

In this section, I explain my pragmatist philosophical beliefs in relation to this AR study. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) sum up the foundations of such beliefs, suggesting pragmatism:

"Offers an immediate and useful middle position philosophically and methodologically; it offers a practical and outcome-orientated method of inquiry that is based on action" (p.17)

It requires the use of action, that is, a research procedure where the doing occurs. Pragmatism therefore allows the researcher to embark on a process whereby they may create a change, within themselves or others, to the greater benefit of their profession or for knowledge generation.

Ontology

"Action research must draw power from the premises of pragmatism, that belief that we can know from doing"

Brydon-Miller et al (2003, p.14/15)

My research stemmed from an interest in discovering ways that I could improve my practice in supporting children with ASD to overcome some of their [potential] emotional wellbeing difficulties. My interest and study aims came down to exploring and enhancing ways of doing this; a fundamentally practical project to develop implications for my own practice as an EP. I therefore aligned myself with a pragmatist orientation towards research, valuing knowing from doing as the premise that underpins my research design.

As writers in the field argue, e.g. Brydon-Miller et al (2003), AR was revolutionary in its early days, bridging the gap between research and practice, enabling researcher practitioners to develop knowledge through bringing about change in their field. Action researchers adopt

multiple cycles of action and reflection, allowing them to develop a cohesive picture of that which they are aiming to discover. Within this study, I seek to apply these practices to my area of interest, creating knowledge that can impact upon practice, as well as contributing to wider theory generation in the area.

I value and incorporate the stance that knowledge is influenced by the observer's past experiences and principles within this pragmatic research design, enabling me to think about how I am able to create shared knowledge, particularly with those participating, i.e. through incorporating multiple perspectives through doing. Therefore, my ontological orientation is little about finding the 'truth', but reaching a shared understanding of the situation through interacting with those involved.

Epistemology

Another key underpinning of AR is the place of the researcher within the research; therefore, subjectivity is active throughout and embraced as adding richness to the data that are gathered. I do not seek to separate myself from my research, but incorporate my own reflections as part of the data and subsequent analysis. For example, my relationship with each of the pupils will have been a vital part of how they responded to the techniques and engaged overall. However, asking those involved to comment on and evaluate the sessions added to the criticality of such subjective accounts (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010). This allowed me to consider the views of others, subsequently shaping the interpretations that I made.

It is significant that this thesis is written in the first person, highlighting throughout that I was at the centre of the research. My thoughts, observations and actions all played a vital role in the results obtained. I made use of 'analytic memos' to clearly identify data based on my reflections.

In practical terms, I encourage those interested in my research to use my results to engage in their own cycles of action and reflection, enabling them to develop their own ways of working with and supporting those who may benefit from the techniques discussed.

Though not the main focus of this study, my research aims to provide greater knowledge towards ultimately improving outcomes for those with ASD. I have considered and outlined my philosophical underpinnings, though in order to remain true to my values, have not become over laden with these issues.

Inductive vs. deductive analysis

A related, but distinct issue is concerned with inductive vs. deductive analysis, which I discuss in relation to my research. By completing a comprehensive literature review, I was able to extract key areas within the topic to further explore. I therefore used *a priori* themes to begin analysing my data (e.g. Damon and Hart's, 1988 work in relation to self-understanding), beginning with an element of deduction (theory driven research). Following this initial stage of analysis, I shifted towards inductive (data driven) research, allowing the data to develop new ideas and theories (see chapter 4 for a full description). I used themes arising within the data to develop a template, which was then used to analyse subsequent data.

As described by Morgan (2007), those adopting a pragmatic stance move backwards and forwards between induction and deduction; termed *abduction.* The process of abduction within research is therefore described as the means of testing the theories that are created during the research process.

In my research, I see abduction as a fluid process that occurred at different points within the AR cycle. For example, through analysing individual pupil data I created knowledge about their individual needs (induction), then in the next phase tested out these ideas by adapting

and evaluating PCP methods with the pupils (deduction). Only by engaging in such processes would one be able to make meaningful interpretations of the data.

Quality research

I adopted an AR methodology in this study, with qualitative methods of template analysis, thematic analysis and a matrix framework used to analyse the data.

Qualitative research methods are now widely accepted as a suitable way to approach research (e.g. Barbour, 2001). Researchers adopting this position have shown a fundamental rejection of 'reliability and validity' terminology, becoming increasingly concerned with 'ensuring rigour' (e.g. Morse et al, 2002). Without such considerations, research is "worthless, becomes fiction and loses its utility" (Morse et al, 2002, p.14). For example, Diefenback (2009) questions the scientific value of case studies and considers how researchers might increase the rigour of their design, thus increasing its utility to the wider field.

Many researchers therefore adopt the use of checklists when undertaking qualitative research; rejecting the search for objectivity and accepting their inherent role within the research. Barbour (2001) argues that increased use of quality checklists has resulted in them being used prescriptively, which (she states) can be counter-productive. Furthermore, such rituals can only strengthen rigour if fully embedded in the research design and data analysis. This means that issues must be considered at the beginning of a project and then continue to be applied throughout until final stages of analysis and interpretation.

In particular relation to my research, I attempted to address relevant criteria, including that in relation to template analysis (e.g. King, 2012). Therefore, from the start of my research, as well as at various points throughout my analysis, I attempted to include: independent scrutiny, respondent feedback and creating an audit trail, which I will discuss in further detail

below. Each of these criteria allowed me to develop further reflexivity towards my research, as well as increasing rigour.

- Independent scrutiny - I extended the use of a 'reading buddy' within my trainee EP cohort. Discussions around how I had reached my conclusions supported me to reflect upon the themes I had developed. This helped to increase my reflexivity in relation to how and why I had reached decisions about the themes that I had created and also considered why I rejected alternative descriptions.
- Respondent feedback - Barbour (2001) argues that this criterion is "particularly valuable in action research projects where researchers work with pupils on an ongoing basis to facilitate change" (p.1117). I presented my interpretations back to the pupils at different points using a visual representation of their data, which I called a 'pupil pen portrait'. Pupils were given the option of adding, changing or removing any aspect that they did not agree with. This increased my confidence that I had begun to accurately interpret their data and subsequently present a true reflection of their self-awareness. In addition, these data sets allowed me to triangulate my findings and help to see the holistic picture.
- Creating an audit trail - described by many qualitative authors as good practice (e.g. Willig, 2001 and Diefenbach, 2009). I attempted to make my assumptions, interests and objectives explicit throughout and kept a research diary that enabled me reflect on key events and my direct work with the pupils. I also used a diary to reflect upon my own feelings and observations, helping me to note how my beliefs and values might have influenced aspects of the process. Throughout my thesis write up, I included 'analytic memos' (within chapter 4), where I shared my reflections at different points, showing how and why I came to certain decisions and conclusions.

Design of study

In this section, I provide a concise overview of my design, as a precursor to later detailed discussion of the procedure, alongside the corresponding data collection in chapter 4.

Overview of action research

Following a pilot study, I recruited participants to take part in the two phases of my action research. Phase 1 allowed me to gather baseline information relating to my area of investigation (self-awareness) as well as allowing me to build rapport and get to know the pupils. Phase 2 involved trialling and adapting different PCP techniques to explore how (and if) extensions could be made to pupils' self-awareness. All stages involved a significant amount of reflection to enable me to improve my actions and practice in the subsequent phase.

Table 1 - overview of study

Stage of research	**Focus of session**	
	Part 1	Part 2
Pilot study	Trialling different PCP activities - Triadic sort technique; Portrait gallery	Trialling different (refined) activities - 'All about me' interview; Salmon line
Main research study:		
Phase 1	'Pilot and preparatory'* - building rapport and gathering baseline data	
Phase 2	'Trial of PCP'* - introduction of PCP techniques	'Trial of PCP'* - use of individualised PCP techniques

*see table 2 for an overview of the techniques each pupil engaged in.

In line with an AR methodology (e.g. McNiff and Whitehead, 2010), I used the information gathered at each stage to inform my thinking and planning of the next stage. As the AR process is fluid and cyclical, there is therefore no clear end point for the research. However time constraints meant that I needed to confine this study to two cycles of noticing and

adjusting of PCP techniques, from which data gathered allowed me to answer my research question.

I collected data from a range of sources (in line with recommendations by McNiff, 2013) in order to triangulate evidence linked to my research question, which included: my field notes, activities the pupils completed (e.g. drawings), evaluations from each session (card sorts/questionnaires) and my reflective journal. Therefore, the data were in a variety of different forms, adding to the richness of AR as a research method.

The following diagram (figure 2) gives an overview of how my AR cycle looked in practice and how each phase might contribute to answering the research question.

Figure 2: process cycle for phase 1 and phase 2

Overview of procedures

The action research phases involved the following steps:

- *Try it out* - in phase 1, I completed a self-awareness interview that allowed me to gain a baseline understanding of each pupil's self-awareness.
- *Note what happens* - I kept a reflective journal, including recording key events, my thoughts, actions and observations, contributing to making sense of what happened and reasoning about how and why it might have happened. This was used as 'evidence' during the planning and evaluation stages. I also accumulated data within the pupil pen portraits, used to show elaboration to areas of self-awareness.
- *Modify what we are doing in light of this* - based on what happened I made resources and adaptations to the PCP methods to support pupils to access material (discussed in relation to individual pupils in chapter 4).
- *Monitor what we do* - this included the way I presented material, my interactions with the pupils and how I asked them to evaluate the sessions.
- *Review and evaluate modified action* - pupils were asked to evaluate each session through visual means, such as a questionnaire and sorting cards. I shared the pupil pen portrait with pupils, checking that they were happy with the content. In the final session, I checked which information the pupils wanted to share with others via their pupil pen portrait.
- *Develop new practices* - I used the data collected (including my reflections and pupil feedback) to develop implications for future practice and recommendations for theory generation (discussed within my synthesis and conclusions chapter).

Table 2 - overview of techniques each pupil engaged in

Pupil name	Phase 1 session (60 minutes) 'Pilot and preparatory'		Phase 2: part 1 session (60 minutes) 'Trial of PCP'	Phase 2: part 2 session (60 minutes) 'Trial of PCP'
Robin	All about me interview		Triadic sort Salmon Line	Laddering
Arty	All about me interview		Triadic sort Salmon Line	Drawing me as I am Salmon Line
Charlie	All about me interview		Triadic sort Salmon Line	Pyramiding Laddering
Sonny	All about me interview		Triadic sort Salmon Line	Portrait Gallery Salmon Line

The specific procedures/techniques are discussed in chapter 4, alongside the relevant phase and pupil to avoid duplication, with an overview of PCP techniques given in appendix 1.

When designing this study, I weighed up the literature around optimum levels of intervention against the time available. I considered the following constraints upon my time:

- Preparation and adaptation of materials/resources.
- Analysis of data prior to subsequent sessions.
- The amount of data required whilst ensuring I could meaningfully incorporate information gathered within my analysis.
- Time for reflection/recording my thoughts.
- Time commitments for the schools (e.g. pupils missing lessons, room allocation and SENCo planning time for my visits).

These factors meant that I was restricted in terms of the sessions I was able to complete. With this in mind, I developed my design to include: one session (in phase 1) to gather baseline information/get to know the pupils; and two follow up sessions (per pupil) in phase 2 to try out PCP methods and make adaptations (each session lasted around one hour). Therefore, the total amount of time I spent with each pupil was approximately 3 hours.

While not in line with recommended levels of intervention, I felt that 3 sessions (of one hour) with each pupil would allow me to gather enough data to explore the use of PCP and answer my research question.

Pilot study

For my pilot study, I worked with a pupil with a diagnosis of ASD (age 11). He was described as having relatively average language and academic skills. Therefore, he appeared to suit my participation criteria (see 'pupils and recruitment'). The purpose of the pilot was to explore his self-awareness skills as well as trial some initial ideas I had about the PCP methods that I could use to see if they were accessible to him.

Part 1

The first session was relatively unstructured; I had a brief plan of a range of PCP tools I wanted to use and work through with him (triadic sort technique and portrait gallery; see appendix 1 for a description). He was able to engage with the material to a point, though I needed to use lots of verbal prompts and alter the language I used to support him.

Following this, he came up with some surprising constructs (e.g. 'good-naughty' and 'autistic-normal') that I was able to further explore. However, I felt that the lack of structure made it difficult to keep on track and give enough focus. Therefore, following this session, I developed an adapted version of the Damon and Hart's Self Understanding Interview (1988), including simplified questions and additional pictures to trial during the second part of my pilot study.

Part 2

I used my adapted self-awareness interview prompt cards (see appendix 2 for a final version). The use of the prompts seemed to elicit a much greater depth and range of

statements in relation to his self-awareness. However, it seemed there was too much language on the prompt cards, meaning that I needed to adapt them again to make them more appropriate for use with pupils with social communication difficulties in phase 1.

I asked the child to draw a self portrait, which I followed with some PCP Salmon Line rating scales. I chose some of the constructs he mentioned to further explored with him. I asked him to rate his present and ideal self, prompting him to identify areas of change. He made some insightful comments, e.g. kind-unkind, and was able to identify a way to move closer to his ideal self ('not hurting people who hurt me').

Reflections on pilot study

The pilot study was a useful exercise and I was able to develop the tools and prompts for my main research phases. It highlighted the need for me to add structure to the sessions, as well as to gather baseline information of the pupils' self-awareness prior to using PCP techniques. I also felt that it prepared me to get to a place where I was ready to work with pupils in supporting them to identify constructs around self-awareness.

From completing this initial work, I increased my confidence in using PCP approaches with pupils with ASD, as this pupil was able to engage in some of the techniques I used. He also showed some signs of engaging in processes of extending his thinking around his self-awareness.

It would have been helpful to have conducted further pilot work following this, i.e. to use the self-awareness interview first, then trial and modify PCP techniques. However, time constraints made this unachievable. Therefore, I extended pilot work into my main data collection phase, allowing me to trial the procedure with the first pupil that I worked with, meaning I did not include his data in my final write up.

Development of tools

The self-awareness interview I used (originally developed by Damon and Hart 1988) proved relatively successful, though there were too many words/questions on the cards, which I subsequently reduced for use in phase 1 (appendix 2).

I decided it would be important to have a range of PCP techniques available for use in phase 2 that had different components (e.g. drawing, visual sorting). I planned to begin with the same PCP technique for each child to allow for comparisons in terms of their level of engagement, which would help inform my thinking and subsequent adaptations to be made. The triadic sort activity proved useful in the pilot study, so I chose to use this in the first PCP session.

<u>Pupils and recruitment</u>

Pupils were selected through purposeful sampling. I recruited schools through the Educational Psychology Service I was working in; my field work supervisor was able to recommend schools and give me a contact name for the Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCos) which I followed up (I did not work with these schools in my role as a TEP). I developed a school agreement for Head Teachers to complete to provide some reassurance I would be able to complete my research within the identified schools (appendix 3).

I met with SENCos to discuss my research and to identify potential pupils to take part. The following selection criterion was used:

- Pupils with a diagnosis of ASD.
- Pupils between ages 11-14 (Year 7 and Year 8; to minimise disruption to those studying for GCSEs).
- Boys or girls.

- Pupils who would be able to manage the demands of the research, e.g. language and engagement. I decided that for this research, I wanted to focus upon pupils with an 'Asperger's' or 'high-functioning' profile to maximise their engagement and ability to participate. However, as many pupils had a generic diagnosis of 'autism' (particularly following DSM V and the removal of the Asperger's category), I discussed the requirements with the SENCo and allowed them some degree of judgement when selecting pupils.
- Pupils with a relatively settled placement, e.g. no concerns of exclusions or school moves.

Once potential pupils had been identified, relevant contact staff members in the school sent out parent information leaflets and consent forms (appendix 4 and 5) and pupil information letters and consent forms (appendix 6 and 7). I decided to send the pupil forms home to enable parents to discuss the research with their child. I also offered parents the opportunity to meet with me in school prior to meeting their child or to have a telephone conversation if they wanted more information (see appendix 8 for an overview of my research timeline.

Once consent forms were returned to school I arranged dates to meet with the pupils for phase 1 data collection.

Table 3: pupil information (names changed to protect the students' anonymity)

Name	**Gender**	**Age (at time of agreeing to participate)**
Harry*	Male	12y 11m
Robin	Male	12y 1m
Sonny**	Male	12y 9m
Arty	Male	12y 2m
Charlie	Male	12y 11m

* included as further pilot work to test out and refine the procedure.

**Sonny's data was not written up as a case study, but used to inform the development of template 3 and included in the overall results table.

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the University Ethics Committee, as well as the research and governance council in the Local Authority in which I was working (see appendix 9 for ethical approval letter).

Fox and Rendell (2002) argue research and associated ethical dimensions are embedded in professional practice and vice-versa. Therefore, I considered two fundamental aspects in relation to EPs engaging children and young people with additional needs:

- In a research study.
- In an intervention, where change is a potential outcome.

The key ethical issues I aimed to address were: informed consent, safety, respectful enquiry, confidentiality and debriefing.

Informed consent

It is important that informed consent is gained from parents/carers, however many stress the importance of also gaining consent from the child (e.g. British Psyhcological Society, BPS, 2009). Geldard et al (2013) argue that the child must give their informed consent, which is also a way to give them a voice and encourage them to feel valued. In addition, the BPS (2009) state potential research outcomes should be made explicit. I shared information with pupils (and their parents) around my aims of developing self-awareness in pupils with ASD in the initial stages.

I asked pupils and their parents to read information letters and sign a consent form. The pupil letters were written in consideration of the child's communication difficulties, including clear language and factual information. My aim was for parents to discuss the research with their child at home, deciding together if it was something they were interested in. Parents were offered a meeting or phone call to ask questions etc. Consent

from the parent did not assume consent from the child, and I followed this up with each child in the sessions to check they still agreed to participate.

When a child has additional learning needs, including social and communication difficulties, increased sensitivity must be adopted. James (2008) advises caution when translating, interpreting or mediating information that is not readily accessible. This raises the importance of developing techniques to engage with young people in a way that allows them to share their views and that minimises (or at least aims to reduce) the power imbalance, including the techniques used to gain informed consent. Lewis (2010) argues that gathering voice can be subverted when not in line with the adult's agenda, meaning we need to be aware of adding our own meaning and interpretations onto our work with children and young people (Billington, 2000).

In addition, Fisher (2003) argues one cannot assume that failure to object is equivalent to consent; Fox and Rendell (2002) further argue that ethics is a process, not just a set of guidelines to think about prior to commencing a piece of work, meaning that informed consent must be sought not only at the beginning, but through to the end.

I revisited consent in each session, checking that pupils consented to continue, also considering their comments in the evaluation, e.g. a feelings rating chart. I also attempted to evaluate their body language, looking for signs they may have felt uncomfortable and offering breaks/the chance to leave if they wanted to. I reminded pupils they could leave at any time and 'practised' what they might say to me if they were uncomfortable. I developed many resources aimed at allowing the pupils to understand the nature of the research as well as allowing them to share their views.

It was important for me to present the pupils as active participants in a process where their feedback was an inherent part. I allowed time to talk about topics of the child's interest to

build trust and rapport and I maintained a stance of curiosity, encouraged by the PCP approach adopted.

I took all data (with my interpretations) back to pupils in an accessible way (via the pupil pen portrait). I also maintained a reflexive stance throughout, attempting to reflect upon my role in both liaising with pupils and in analysing their data. Through this process, I attempted to reduce my personal bias and continued to reflect upon how and why I had arrived at certain decisions. Pupils were encouraged to share their views via an evaluation completed at the end of each session.

When engaging in an intervention, outcomes (or potential outcomes) should be considered directly with the child to determine what they might want to achieve, rather than relying on the concerns of the adults (Geldard et at, 2013). This is vitally important, as without the views of the child, one might inadvertently coerce the child into engaging in behaviours they do not find personally satisfying. EPs therefore should not assume that a neuro-typical stance is best, but come from a position of ignorance and openness and embed reflexive practices.

I sought to explain my study aims at the start of each session, using visual aids to increase structure and predictability so they knew what to expect, e.g. a visual 'story' relating to the concept of self-awareness (e.g. appendix 10). I produced different resources to explain the procedure and intended outcomes of the study in a means that would be accessible to the pupils so they could consider their participation further.

I attempted to make it clear, both in correspondence and direct discussion with parents and pupils, that my study was exploratory in nature and that there would not necessarily be any direct benefit achieved from their child taking part (though I would attempt to minimise any potential negative effects).

Safety

I worked with the pupils during school time in a room that was accessible and in view. A member of staff knew of my whereabouts and vice-versa. I used my knowledge and previous experience of working with similar pupils to judge their mood and gauge their engagement throughout to reduce potential feelings of anxiety, including increasing structure and predictability through the use of a visual timetable. I liaised regularly with the SENCo should I need to share any safety concerns.

Fox and Rendell (2002) argue if our work 'does no harm', then we may consider that our work was ethical. The emotional safety of pupils was at the height of importance for me in this study. I attempted to ensure that pupils would be protected from any potential negative outcomes by developing a robust framework of 'noticing and adjusting'. Within my sessions, I was constantly attuned to the engagement of pupils, observing changes and attempting to adapt my practice in return. My subsequent reflections of the sessions gave me further opportunity to think about such factors, and allowed me to consider whether I had rightly interpreted their behaviour/comments.

Through elaboration of self-awareness, pupils may have become distressed or uncomfortable with what they had learned about themselves, either in the session or at a later time. In an attempt to reduce this, the activities were pupil led and I did not probe into areas they may have been uncomfortable with. I also monitored their comments and allowed time and space to talk about things further if they wished.

At the end of each session, I encouraged pupils to spend a few minutes talking with me, allowing me further time to monitor their mood. I planned additional time to spend at the school in case I needed to follow up on any issue with the pupil, member of staff or parent. I

gave my contact details to SENCos and parents, and advised them to contact me should any of the pupils show signs of distress following their sessions with me.

Fox and Rendell (2002) proposed that researchers cannot stop being practitioners and fully relinquish responsibility, i.e. if concerns arise in relation to a participant, one may need to refer on to other professionals (if they wish) for further support. I ensured that there was a means for me to refer pupils on for further support should this have emerged during the study (though this was not required for any of the pupils).

Respectful inquiry

I considered the implications of whether or not pupils knew about their diagnosis of ASD and tried to alleviate tensions by encouraging parents to talk through the study with their child before both gave their consent (by sending out the parent information leaflet with the pupil letter).

As I had initially set expectations for the pupils and parents regarding taking part in the study, I met with all students for the pre-agreed number of sessions (even if not writing up their data as a case study). All pupils received a completed pupil pen portrait documenting the information they shared.

A fundamental aspect of this research involved treating the pupils as individuals rather than assuming they all had the same wants and needs (based upon their diagnosis). This meant spending time getting to know them and building rapport. I was then able to tailor and adapt sessions according to what I had learned about them. The approach adopted (PCP) was a good fit to my values and did not come from an assumption of how pupils should behave, therefore reducing neuro-typical bias.

Confidentiality

I tried to ensure that sessions were in a relatively quiet area of the school where pupils would not be overheard. They were reminded the information they shared would be largely confidential, though I emphasised I may need to share information if there was a safety concern, either for them or others.

Pupil data was kept in a safe, locked location in my home to which only I had access. I gave each of the pupil's pseudonyms for anonymity and to reduce the chance of them being recognised within the write up of my thesis.

Debriefing

A further ethical dimension when engaging pupils in an intervention relates to ownership of voice; who owns voice once it has been elicited? Where does it go? Who controls it?

I developed pupil pen portraits for each pupil; these were successively compiled from the information shared. This provided a 'visual' means of feedback. I gave pupils ownership by offering the chance to change and add to what was written.

I explained to pupils at the beginning that their data would be used within my research project (though that they would be given anonymity) and reminded them later on, checking if there was anything on their pupil pen portrait they did not want to be shared. I reminded pupils if they changed their mind they could tell their parent or key member of school staff who would let me know.

However, I appreciated the power-imbalance might have an impact upon the pupils' ability to explicitly share such views and also used my judgement about the information they shared. For example, when Robin shared something personal about his family; I spent some

time talking about this with him and we decided that it was not appropriate to be recorded on his pen portrait.

I asked pupils who they wanted their information to be shared with. As all pupils gave consent to share this with school staff and their parents, this enabled me to have discussions about the issues raised, encouraging them to think about the support offered and how they could tailor this to specific needs.

Parents were offered a follow up phone call following completion of the research where I was able to give an overview of the work undertaken and their child's pen portrait.

CHAPTER 4: INTEGRATED DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Overview of chapter

Within this chapter I describe the data set, provide an overview of my main method for analysing data (template analysis) and discuss the application of this method. I also discuss how I used thematic analysis and a matrix framework to analyse other data.

In the phase 1 section, I describe the procedure adopted, followed by analysis of the data collected using template analysis (TA), presented as case studies. This involved the development of a template and pupil pen portraits.

I then describe the procedure for phase 2, including modifications that were made for individual pupils. This is followed by analysis of the data, using the template devised in phase 1. I again discuss the three case studies in further detail, exploring the emergent key themes for each pupil.

Following discussion of the case studies, I present a table with the matrix analysis as a way to compare data across phases.

I conclude the chapter by explaining how I used thematic analysis to extract themes from my reflective accounts, contributing towards an understanding of how I made sense of the research processes.

I discuss my interpretations of my results in chapter 5 (Synthesis and Conclusions).

The data set

I collected data from a range of sources (in line with recommendations by McNiff, 2013) in order to triangulate evidence linked to my research question:

- My field notes (including key observations from the sessions)

- Interview transcripts (phase 1)
- Observation notes from the sessions (including pupil comments)
- Activities that the pupils completed, e.g. drawings or pieces of writing (including PCP techniques in phase 2; I also audio recorded the sessions for accuracy of pupil comments)
- Pupil evaluation questionnaires
- My reflective journal
- Successively compiled pupil pen portraits (following pupil agreement with information presented)

Therefore, the data were in a variety of different forms, adding to the richness of AR as a research method.

Method of analysing data

The main method used to analyse the data within this project was template analysis (TA), a further elaboration of theory driven analysis. This is generally considered a deductive form of enquiry as described in chapter 3 (Methodology). Therefore, researchers adopting this method tend to consider the literature prior to data collection (though not always).

Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that such general theory driven analyses form the basis of all qualitative analysis, allowing researchers to then conduct other forms of analysis. Others see the process of 'thematic coding' as being a derivative of many methods, rather than being an approach in their own right (e.g. Ryan and Bernard, 2000).

Boyatzis (1998) gives three main reasons for using theory-driven methods in research: firstly, it allows the researcher to expand, replicate or refute earlier research claims. The researcher may also wish to use a priori codes as the basis for developing a new code. Secondly, researchers may have raw data that they wish to analyse using existing codes to introduce

an independent variable, such as TA. Finally, researchers may adopt this method if they do not have the skills or experience to develop their own code. For this study I feel that the first reason cited is the most pertinent, as I wanted to build upon previous research, then extend this to develop my own code (or template), allowing the data to lead the overall analysis, to an extent, like an independent variable.

TA allows the researcher to thematically organise and analyse qualitative data (Brooks and King, 2014). Brooks and King argue there is no particular epistemological position tied to the method, meaning there is flexibility for differing researchers to apply it to their own study. In addition, the clear framework for utilising TA (Brooks and King, 2014) meant that it was an accessible and attractive method for me to employ within the limited time constraints of this project. Finally, Brooks and King describe TA as able to analyse a range of data, from single case or small samples to a very large sample size, meaning that it could be appropriately applied to my particular sample.

For these purposes, I felt that TA gave a more detailed and appropriate protocol with which to analyse my data. I developed an *a priori* template (named template 1; appendix 11) based upon self-awareness literature (e.g. Damon and Hart, 1988). Therefore, TA offered the means to further test and develop this, as well as allowing me to generate new ideas for theory development. I have described the development of Template 3 (my final template) on page 73 and in figure 3.

To explore the data across different pupils, I also developed a matrix framework analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) propose the use of such analysis to compare cases and make overall conclusions to support a claim to knowledge. This form of analysis allowed me to set out data in a coherent way to explore extensions to self-awareness across phases.

Using multiple comparison groups allows one to make sense of a complex set of data that may otherwise be difficult to formulate into reasoned results. I interpreted the descriptions of this form of analysis made by Miles and Huberman (1994) in my own way so as to best fit the data within this study. Within this chapter, I provide a comprehensive matrix analysis to explore data across cases.

In addition, I employed the use of thematic analysis (based upon descriptions by Braun and Clarke, 2006) to analyse my analytic memos. As I had no prior expectations around what I expected or hoped to find, an inductive data driven form of enquiry seemed the most appropriate method to use. This allowed me to generate a set of themes, which in conjunction with my other results allowed me to make appropriate interpretations and answer my overarching research question.

Phase 1

Procedure

Within each of the phases I worked individually with the pupils I had recruited, in line with the ethical and safety considerations discussed in chapter 3. Each of the sessions were audio recorded and the child reminded of this at the start, as well as their ongoing right to withdraw. I encouraged the pupils to 'practice' what they might say if they wanted to leave and said that I would check in with them at different points throughout.

I introduced myself and reminded the child about my research project, using the 'child information letter' (appendix 6). I checked their understanding of this and that they gave their consent to take part, reminding them they could change their mind at any time. I then showed the pupils an overview of the session, designed in the form of a tick sheet that they could mark as we worked through different activities (appendix 12).

As an 'ice-breaker' I asked the child to say whether they liked a school based activity on a set of picture cards. I also asked them to tell me about their hobbies outside of school. Following this I used my judgement to gauge how relaxed the child felt with me. In all cases, I felt able to move on to the self-awareness interview without the need for further games or activities.

I introduced the self-awareness interview prompt cards (appendix 2; based upon the Self-Understanding Interview by Damon and Hart, 1988) as an 'all about me' activity. This was designed to provide a baseline profile of how self-aware the child was, prior to PCP tools being introduced. The child was first asked to draw a picture of themselves, which formed the start of the interview. I attempted to ensure the interviews were open ended, minimising my own agenda and encouraging them to share their unique thoughts and perspectives, rather than what they thought I might want to hear. I reminded them that I

wanted to get to know who they were and that it was important to me that they could say whatever they wanted to.

I then showed the question cards in turn, asking each child to either draw or say their response to each part, for example, 'what type of person are you?' 'What do you like most about yourself?' And 'from year to year, what changes? What stays the same?' I told the pupils explicitly that I would write down their comments, so as not to limit their response due to any literacy difficulties or anxiety. However, I reminded them that they could make changes or add symbols to their self-portrait as we were going along if they wanted to.

Throughout the sessions, I monitored the pupils' mood and level of engagement, trying to ensure they felt comfortable. If I felt they may have been uncomfortable, I asked if there was anything I could do or change, and reminded them they could finish at any point if they wanted to.

I kept brief notes during the sessions on an interview prompt sheet (appendix 13) and asked additional questions/gave prompts if the child was finding it difficult to respond (follow-up prompts were written on the interview prompt sheet).

Once all of the interview questions were completed I gave an overview of what the child had said about themselves. I gave them the opportunity to add or change anything. I told pupils I would be taking away their comments to think about what this meant for them and bring this back in the next session. I reminded them they would have the chance to make changes or comments to my interpretations of what they had said.

The child then completed an evaluation of the session (appendix 14) with support where needed, and they were encouraged to give their thoughts. I encouraged them to give their honest opinions, reminding them that their thoughts were a very important part of my research as I wanted to think about how pupils found the materials etc. I designed my

questionnaires so pupils could tick a box, rather than explain their thoughts (which may have been difficult for them). I reminded them that I would be meeting with them in September and said that I would keep their work safe until this date.

Following the sessions I transcribed each interview (see appendix 15 for an example). I also wrote a reflective diary, focusing upon: recording events, my thoughts/actions and key observations. This was used as to supplement the interview and pupil evaluation data during analysis of phase 1.

After each session, I completed a reflective journal based upon my observations, thoughts and feelings. This was used for later refection and to inform subsequent sessions (see appendix 16 for an example) I also used this information to populate my analytic memos and for further reflection during the write up.

Data analysis

While I collected data for five pupils, I chose not to analyse data for the first pupil I worked with, using this session as extended pilot work. This allowed me to practise the interview and adjust my technique for the subsequent interviews. I used the data from the four other pupils to develop template 1 (discussed later in this chapter) and in the matrix analysis table to show data across the phases.

As previously mentioned, I used a priori themes (developed into template 1, appendix 11) to focus my analysis upon a pre-defined set of criteria, though I sought to ensure that I did not only code data in order to confirm these themes.

Brooks and King (2014) describe the benefits of using a priori themes as accelerating the initial coding phase of analysis. They also cite the importance of not simply reducing all data down to fit the original themes, and noticing when a theme is not the best way to describe a

set of the data. It was therefore vital I recognised the a priori themes as tentative and allowed enough reflexivity to change or remove themes as necessary.

The following procedure was adopted from Brooks and King (2014) to analyse the data from phase 1 and develop the template (see figure 3 for an overview of phase 1 data analysis):

- I read through one of the transcripts, highlighting segments of possible relevance to the research questions; I looked for data relating to self-awareness. Information largely irrelevant to the research questions was not coded.

- I attached a code to the identified section, in line with template 1 (based on a-priori themes, through colour coding; see appendix 17 for an example). If a theme that emerged within the transcripts was not already identified, at this stage I commented and underlined the text.

- Following this, I began to group the initial codes together as themes, modifying or creating new themes for those codes not yet defined (see appendix 18 for an example). Where a piece of text had more than one code, I made a judgement call about its best fit.

- This allowed me to produce template 2 (appendix 19) adding, modifying or deleting themes according to the codes extracted.

- I then repeated the process of highlighting and coding segments of transcript that I completed for transcript 1, with template 2.

- I then analysed transcript data for all of the pupils using template 2. I recoded and reclassified themes to create a final, modified template (template 3, table 4) to fit all of the data. I grouped themes into a smaller number of higher order codes, which describe broader themes in the data.

- Template 3 was then carried forward to phase 2 of my study, to help me to address the research questions.

Figure 3: overview of phase 1 data analysis

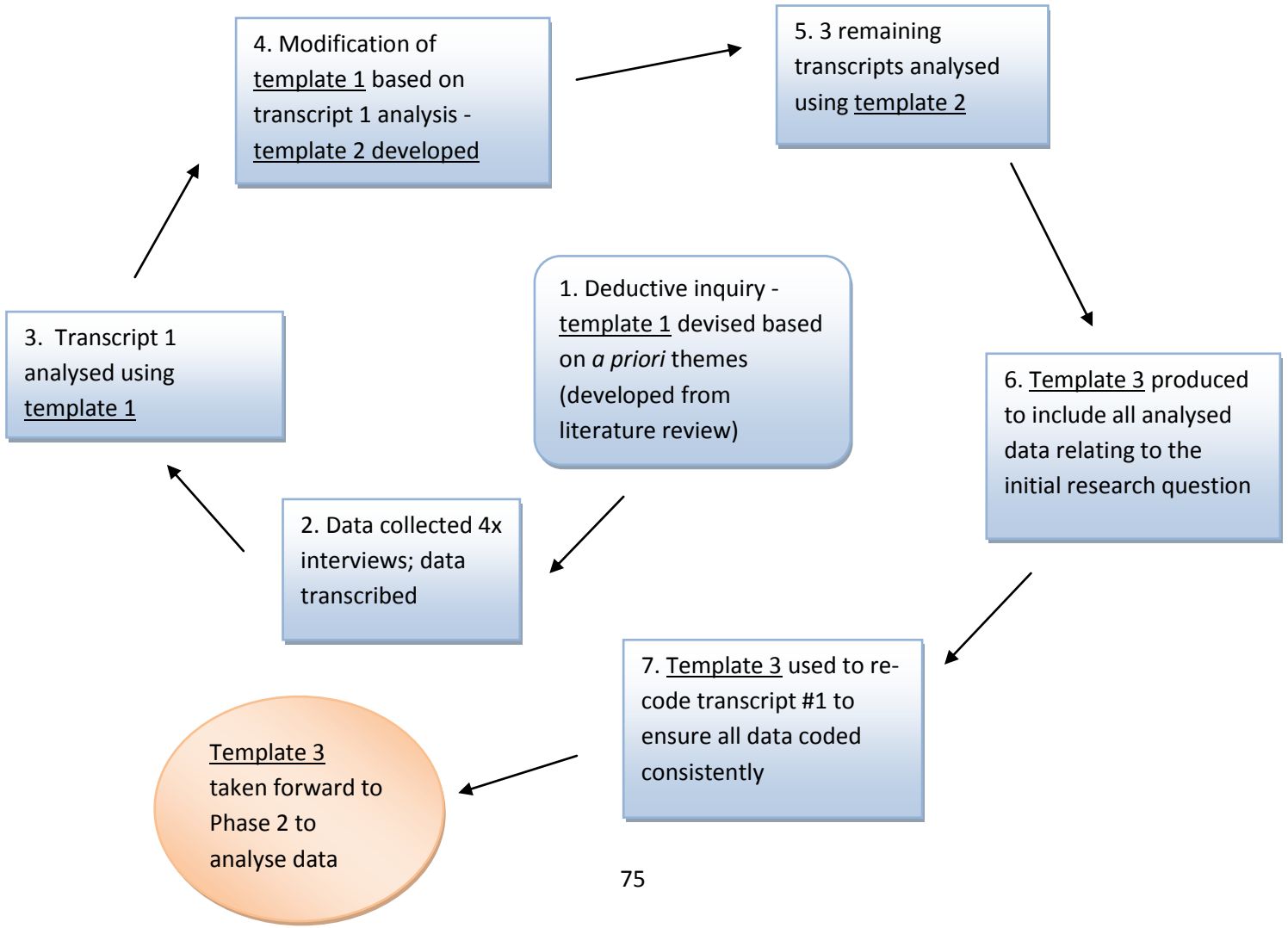


Table 4: template 3 with a description of each theme

Pupil self-awareness can be organised into the following areas:

	Main theme	***Definition of theme***
'Self as object' - 'me'	Personal attributes	Awareness of their personal attributes, including physical, emotional, behavioural and cognitive features.
	Impact of social skills	Consideration of how their social skills might impact upon social appeal, relationships and social status.
	Psychological awareness	Insight into their own preferences, likes and dislikes, skills, feelings (including causes of) and beliefs about the world.
'Self as subject' - 'I'	Future considerations	Aspects relating to their future, including: ambitions, personal growth, goals, practical arrangements and aspirational dreams.
	Change over time	Consideration given to their own physical, emotional, behavioural, skill-based, personal and environmental change that has/will occur over time.
	Comparative attributes	Consideration to how they are similar or different to others, in terms of physical and personal characteristics, environmental factors and life experiences.
	Stable factors	Consideration of their own personal and environmental factors that remain stable over time.
	Influence on self	Consideration given to the impact of environmental influences upon their self development, incorporating beliefs about self vs. external factors as contributing to personal and life outcomes.

This template is qualitatively different to the original (template 1), though with clear similarities. I have classified each theme according to how I relate each to James' (1892/1961, cited in Jackson et al, 2012) descriptions of the 'me' and 'I' self.

Case study accounts

I chose three of my pupils to write up as case studies (Robin, Charlie and Arty). I included those showing a range of insights into their self-awareness as well as salient themes, randomly choosing three out of the four pupils to analyse in greater detail. This allowed me to explore different adaptations across phase 2 of the project, including my reflections and observations during the sessions. While Sonny's data is not written up as a case study, I included his data in the development of template 3 and in the matrix analysis table.

In reference to King's (2012) discussion around interpretation, I decided to focus upon emergent themes by prioritisation for each pupil. This meant making judgements about the saliency of a particular theme, thus enabling me to plan a meaningful phase 2.

King (2014) prompts us to ask which themes seem to get to the heart of a participant's story. This may relate to the frequency that a theme emerges or to the noticeable emotional connection to a point they make, thus emphasising my role as a crucial part of the interview.

For each pupil involved in my research, I devised a pupil pen portrait (see appendix 20 for an example) based upon the themes described on template 3 (e.g. 'personal attributes'; 'future considerations). Following phase 1, I organised separate points from interview transcripts into the themes described on template 3. I then summarised these points into constructs (see appendix 21 for an example) and added these to the relevant section on the portrait.

In line with an AR methodology, I have included 'analytic memos' to include my reflections as well as the evaluative comments from the pupils. These data were used to consider individual adaptations to support the pupils further in the next stage.

Phase 1 data analysis

Phase 1 acted as a baseline data collection phase, where I used the 'all about me' interview schedule to explore the constructs relating to self-awareness the pupils showed before using PCP activities with them. Following the interviews I organised transcript data into themes and began to develop a pupil pen portrait for each pupil.

Robin

Analysis

Psychological awareness

One of the prominent themes emerging during the interview was around Robin's psychological awareness. He frequently showed insight into his spiritual and philosophical beliefs, e.g. *"sometimes I sit there and like I do with the philosophy and stuff, and think 'why' 'Why life?"* (Robin transcript page 5).

Comparative attributes

Robin showed consideration of how he differs from other people. He sees himself as different, e.g. *"I'm a bit different, bit more different than everyone else, because, everyone else is normal, I have like, Asperger's"* (Robin transcript page 4).

Robin also showed that he has thought about some of his attributes that he sees in others, thinking about the ways that he is similar and different to others. His understanding of this concept led him to believe that his successive life experiences make him overall a unique individual, e.g:

> *"Nobody will go through the exact same stuff as you. You're born in a house, someone else might be born in a hospital, someone else might be born on the street, someone else might be born on a river, on a boat or..."*
>
> (Robin transcript page 13)

Influence on self

Robin believes a person is largely in control of their destiny; he sees choice as being a large factor in what a person achieves in their life, e.g.

> "*If you really try hard to do something, then you can change, but if you just do small stuff, say I do a little bit of boxing, sometimes, then I won't be a master at it. If I* do*, like hours a day, I'll get really good, really fast"*
>
> (Robin transcript page 12).

Impact of social skills

Robin showed a degree of insight into his relationships with others. He reflected upon difficulties he had in the past and currently, both with his peers and members of his family, e.g. "*yeah but most of the time it works out good, cause I stick with my technology and no one insults me, apart from the people who do, apart from the people who do"* (Robin transcript page 2). He also shared how he thinks others see him and his interpretation of what they mean, e.g. *"people call me a nerd, that means they're saying I'm clever"* (Robin transcript page 1).

Robin has considered how his personal attributes might impact upon his relationships, though he appears to consider this as fixed and did not consider how things might improve, e.g. "*I'm not stupid, but I can act stupid sometimes, but that's cause of something...* [break] *yelling at my mum, getting very angry, swearing, I do that a lot"* (Robin transcript page 1).

Analytic memo

Robin appeared to enjoy engaging in thoughtful discussion with me. When completing the student evaluation form at the end of the session, he commented that he liked 'the philosophical ones' [questions]. A few times during the interview, Robin said that he liked having someone to talk to, including having the chance to 'rant'. He recently received his diagnosis of ASD, meaning that he may have valued this opportunity to reflect upon his thoughts and experiences around this.

I found the interview with Robin relatively straight forward to administer. He spoke spontaneously, meaning that I did not need to add many follow up prompts or further questions. However, there were times when he spoke over me, possibly due to his eagerness in getting his point across or due to difficulties engaging in reciprocal conversation. This meant that if there was a point that I wanted to explore further, it was difficult to steer the conversation that way.

Robin came across as very articulate, though I had the impression that his stance and many of his views were relatively fixed and that he would find it difficult to see things in a different way.

Considerations for phase 2

- Clarify purpose using prompts/visuals to keep Robin focused on the discussion.
- Use prompts to encourage Robin to explore his views from alternative perspective.

Arty

Comparative attributes

Arty gave consideration to how he is similar and different from his peers. He indicated some comparisons in terms of physical attributes and personal values, e.g:

> ***Gemma:*** *"Do you think it makes a difference to who you are, that you like everything to be perfect?"*
> ***Arty:*** *"yeah"*
> ***Gemma:*** *"why does it make a difference?"*
> ***Arty:*** *"erm, cause people don't really care about..."*
> ***Gemma:*** *"...other people don't care"*
> ***Arty:*** *"no"*
> ***Gemma:*** *"so other people don't really care as much as you, is that what you mean?"*
> ***Arty:*** *"yeah"*
>
> (Arty transcript page 1)

He accepted that there are people with the same interests as him, e.g:

> ***Gemma:*** *"so how is he partly like you?"*
> ***Arty:*** *"erm, he is erm, he likes the same stuff as me"*
>
> (Arty transcript page 8)

Impact of social skills

Arty seemed concerned with how he is viewed by others. He values being liked by his peers, e.g:

> ***Gemma:*** *"and what about kind and friendly? What do you think would be different if you weren't kind and friendly?"*
> ***Arty:*** *"erm, I wouldn't get as many friends and people wouldn't like me as much"*
>
> (Arty transcript page 2)

Change over time

Arty reflected on how he has changed over the years. He sees himself as being much calmer and kinder now compared to when he was younger, e.g:

> **Gemma:** "So you were less kind when you were younger?"
> **Arty:** "yeah. I don't want to say this, but I actually threw a chair in primary school"
>
> (Arty transcript page 4)

He thinks that his interests might change as he gets older, e.g:

> **Gemma: "**what do you think will be different?"
> **Arty: "**my likes and dislikes"
> **Gemma: "**OK. So how do you think they'll change? Can you give me any examples?"
> **Arty: "**erm, maybe I won't like art as much"
>
> (Arty transcript page 3)

Analytic memo

Arty seemed a little apprehensive when first meeting with me, but began to open up during the 'getting to know you' activity. During the interview, he appeared to give honest and thoughtful answers, though these were generally short. He found it difficult to elaborate on points when I prompted him to. There were times when Arty did not give an answer to a question and appeared unable to say that that he did not know or that he had finished answering.

The responses Arty gave did not appear to be largely insightful, though he did reveal some interesting values and insights. I felt the approach of questioning and answering was not the best in engaging Arty. I noticed that there were times when Arty took a few seconds to respond, perhaps indicating a processing delay. It also took a long time for him to get to a clear point, perhaps showing he does not have the expressive language skills to express himself fluently.

In the student evaluation, Arty commented that some of the questions I asked were slightly confusing. He thought that some of the questions were asking the same things. This was consistent with my observations that he found it difficult to answer my questions.

Considerations for phase 2

- Visual organisation to help to elicit greater information.
- Clearer language and use of examples to illustrate the point.
- Be mindful of potential noise and check that he is comfortable.
- Give Arty 5 seconds to answer before repeating my question
- Word bank/prompts to share evaluative comments.

Charlie

Future considerations

Charlie had a clear idea of the goals he would like to achieve as an adult, e.g. *"I'm going to be a business man, get a job in [unclear] the Fuji bank, if that's still around in the new World Trade"* (Charlie transcript page 8). He thought about what he might need to accomplish in the short term to work towards this, e.g. "*I'm trying to learn stocks"* (Charlie transcript page 7). Charlie considered personal attributes that would suit his ambition, e.g. "*well I just, just like to be erm, well-um-tailored to just um be working really long hours*" (Charlie transcript page 8).

Psychological awareness

Charlie showed insight into aspects of himself that he doesn't like or cause him difficulties, e.g. "*well I don't like how I'm always um, how I always, how I always, um, somehow cry a lot, I just want to stop crying these days. I'm maturing, I should stop crying"* (Charlie transcript page 5) and:

> "*You know, sometimes I wish I didn't have autism at all* [break] *cause sometimes I just want to let, I just want to let my own opinion out but I can't cause I've got a teaching assistant next to me, telling me "no, you can't do that*""
>
> (Charlie transcript page 4).

Charlie would value making changes to himself, e.g. "*be able to um concentrate more"* (Charlie transcript page 9). He has a view that his autism diagnosis is "*a double edged sword"* (Charlie transcript page 14), though perhaps lacks a full understanding of what this means in a wider sense to him at a personal level.

Impact of social skills

Charlie showed some awareness of how his social skills might contribute to difficulties in relationships, e.g. "*I'm not really, I don't, I'm not that good with conversations* [break] *can't make friends if you're not good at conversations"* (Charlie transcript page 1).

Change over time

Charlie considered how he has and will change over time. He accepts that his mood has changed compared to when he was younger, e.g. "*I was just, I was more a temper a lot, definitely back in year 4, 5 slash 6*" (Charlie transcript page 7).

Charlie appears to be anticipating a change when he soon becomes a teenager, e.g.

> *"My plots about to thicken in a few, erm, days, so...* [break] *er, going to be a teenager* [break] *for everyone, so when I'm at the age of 13, the plot thickens, you start going through different, um, moods and stuff"*
>
> (Charlie transcript page 3).

Analytic memo

Charlie was generally well engaged and talkative during the first session. He seemed to give considered responses to my questions, though at times veered away from the point. I used prompts to redirect him towards the original question. I noticed Charlie becoming distracted at times, e.g. by noises outside the room or items of interest within the room we were working.

Many of Charlie's responses were spontaneous and detailed. A few times I prompted him to elaborate on what he had said, which he did. Sometimes I found it difficult to decipher Charlie's point, indicating some expressive language difficulties, though he was amenable to explaining himself again.

Charlie came across as relatively insightful on certain issues, though in other ways he seemed to lack much personal insight. I felt there may be some potential in supporting him to extend on some of his beliefs and values in the next phase.

In the student evaluation Charlie said that he liked all of the questions I had asked him. He had felt happy in the session, though would have preferred a quieter room.

Considerations for phase 2

- Be mindful of potential noise/environmental distraction and check that he is comfortable.

- Keep my language short and clear to support him to understand my questions and instructions.

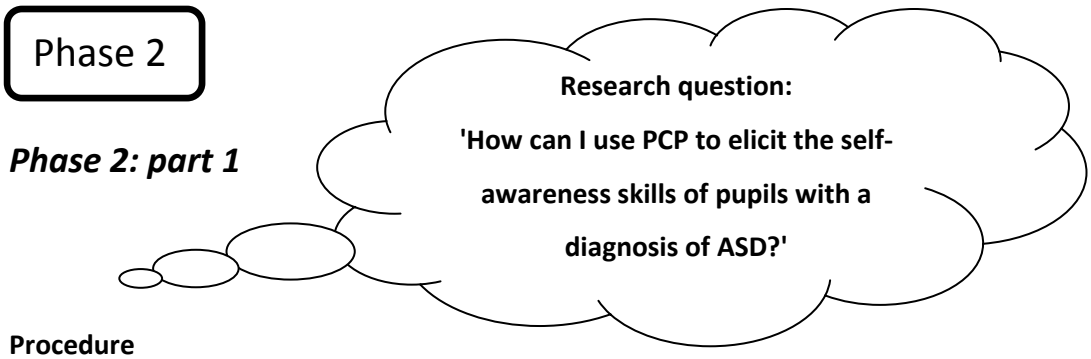
- Use prompts and modelling to help him understand the task and express himself coherently.

Summary of phase 1

I was able to gather baseline information in relation to each pupils' level of self-awareness, based upon a simple question and answer approach. In order to answer my research questions, within phase 2 I aimed to introduce PCP methods with each pupil, making relevant adaptations (based on phase 1 findings) to explore whether this enabled pupils to access or share a deeper level of self-awareness.

Learning from phase 1 - adaptations

For each pupil I used what I learnt about them (based upon my reflections, their interview data and student evaluation) to think of plausible ideas for adaptations to take forward to phase 2 to support engagement with the PCP material. Many PCP activities incorporate visual/structured elements, so I also thought about prompts I could use to introduce and explain the tasks.



Phase 2: part 1

Procedure

Once reacquainted with each pupil, including a period of building rapport, I explained the structure of the session in the same 'tick sheet' format as in phase 1 (appendix 12). I showed pupils the pen portrait I had developed using their answers from the previous interview. Each pupil was given the opportunity to make changes or add to their portrait, though I explained there would also be another chance to check it later on.

I developed a 'comic strip' (Gray, 1994, appendix 22) to explain the aims around developing their self-awareness skills and to help introduce the PCP work that would be completed. I shared this with each of the pupils before beginning PCP activities.

The PCP activities that I selected were in line with the defining criteria outlined in chapter 2. The first PCP activity was used to elicit constructs: triadic sort technique, part of a simple repertory grid (Kelly, 1955). This involved the pupils writing elements (usually the names of people in their lives) on separate cards or papers, usually around seven or eight (see appendix 1 for an overview of PCP activities used).

Pupils were then asked to place two elements together against another one, saying how the first two are similar in some respect and then how the third element is different. For example, Charlie first placed 'sister' and 'cats' together (based upon a similarity) against 'grandma' (who is different in some way). He said that his sister and cats were 'annoying' and his grandma was 'kind'.

These descriptions became an 'emergent pole' (annoying) and the 'contrast pole' (kind) and noted down on a separate piece of paper, to enable further discussion later (i.e. annoying---kind). The process was repeated with different combinations of elements until numerous constructs had been elicited.

Following this, I introduced a salmon line technique (Salmon, 1988), using the constructs already elicited. This involved the emergent and contrast pole being placed on either end of a straight line.

Each pupil was asked to rate:

- Where on the line they currently see themselves.
- Where they were in the past.
- Where they would like to be in the future.

I then asked a series of questions designed to explore their constructs in greater detail, including:

- In what ways have they changed from the past to now?
- What do they need to do to move closer to their goal? (If a large gap between present and goal, how could they move a step closer to it?)
- What support might they need to move closer to their goal?
- How would they know when they had moved closer to their goal?

I noted down the pupil's answers on the sheet, checking that I had noted down the exact words they wanted me to write (see figure 4 for an example).

After the activities were completed, I gave each pupil an evaluation sheet (as before). This included some elements from the previous evaluation (such as how they felt, ideas for improvement etc.) and some additional sentence completion activities to encourage them to reflect on what had helped them and share what they were taking away.

The following section gives an individual overview of each pupil's engagement in phase 2: part 1. Overall findings are discussed towards the end of this chapter.

Robin

Analytic memo

Robin engaged very well with the PCP methods, though he did say that the activities became a little repetitive. He seemed relaxed and interested throughout.

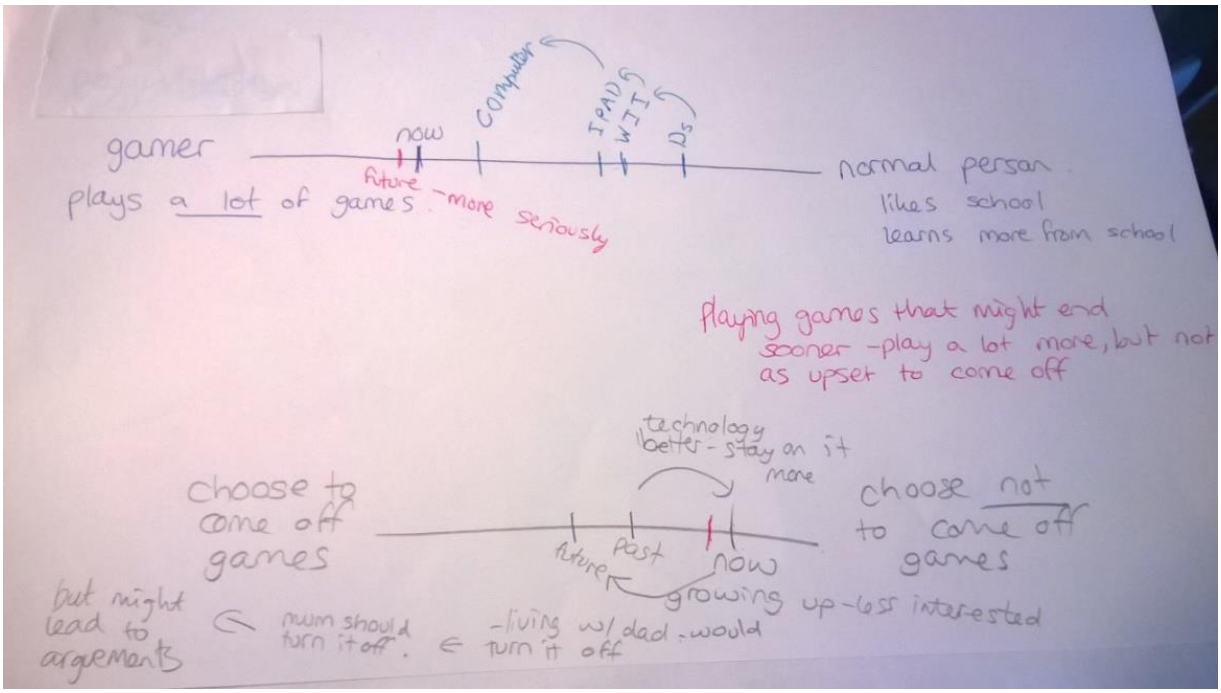
During the scaling activity, Robin shared a lot of information relating to his constructs, even coming up with ways to move closer to his ideal self. However, while he was able to say how he would change his behaviour, I felt as though his motivation to change was lacking.

Robin showed great awareness of his social difficulties, sharing that he knows he interrupts people and lacks interest in what they are saying. He recognised that this would impact on how other people see him and their willingness to interact with him.

The main themes that arose during the PCP work were around the impact of his gaming and relationships with others. It surprised me that little came up about his social skills.

I felt that he coped very well with the demands of the activities and in the next phase, would like to extend the complexity of the tasks to encourage a greater degree of self-reflection.

Figure 4: Example of Robin's scaling activity



Description of Robin's salmon line scaling activity:

The picture shows one of the bipolar constructs Robin came up with following the triadic sort technique ('gamer---normal person'). As can be seen from the salmon line at the top of the picture, he now plays more games than he did when he was younger (his first computer was a DS, then he had a WII etc.). Robin sees gaming as an important part of his future.

The other construct ('choose to come off games---choose not to come off games') was elicited during discussion of the first construct. Robin had indicated that he is becoming more engrossed in gaming. I explored this construct using the questions on page 87 (e.g. where do you currently see yourself on the line?) I asked how he might move to different parts on the line (as marked by Robin) and he made comments relating to his mum and dad.

What next? Further adaptations for Robin:

- Continued PCP activities to encourage Robin to extend his self-awareness.

- Methods that use/incorporate sorting or analytic skills, e.g. laddering, to elaborate constructs elicited.

Arty

Analytic memo

Arty was cheerful when he met me and seemed pleased to work with me again. He accepted most of what I had written on his pupil pen portrait, checking one aspect and adding another.

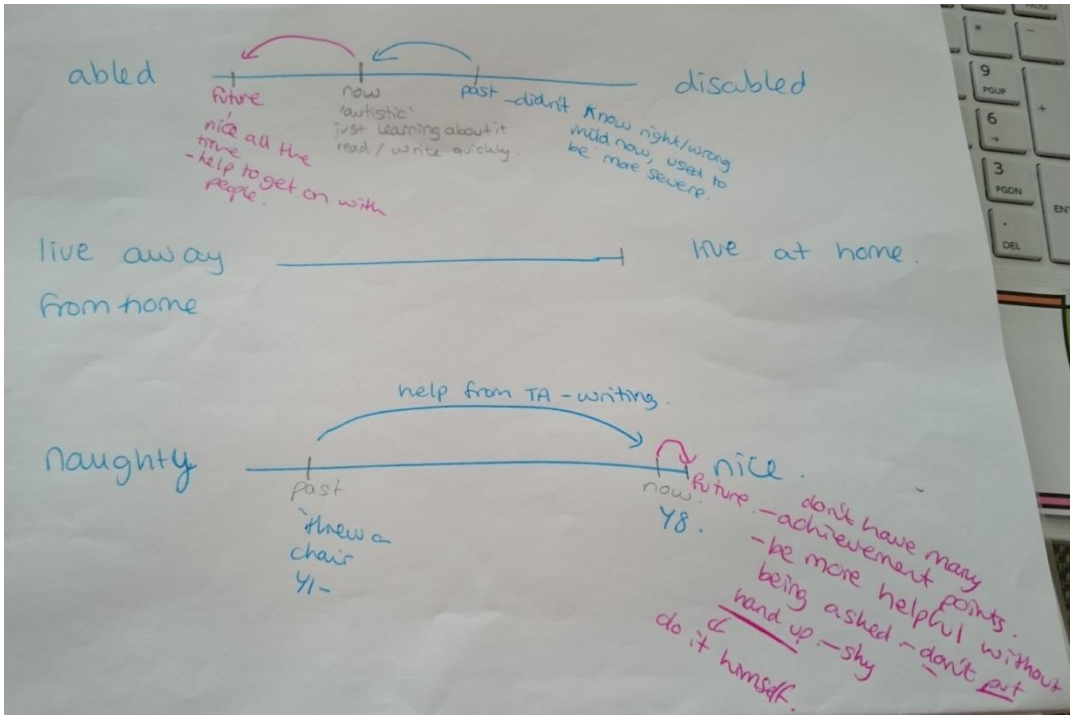
The most prominent feature that emerged throughout this session was the verbal language barrier. It was difficult to explain instructions and more abstract concepts in a way that Arty could understand. He had equal difficulty in expressing himself verbally, sometimes saying *'I can't explain it'.*

I did not have access to any assessment information relating to Arty, but suspect that he has significant difficulties with expressive and receptive language. I therefore need to provide a greater degree of adaptation to the methods I use with him to enable him to access them. Making comparisons between elements was too difficult a concept for Arty, so I think it would be best to focus on one element at a time to explore his constructs.

During the evaluation, Arty needed prompts and encouragement to say that he didn't like or found tasks difficult. Without this, I feel that he would have said that he had liked everything. His desire to please may make it difficult to know how much he has understood of what is going on around him.

Does Arty see himself as having difficulties? I wondered whether his engagement in the task related to his degree of self-awareness. If he is content the way he is, should I disrupt his emotional stability?

Figure 5: Example of Arty's scaling activity



Description of Arty's salmon line scaling activity:

The bipolar constructs shown in the picture were elicited by Arty during the triadic sort activity. We explored two of them in greater detail ('abled---disabled'; 'naughty---nice'). I asked the questions on page 87, e.g. where do you see yourself on the line now? Arty used a pencil to mark points in answer to my questions.

I further elaborated his comments by asking how he knew things were different. He was able to give further information, e.g. telling me that in the past he did not know right from wrong and that his disability is more 'mild' now.

What next? Further adaptations for Arty:

- Explanation of self-awareness in more concrete terms.

- Introduction of a PCP technique that is not reliant on verbal fluency e.g. portrait gallery (Butler and Green, 2007) or drawing 'me as I am'. This may tap into Arty's interest in art drawing to allow discussions to focus around one element.
- Have examples available to share/model.
- Word bank of emotions/personal characteristics available throughout the session.
- Visual sorting cards, to evaluate the session, reducing the need for him to use spontaneous language.

Charlie

Analytic memo

Charlie seemed relatively relaxed upon meeting with me again and told me about a book he had read recently.

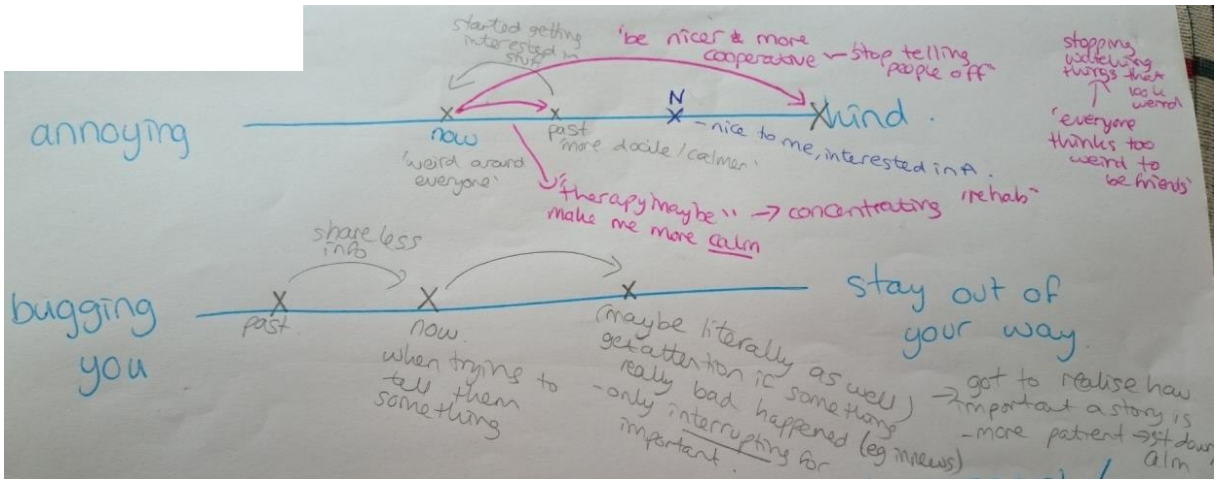
I thought that the main issues arising for Charlie within the session were related to his social skills and appearance to others. He seemed to be seeking support in managing his difficulties, mentioning a few times a desire for *"counselling"* and *"rehab"*.

I felt that he appeared less comfortable later in the session, during the PCP activities, perhaps as his focus was geared towards discussion around his current and ideal self. This may have made him think about ways that he does not like himself. To me, Charlie seemed to lack confidence in himself and his likeability.

I am unsure as to whether one would be able to support Charlie to reconstrue to see himself in a more positive way. Though he began talking about a desire to change, the methods I used in this session did not seem to 'loosen' his core constructs. I wonder what he took away from the session.

However, in completing the PCP activities, Charlie shared a greater amount of information relating to his self-awareness suggesting some degree of self-reflection.

Figure 6: example of Charlie's scaling activity



Description of Charlie's salmon line scaling activity:

The picture shows two of the bipolar constructs elicited during the triadic sort task ('annoying---kind; 'bugging you---stay out of your way'). The aim was to allow Charlie to think about the contrast between different times in his life and to support him to reflect upon how things might have/will change to explore his level of self-awareness.

I asked Charlie to first rate his current, past and ideal/future self, which he marked on the line. I used arrows to indicate potential movement and asked questions, such as 'how might you move closer to your goal?' and 'what support might you need to get there?' Charlie spontaneously commented on what might need to happen, e.g. 'therapy maybe; make me more calm.'

When exploring the second bipolar construct, I asked similar questions and Charlie shared his views, including some of the things he might want to do to move closer to his ideal self, e.g. 'get attention if something really bad happened'.

What next? Further adaptations for Charlie:

- Perhaps more focused discussions around what he wants to work on/ his social appeal and how this can improve.
- Sentence completion activities?
- Pyramid technique to make use of his analytic/organisation skills?
- Use of cards to evaluate.

Phase 2: part 2

Following the conclusions I made from phase 2; part 1, I created further resources and planned follow up PCP activities for each pupil. I then revisited them in school and attempted to engage them in modified PCP methods to extend their self-awareness skills. I also provided an adapted evaluation to allow them to give a greater amount of feedback regarding their work with me. In this phase I completely personalised the techniques I used; I will therefore discuss the specific PCP techniques for each pupil separately.

Overview of procedure

At the beginning of the final session, I shared each pupil's modified pupil pen portrait checking they were happy with the parts I had added. I then shared an explanation of self-awareness (based upon principles of social stories; appendix 10) to help pupils to further understand the concept and a word bank (appendix 23).

Following this, I began introducing the modified PCP methods (described for each pupil individually later in this section alongside their data).

At the end of each session, pupils completed an evaluation and were asked who they would like to share their pupil pen portrait with. I reminded them this was the last session working with me and thanked them for taking part.

Analysis

Following writing up the procedures for each pupil, I begin an analysis section where I discuss the overall findings for each pupil from phase 2 (part 1 and 2 combined).

I added new information shared during PCP activities to the pupil pen portrait, according to which theme it was related to. After phase 2: part 2, I finalised the document, adding in

additional information shared during the sessions (appendix 24). I forwarded this on to the school and their parents (as each had said they wanted to share it).

Robin

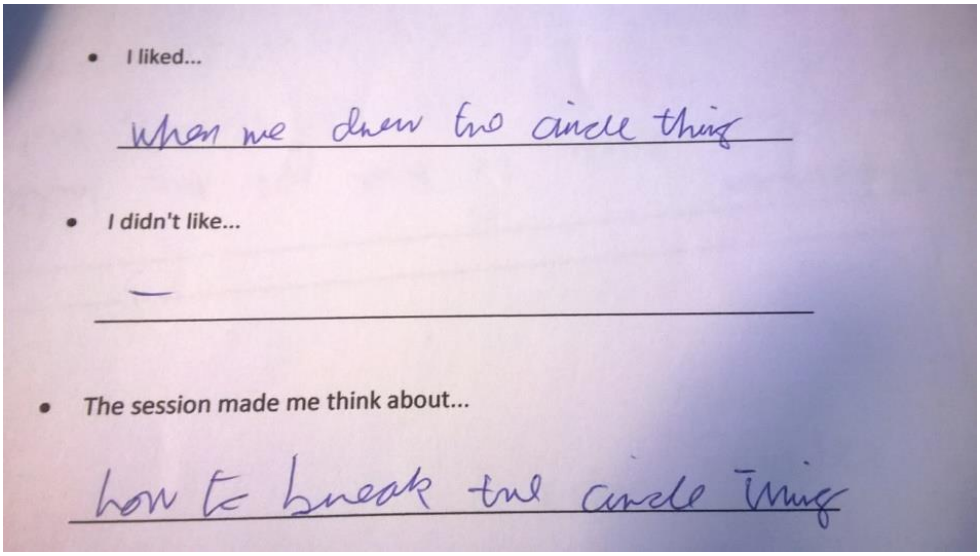
Modified techniques

As Robin had shown a good degree of understanding in the first stage of using PCP, I attempted to use a PCP laddering technique with him, choosing constructs from the previous section to elaborate upon.

Laddering (e.g. Butler and Green, 2007) aims to elicit increasingly super-ordinate (core) constructs. At the top of the 'ladder' are two polar constructs (I asked if we could discuss ’gamer---not a gamer' due to the saliency to Robin's story, though Butler and Green (2007) argue that the start point for laddering is immaterial). I then asked Robin about his preferred pole ('gamer'), which began the basis for our discussion. This was followed by me taking a questioning stance to get to the deeper core construct, e.g. ""how come it's important to get better at games?" and "why is it important that you play games for longer?" etc.

We then moved on to the polar side ('not a gamer') and I asked similar questions, e.g. "why does it matter if you don't play games as much?" and "why is being more social important?" Robin then elaborated further, giving insight into his related super-ordinate constructs (see figure 9).

Figure 7: Example of Robin's final evaluation



Analytic memo

As in the previous sessions with me, Robin was relaxed and 'chatty' throughout. When I began the first activity with Robin (laddering; see page 94), I did not seem to be eliciting deeper constructs; the first discussion mostly concerned behavioural aspects. However, I continued with laddering to elicit a second construct, and this did elicit a deeper discussion. Once this was complete, Robin looked at our first discussion and commented that he had not done it right. He subsequently followed the laddering questioning (with prompts from me) to engage in a deeper discussion. This suggests the uniqueness of the technique may have thrown him at first, but once familiar with the process he engaged very well.

Following my initial reservations that laddering was not helpful for Robin, he completely astounded me by then engaging in deeper discussions around the core constructs elicited. He came up with a circular explanation for his difficulties (with help from me) and was able to discuss the practical meaning of this in terms of making positive changes to his life (appendix 9). This PCP technique, therefore, allowed me to access some of Robin's core constructs, helping him to then make sense of these by discussing how they relate to other aspects of his life.

I continue to wonder about Robin's overall motivation to make a change within his life, particularly if this involves playing on his computer less, but the fact that he recognised how his behaviour might be impacting upon his social difficulties really impressed me.

I previously questioned myself: 'how would I know if Robin had reconstrued?' While the rigidity of his thinking was clear, I never would have imagined (upon first meeting with him) that he would be able to show such insights into himself and identify practical aspects of his life that may have reinforced other behaviours.

Through using PCP methods with Robin, he showed that he could extend his self-awareness in key areas that relate to the social interaction difficulties that he faces. This may suggest a key breakthrough for him to continue to better understand, and subsequently make changes, for the future, should he wish to.

He was keen for me to share his pen portrait with his mum and school staff; he asked if he could be there when I gave the feedback, perhaps showing how useful this process had been for him.

Arty

Modified techniques

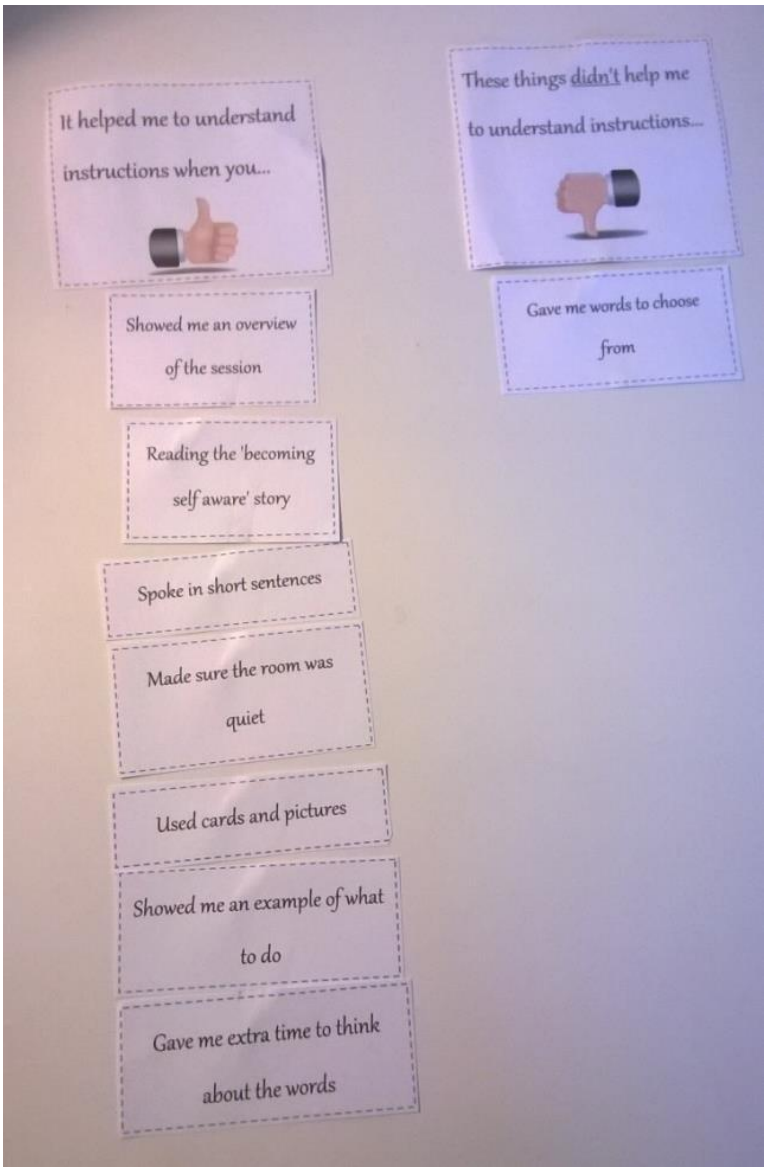
As Arty had found it difficult to engage in the triadic sort technique and had commented that this was difficult, I sought to use a technique that reduced the language demands even further and made use of his interest in drawing. I therefore introduced an activity called 'drawing me as I am' and asked Arty to draw himself doing something that he often does (described by Burnham, 2008). He carefully drew a detailed sketch of himself in his bedroom playing on the computer.

I followed this up with different questions, e.g. 'what's happening in the picture?', 'how are you feeling?' and 'what's important about this activity?' I was then able to explore his comments further and attempted to access polar constructs, e.g. 'how would you feel if you were not playing on your computer?' Arty made comments such as 'I feel happy' and 'I am on my own.'

I also introduced some salmon line scaling to explore how he currently sees himself in relation to the importance of game playing, beginning with the construct 'playing games all the time'. I drew a line and asked Arty what 'not playing games all the time' would look like and he replied 'bored', thus developing the bipolar construct 'playing games all the time---bored'. I then asked him to rate his current and ideal self to explore potential change over time.

To evaluate the session I gave Arty some cards with various statements (see figure 8) and asked him to sort them into 'it helped me to understand instructions when you' and 'these things didn't help me to understand instructions', and 'working with Gemma helped me to think about' and 'I am not really thinking about'. He was able to share those strategies he found helpful in following my instructions during the sessions.

Figure 8: Arty's evaluation of which strategies helped him to understand instructions



Analytic memo

Arty arrived to the session seeming relaxed and spoke with me about how his day was going.

It was immediately clear that Arty found this PCP activity more accessible. He seemed to enjoy drawing the picture and sharing this with me, speaking in great detail about the game he is currently playing. This dialogue was slightly surprising given that Arty had answered in short utterances in previous sessions.

I felt that I found out more about 'the real' Arty than I had in previous sessions, i.e. how important his gaming is and that it takes up a significant portion of his life. This also incidentally allowed me to learn more about his social relationships as he commented that he knows that other people from school play on the same game as him, but he only speaks with his one friend on there.

The extent of his social isolation had not really been revealed until this point and I feel that this activity really helped Arty to share his life with me in a way that would have been inaccessible to him through conversation alone (unless I had already known precisely what to ask him about). However, while I feel like I know him better, I am unsure about Arty's understanding of the significance of this. He did not identify that this is an area he would like to improve, suggesting that he does not 'see' how his gaming impacts on his relationships, despite previously commenting that he would like to be more 'popular'.

During the evaluation, Arty indicated that he had begun considering certain aspects about himself, including 'what I want in the future' and 'how I get along with people'. However, through my observations of him, I am unsure as to how much he has actually taken on board from the sessions, in terms of shifting his views about his own role in maintaining or changing his current situation. However, the PCP activities certainly enabled him to open up and share more of his constructs. It may be that prolonged work with Arty in this way, with consistent prompts around goal setting, would have allowed him to extend his self-awareness to a greater degree.

Charlie

Modified techniques

I attempted to use the PCP pyramid technique with Charlie, beginning with the constructs 'excited' and 'calm' that we had previously discussed as Charlie said that being calm was important to him. Pyramiding (described by Butler and Green, 2007) is described as a way of elaborating subordinate constructs (i.e. those with a behavioural element, lower down (towards the surface) within the sense of self hierarchy) making such constructs more concrete.

I chose the 'excited---calm' bipolar construct elicited in the previous session during the triadic sort technique. I wrote this at the bottom of the pyramid and asked Charlie to choose his ideal side of the pyramid (calm). I then began asking questions, e.g. 'how come this is preferred?' and 'what does that look like?' to work up this side. Once this had been elaborated we began on the other side, working our way up to the top.

I followed this up with a laddering technique (using the same construct - excited-calm) to attempt to elicit his core constructs. As before, I asked Charlie to choose his preferred pole (calm) and began with this. I asked questions, e.g. "Why is it important to be calm?" and "Why do you feel it is a good thing to be orderly?" Once Charlie had elaborated this side, we moved on to the polar side and worked down that side of the ladder, e.g. "what's so bad about being excited?" and "why does it matter if you don't know what you're doing?" (see figure 13).

Analytic memo

Charlie arrived to the session in a slightly agitated state; he commented immediately that he was unhappy as school had just decided to stop showing BBC News on the internal TVs. He said that he was concerned about this as if an emergency happened in the world, he would not know about it straight away. I therefore gave him some time to discuss this before starting the activities.

Once I had begun the pyramid technique, Charlie seemed to engage with the process and used the visual cues to expand on his comments, e.g. making one comment on each side of the triangle before moving on to the next. He focused on behavioural aspects, i.e. what he could see about people. It was sometimes difficult to follow Charlie's train of thought, perhaps making it difficult for me to relate to what he was telling me.

During the activities, I wondered about how significant the constructs that Charlie revealed were for him, i.e. were the constructs that emerged just on his mind that day due to a specific event, or did they have more of a consistent place within his world? I found it difficult to assimilate the constructs that he shared, perhaps as they did not fit with the issues that I believed were important to him.

Part of the premise of PCP relates to us accepting what a person tells us. Therefore, why do I feel that I needed to elicit different constructs? Does this relate to my own bias, in terms of finding information that I want to hear?

In a wider sense, Charlie showed extensions to some key areas, suggesting the PCP techniques I used allowed him to extend his insights into his social skills and psychological awareness, which had not been evident prior to using these techniques.

Phase 2 case study analyses

In this section, I discuss the extensions that pupils made following the use of PCP in phase 2 (parts 1 and 2 combined). Again, I have discussed the areas that appeared most significant to their story.

Robin

Analysis

Robin made the greatest extensions in constructs relating to self-awareness in areas of 'impact of social skills', 'psychological awareness', 'influence on self', 'future' and 'change over time'. Below, I have discussed those that seem to be the most important to Robin.

Psychological awareness

Through discussions using the laddering technique in phase 2: part 2, Robin showed a great degree of insight into his world. The 'core constructs' he shared (at the bottom of the ladder) were 'bullied' vs. 'less bullied', which he also related to aspects of a person's sociability and interest in games. He seemed to relate the behaviour that he shows to avoiding being bullied, i.e. reducing contact with others.

Following this, Robin went on to talk about how various aspects were impacting upon each other, thus reinforcing his lack of interest in people and the extent of his gaming. We developed this into a cycle (see figure 10).

Robin described his Asperger's as overarching all of his difficulties. He described how he was bullied in the past, which made him like people less, resulting in his playing games more. He became more engrossed in his games, which made him become less social, and therefore bullied more. We then went on to discuss how the cycle might be broken, thus making him

less engrossed in his games and more social. He thought that improving his social skills might help to improve things.

Robin came up with a few ideas of how he might reduce the amount of times he plays on games, e.g. *"start saving the game"* and *"being more prepared to stop"*. However, when exploring a scale based on constructs of 'choose to come off games' vs. 'choose not to come off games', Robin placed himself as being currently closer to the latter end. He thinks that he will move closer towards choosing to come off games when he gets older, suggesting less motivation to change at present.

Figure 9: Robin's laddering activity

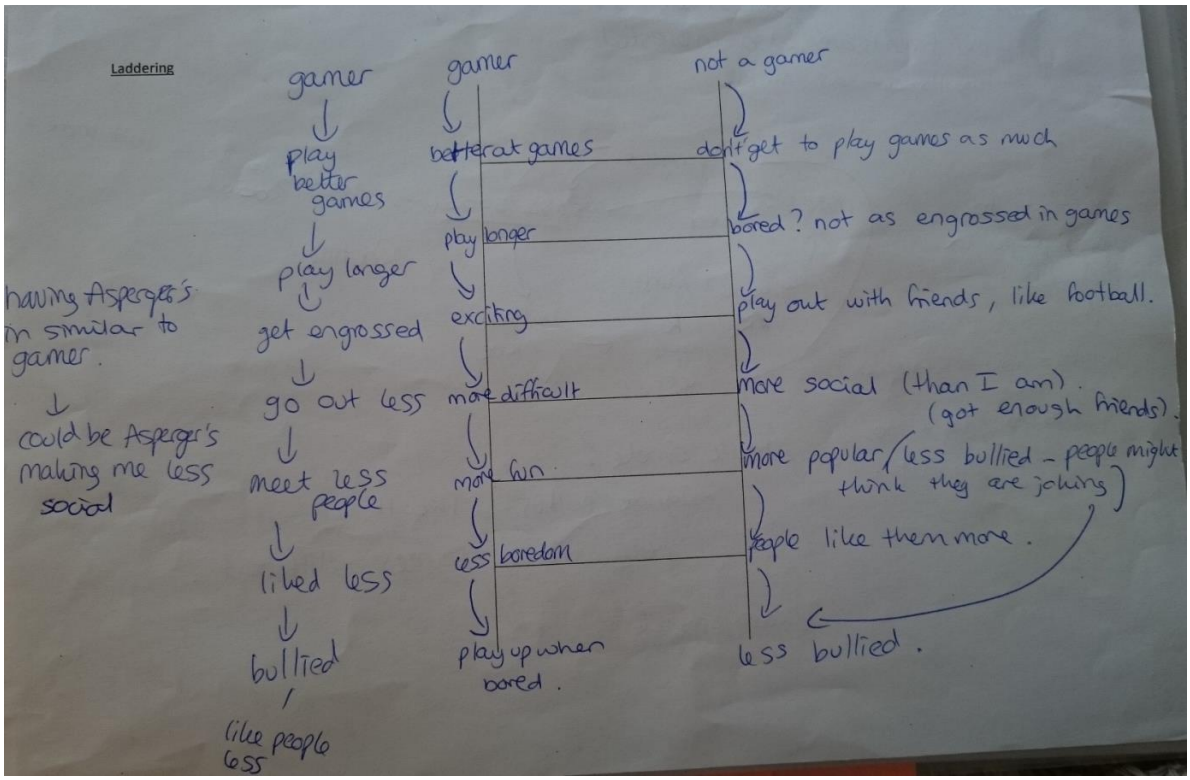


Figure 10: Robin's elaborated explanation of his cycle of social difficulties.

Impact of social skills

Robin elaborated upon his social skills, in particular, some of the behaviours that he shows that make it difficult for him to maintain positive relationships e.g. *"I'm kinder when off my games".* He appears to have a group of friends who have similar interests to him, though recognises adults aren't always interested when he talks about his games.

Summary

Robin seemed to show some key insights into his self-awareness following the use of PCP activities. He appeared to move from a relatively fixed view of his world in phase 1 to exploring ways in which he might be able to make changes to his life in phase 2. He did not come across as committed to making any changes, but showed awareness about how things might begin to be different. I felt that this showed a change to the constructs he shared in phase 1, perhaps showing that the activities created space for him to begin consider the significance of key elements of his core constructs, making some links to external factors, e.g. his relationships with others.

Arty

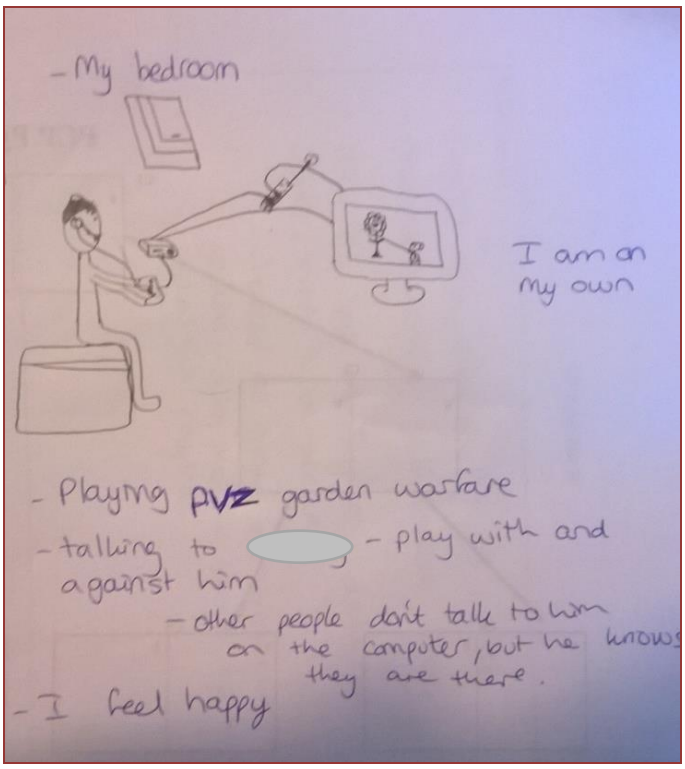
Analysis

The areas where Arty showed a degree of extension relating to his self-awareness were: 'impact of social skills', 'psychological awareness' and 'change over time'.

Impact of social skills

Arty's drawing depicted him in his bedroom playing on his computer (see figure 11, below). Through further discussion he revealed that he spends a significant amount of time in this scenario, i.e. away from his family. Arty did not show any acknowledgment or appreciation about how this might impact further on his social skills, though did comment that he speaks with one friend through the computer, though knows other people who play it (who do not invite him to play against them).

Figure 11: Arty's 'me as I am' drawing in phase 2: part 2



Change over time

Arty shared that he now feels less disabled by his autism than he used to, including being less 'naughty' and now knowing right from wrong. He commented that he is just learning about his autism, which may have allowed him to reflect upon how things were different in the past.

Comparatively, in the future, Arty said that he wants to be less disabled than he currently is by his autism, suggesting that he still sees himself as different to how he wants to be, which he attributes to his autism diagnosis. He found it difficult to think about how things might be different or what changes need to take place for this to happen.

Psychological awareness

Arty revealed a much greater degree of self-awareness relating to this area following this PCP activity. He identified a 'naughty-nice' construct, highlighting how he would like to be different in the future. He identified that moving further towards the 'nice' end would mean him gaining more achievement points in school.

He shared that he is 'shy' and doesn't put his hand up in class (which may get him extra points). This was one aspect that Arty felt was in his control to change, which would involve him making the effort to put up is hand in lessons.

In addition, during the 'drawing me as I am' activity he shared the significance of gaming in his life, something which had not come up previously. He identified how this interest can make him preoccupied in lessons, and how this is an area that he shows great concentration in comparison to his school work.

Summary

Arty was not able to engage in the multiple-element PCP activities of laddering or pyramiding techniques. However, he was able to tell me (inadvertently) about his degree of social isolation through a further modified technique. He also discussed constructs of naughty-nice, sharing ideas about what this would 'look like', identifying small behavioural changes he could make.

Charlie

Analysis

The most prominent areas that Charlie revealed a greater insight into, following the use of PCP in this phase, were: 'psychological awareness', 'impact of social skills' and 'influence on self'.

Psychological awareness

Key constructs that emerged for Charlie in phase 2 related to: 'annoying-kind', 'danger-less in danger' and 'excited-calm'. He commented that he thought his behaviours were more in line with an 'annoying', 'excited' and 'in danger' profile, seeming to link the latter of these two factors together. However, he did not seem to accept that some of the behaviours described on his ideal pole of 'less in danger' (e.g. 'be orderly') may already be in line with his behaviour in school.

Figure 12: Charlie's pyramid technique

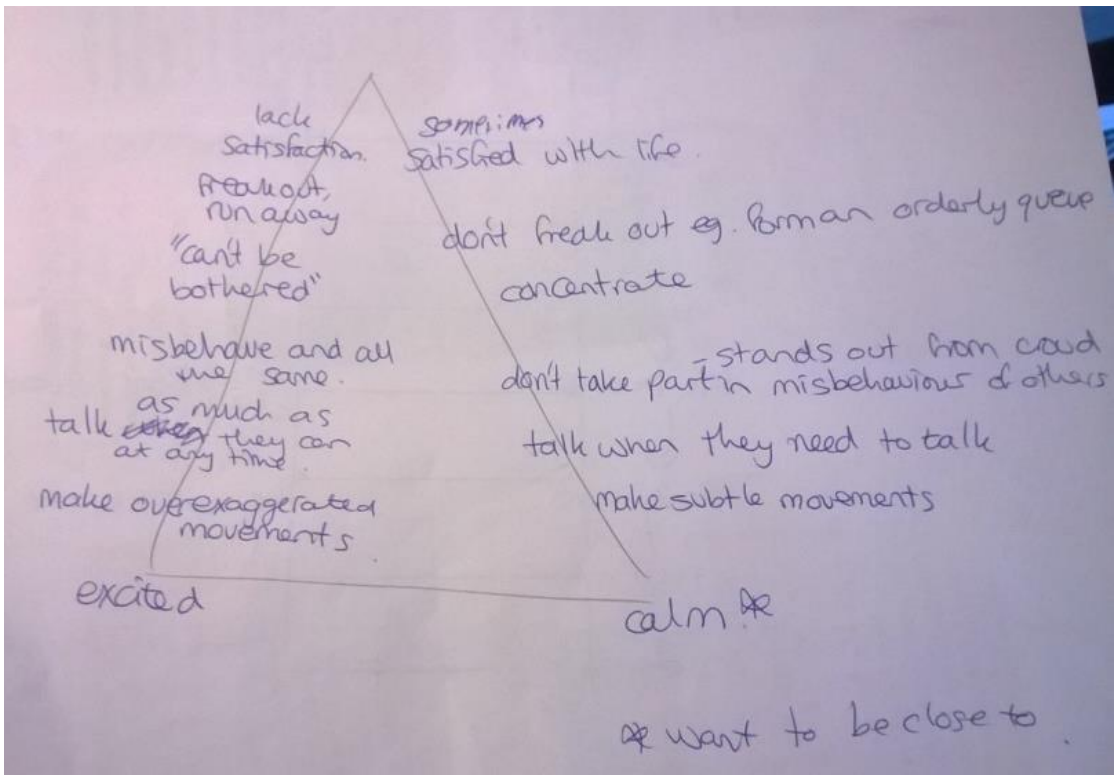
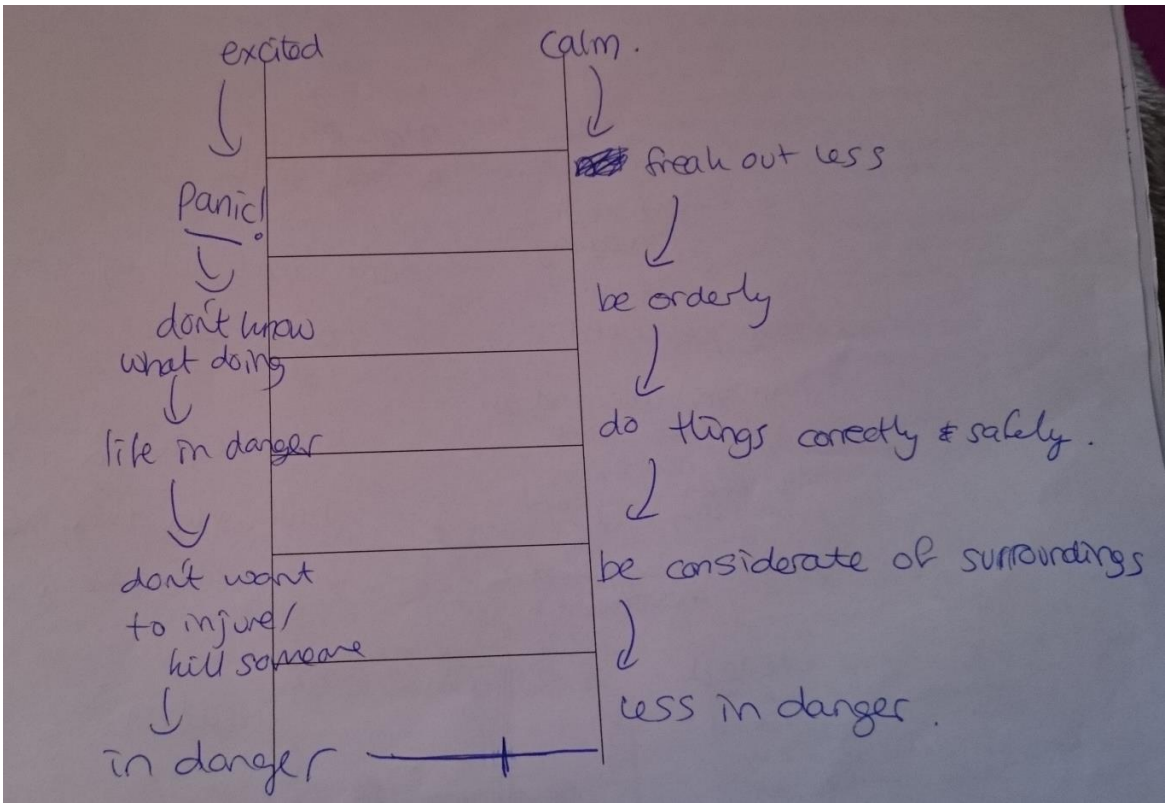


Figure 13: Charlie's laddering technique



Impact of social skills

Charlie showed extensions in this area relating to how other students perceive him and why he might have difficulties making friends. For example, commenting that he often interrupts people to tell them information that they are probably not interested in. He finds it difficult to keep information to himself once he has thought about it. Charlie identified some ways he might be able to change, e.g. 'only interrupting people with very important information'. He also linked this to how calm he is, saying that this would help him not to interrupt people.

Influence on self

While there was only a small amount of information relating to this area, I felt that it was prominent to Charlie's story. He made numerous comments about needing *"therapy...rehab even"* in relation to making him more 'calm'. He therefore identified a need for other people to help him to change, suggesting he has little awareness of his role within this process.

Summary

Through laddering techniques, Charlie's core constructs related to 'danger-less in danger', with him saying he is closer to the 'danger' side of the pole, but would prefer to be closer to 'not in danger'. While this did not seem to mean much to me (from my 'curious' stance) the behavioural manifestations relating to 'excited' (shown through the pyramid technique) were around him showing exaggerated movements or talking a lot. He previously mentioned that others' found these behaviours 'annoying', suggesting that he may have related this construct to his social skills

Comparisons across the data

The table below shows the number of unique constructs elicited in each phase, relating to each area of self-awareness. This allows cross comparisons of the individual data. Following this table, I discuss the key points arising from this data analysis, including what I felt phase 2 added to the pupils' self-awareness (summary of learning across phase 1 and 2).

Table 5: matrix analysis table

		Constructs relating to areas of self-awareness			
		Robin	**Arty**	**Charlie**	**Sonny**
PCP/phase	**Phase 1** 'Self awareness interview' Baseline measure (not PCP)	Impact of social skills I sometimes find social situations hard. I can act stupid and mess up. Sometimes other people are unkind to me or bully me. In the past, I have been in conflict with others. Sometimes I find it hard getting on with my mum and dad. We don't always have the same point of view.	Impact of social skills I would like to be popular as it would mean that people know me. It is important to be kind and friendly so that people like me.	Impact of social skills I'm not good with conversations, which can make it hard to make friends. I might have more friends if I were better at conversations.	Impact of social skills It is important to be helpful when people have accidents.
		Comparative attributes I am different to other people. I	Comparative attributes Other people don't care about	Comparative attributes I have different interests to	Comparative attributes There are people who are kind

		have Asperger's, which makes me have different qualities. I know some people who might be the same as me. My past experiences have shaped the person I am today, making me unique. Other people can be similar to me, but not exactly the same.	the same things that I do. I think that I am different in some ways to other people, such as my voice, my looks and my age. I know that I am me because of my game tag. I know people who have the same interests as me.	other people my age. I am unique. I correct people, such as teachers, which is quite unique to me. I have autism, which is a double-edged sword.	friendly like I am. I am different from other people because of my looks.
		<u>Psychological awareness</u> I like being thought of as clever. I don't want to be stupid. I spend a lot of time thinking about the meaning of life. I consider spiritual aspects, such as afterlife. I'm good with computers and technology. I like being unique. I develop my own theories about the world and why things happen. I don't have all the answers to the questions I raise.	<u>Psychological awareness</u> I think that it is important to learn well. I don't like being autistic as I don't learn things as well. I don't like noisy environments.	<u>Psychological awareness</u> I don't like the fact that I can't concentrate. This might cause something negative to happen in my future. It is important that I do my best to make my hopes and dreams come true. I don't want to be a stroppy teenager. I'm proud when I try new things. I sometimes cry a lot. I should stop doing this so much. I think it is important to show our emotions. I don’t like noisy environments. It bothers me that I am different	<u>Psychological awareness</u> I am happy as I am. I want to stay happy and I don't want to be sad or angry. I am sometimes angry. I am addicted to games. I am good at sports. I don't like football. I have been stressed out and worried before because of assessments and school work. I don't like tests or full on writing. Homework stresses me out. I like how my parents take care of me. I am proud that I achieved my

				to other people. Sometimes I don't like that I have autism. I don't like being put under pressure. I like to collect things. I want to get rid of my fear of heights.	level targets. This is important to me so I can get a good job.
		<u>Personal attributes</u> I am a gamer and a nerd. I have Asperger's. I'm good at technology, but not good socially. I'm sometimes funny. I can be selfish or spoilt. I'm philosophical and I'm clever. I am aware of what is going on around me, more than people sometimes realise.	<u>Personal attributes</u> I am kind and friendly. I am a perfectionist.	<u>Personal attributes</u> I'm shy and quiet. I have a broad imagination. I am not a loner or a mute. I am not a "thief".	<u>Personal attributes</u> I'm smart and a bit funny. I'm not a pushy person or a sad person. I'm a happy person and kind.
		<u>Stable characteristics</u> My Asperger's is a stable characteristic, meaning that I will always be great with computers, bad with social. I might get used to it more in time. My unique experiences will always be the same.	<u>Stable characteristics</u> I always need glasses.	<u>Stable characteristics</u> I have always needed glasses. I am always an optimist. The amount of work I have to do stays the same.	<u>Stable characteristics</u> My terrible eyesight stays the same. My happiness stays the same. I would like my kindness to stay the same.

		My view of the world will mostly stay the same.			
		<u>Change over time</u> I think I will be different in 5 years. My thoughts about the world might develop. I am different now compared to when I was younger. I used to have lots of friends and was well respected. I now know that I have Asperger's. People change when they get older, they are more concerned about what other people think of them. I have changed physically over the years. Change happens slowly, over time.	<u>Change over time</u> I might have more interests when I am older. I am much calmer and kinder now compared to when I was younger.	<u>Change over time</u> I change as I get older. I have become happier and more eager. I used to have a temper when I was younger. My voice and mood have changed. I might change when I become a teenager. When I get older, I will be preparing for work, so will be on my games less.	<u>Change over time</u> I have changed over time. I have gone from being shy to being happier and cooperative. I used to be naughty but now I am kind. I think I'll be different when I get older. I will be studying different subjects. I won't be with my friends in lessons. My voice will change when I get older. My future goals changed as I got older.
		<u>Future considerations</u> I want to be kind, different to my dad. I would like to work with computers, possibly in coding if I can learn the skills I need.	<u>Future considerations</u> In the future I would like to work with video games and editing.	<u>Future considerations</u> When I am an adult, I want to live in New York and work in the new World Trade Centre. I would like to get married. I want to be able to cope with	<u>Future considerations</u> I would like to be an actor or a TV show host in the future. I hope that my future dreams come true. I want to be a really helpful

		I want to do something useful with my life, like invent or create something.		working long hours. I'm trying to learn stocks for my future career.	person. I would like to do a job that I can manage.
		<u>Influence on self</u> I'm not controlled by my Asperger's. I think that people's choices influence their opportunities. People can change if they choose to. Environmental factors can influence who a person becomes.	<u>Influence on self</u> Being around certain people has helped shape who I am. My friend got me into computer games. I think that I will stay the same person forever.	<u>Influence on self</u> The internet has shaped my interests. My parents have shaped who I am today. My choices influence what I do and who I am.	<u>Influence on self</u> My friends helped me become the person I am today. My education was important in shaping who I am.
	Phase 2, part 1 'Triadic sort technique'	<u>Impact of social skills</u> My gaming has an impact on my kindness. I can interrupt people. I don't always pay attention or listen to others. I want people to be able to talk to me and trust me.	<u>Impact of social skills</u>	<u>Impact of social skills</u> I tell off other students, which annoys them. I can be annoying and seem weird to others. I sometimes interrupt people with information they are not interested in. I want to become calmer and less annoying so I have more friends.	<u>Impact of social skills</u> I often hang out on my own at school. I would like to have more friends and hang out with them. I would like to know what they get up to. I find it hard to get to know people because of my social difficulties.

		Comparative attributes	Comparative attributes	Comparative attributes I see the world differently, which makes it difficult for me to fit in.	Comparative attributes My friends don't have the same difficulties as me. I am autistic, which means that I don't have as many friends and do some things differently to others.
		Psychological awareness I want to become a better person.	Psychological awareness I want to be more helpful and get more achievement points in school. Being shy stops me from putting my hand up in class.	Psychological awareness Sometimes I have low self-esteem.	Psychological awareness Assessments and tests make me feel angry. I also feel angry when I lose my video game. Monday's and homework make me feel sad. I enjoy school, spending time with my parents and playing video games.
		Personal attributes I'm not very trustworthy. Gaming is a big part of my life.	Personal attributes I am good with devices. I am nice. I am shy.	Personal attributes I am a perfectionist.	Personal attributes
		Stable characteristics	Stable characteristics	Stable characteristics	Stable characteristics
		Change over time I recognise my need to change how much I play on my games.	Change over time I used to be naughty; this change happened over time. I used by be more disabled by my autism when I was younger.	Change over time	Change over time I found it hard moving from primary to secondary school as I missed my old friends.

		Future considerations I think that need to come of my games to reach my future goals, but I lack the motivation to do this at present.	Future considerations I want to become nicer and less disabled by my autism when I am older.	Future considerations	Future considerations
		Influence on self If my parents turned off my computer, I would game less. I will choose to come off my games when I get older. Currently, I am more motivated towards continuing with my games than I am to choosing to come off them.	Influence on self Adults in school have helped me to learn. I can choose to put my hand up in class and become less shy.	Influence on self I need help from others to change who I am.	Influence on self I think that teaching assistants could help me to improve my social skills. I could also spend more time with my peers so that I can get to know them better.
	Phase 2, part 2 Robin - 'laddering technique' Arty - 'me as I am' drawing	Impact of social skills I start a lot of sentences with 'I played...' My friends are interested in these conversations, but adults not so much.	Impact of social skills I spend a lot of time on my own in my bedroom playing computer games. I sometimes talk to my friend through the computer while we are playing a game. Other people who I know from school don't talk to me on the computer.	Impact of social skills	Impact of social skills
		Comparative attributes I start a lot of sentences with 'I played...' My friends are	Comparative attributes	Comparative attributes	Comparative attributes

	Charlie - 'pyramid and laddering technique' Sonny - 'portrait gallery' drawing*	interested in these conversations, but adults not so much.			
		Psychological awareness I am stuck in a cycle whereby my poor social skills mean that I am bullied more, which makes me like people less and therefore play on my games more. If I didn't play on games so much, I might develop my social skills.	Psychological awareness Playing on my computer games makes me happy. I would be bored if I did not play. I can concentrate for a long time when I am playing computer games, but not in my lessons at school. I often think about playing on my computer when I am at school.	Psychological awareness I worry about bad things happening in the world, e.g. if the country is attacked by terrorists I want to be calmer so that I am less in danger.	Psychological awareness
		Personal attributes	Personal attributes	Personal attributes	Personal attributes
		Stable characteristics	Stable characteristics	Stable characteristics	Stable characteristics
		Change over time I have become more engrossed in gaming as I have got older.	Change over time	Change over time	Change over time
		Future considerations I might need to improve my social skills for job interviews in the future.	Future considerations	Future considerations	Future considerations In the future, I want to be happy, in a job that I like that isn't too hard. I would also like to be less autistic so I have more friends and am more social.

		Influence on self But it has an impact on my social skills.	Influence on self	Influence on self	Influence on self

* see appendix X for a description of the 'portrait gallery' activity

Key themes from matrix analysis

The matrix framework (table 5) allowed me to explore key similarities and differences amongst the pupils in the different phases:

- All pupils shared information relating to each area of self-awareness during phase 1.
- Arty shared the least information relating to constructs of self-awareness compared to others in phase 1. For example, in the area of 'future considerations', he revealed just one construct: 'In the future I would like to work with video games and editing'.
- Robin consistently shared the highest frequency of constructs relating to self-awareness in all phases. For example, in phase 1, he revealed the following in relation to 'influence on self':
    - 'I'm not controlled by my Asperger's'.
    - 'I think that people's choices influence their opportunities'.
    - 'People can change if they choose to'.
    - 'Environmental factors can influence who a person becomes'.
- Charlie and Sonny showed the least extensions to self-awareness in phase 2: part 2, compared to the others. For example, Charlie only shared information in the area of 'psychological awareness', which included: ' I want to be calmer so that I am less in danger'.
- Techniques in phase 2: part 1 supported extensions to self-awareness in a variety of areas. All pupils showed a degree of extension to their self-awareness in areas of 'psychological awareness', 'personal attributes' and 'influence on self'. For example, in the area of 'influence on self', Arty shared: 'I can choose to put my hand up in class and become less shy'.

- In phase 2: part 2, pupils showed greater extensions to their self-awareness in areas of 'impact of social skills' and 'psychological awareness'. For example, in the area of 'impact of social skills', Robin shared: 'I start a lot of sentences with "I played..." My friends are interested in these conversations, but adults not so much'.

- Techniques in phase 2: part 1 seemed to be less specific/focused (in terms of extensions to areas of self-awareness) compared to phase 2: part 2.

- Overall, the pupils shared less information in relation to constructs of self-awareness in phase 2 than in phase 1. This could relate to the interview questions in phase 1 being directly targeted towards the area of interest, whereas the PCP activities included much wider discussions at an in-depth level.

Summary of learning across phase 1 and 2

It seems whilst the quantity of information shared in phase 2 appeared less than phase 1, the information elicited tended to be focused more upon the pupils' making sense of themselves and linking up different areas. This perhaps suggests that PCP allowed pupils the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences and what their understanding of themselves.

For example, while Robin shared a great degree of information relating to self-awareness in phase 1, his points came across as relatively fixed and I felt that he lacked a strong sense of agency. He commented that people can change if they want to, but did not give any indication of what or how this might relate to him personally.

Comparatively, in phase 2: part 2 Robin shared a notion of how his behaviour (playing on computer games) might be directly impacting upon his own identified areas of difficulty (social skills), showing that he had begun to make links between various aspects of himself (as seen in figure 10).

Through engagement in PCP activities, there seemed to be a qualitative shift in terms of his understanding of himself that he seemed to relate to on a deeper level, which had not emerged during phase 1.

When looking at Charlie's data, while he did not show a great amount of extensions, following PCP, within phase 2 he began to discuss how others might view the more 'annoying' aspects of his behaviour, which he somewhat related to how they interact with him. While seemingly quite a small shift compared to the comments he made in phase 1, he seemed to begin to make some links across different areas of self-awareness.

Therefore, the usefulness of PCP might relate more to quality of extensions to self-awareness (in terms of allowing the pupils to make more sense of themselves) rather than just the quantity of information shared. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Personal application of results

Main research question:

Research question: 'How can I use PCP to elicit the self-awareness skills of pupils with a diagnosis of ASD?'

I completed a thematic analysis on my 'analytic memos' using steps described by Braun and Clarke (2006). My analytic memos included the events that occurred (i.e. what happened in the sessions), my thoughts or action in the sessions, any key observations that I noted and data from the pupil evaluations.

The steps that I followed were:

- Phase 1 - *familiarise yourself with the data*. I read and re-read my analytic memos, considering the meanings and patterns arising. I made some notes alongside the text.
- Phase 2 - *generating initial codes*. At this stage my analysis was data-driven, as I did not have any predefined ideas or literature relating to what I might find, other than attempting to answer my research question. I therefore highlighted words or phrases in the text that seemed relevant in helping me to answer this, attempting to keep the extracts in context of the surrounding data. I then compiled a list of each of the codes I had highlighted.
- Phase 3 - *searching for themes*. I cut up my list of codes and began sorting them into 'themes', looking for those that seemed to link together. I initially had 12 themes (see figure 14).
- Phase 4 - *reviewing themes*. I returned to my initial 12 themes and began to consider whether they were discrete or if I could collapse some into each other. Some data seemed to meaningfully group together, e.g. certainty, my uncertainty and

expectations, whereas others remained alone, e.g. language barrier. I again read through each of the codes that I had grouped together to ensure that they formed a coherent pattern. Following this exercise, I finalised themes and sub-themes, where appropriate, creating a 'thematic map' (see figure 14). Braun and Clarke (2006) describe this stage as fluid, as one can continue to refine and re-code data, modifying one's thematic map. However, as Braun and Clarke advise, and in relation to time constraints associated with this research project, I finalised my themes when I felt they were a 'good fit' and accurately represented the data (when further refinements seemed to add nothing substantial).

- Phase 5 - *defining and naming themes*. I finalised the name of each theme and sub-theme, ensuring an accurate representation of the codes within them. The majority of these remained the same as within the thematic map as they were a good fit to the data. There were five themes and six subthemes in total.

The main themes that I found, and an overview of their content, were:

- **Language barrier** - this was a frequent issue that arose in the sessions, impacting upon how the pupils were able to access the material and share their thoughts with me. For example, *"he had equal difficulty expressing himself verbally"* (analytic memo, page 90) and *"[Arty] appeared unable to say that he did not know or that he had finished answering"* (analytic memo, page 82).

- **My response** - I made frequent adaptations based upon how the pupils were engaging with the material I presented to them, including giving prompts, using visuals and altering my language. For example, *"Charlie seemed to engage in the process and used the visual cues to expand on his comments"* (analytic memo, page 104) and *"Arty needed prompts and encouragement to say that he didn't like, or found tasks difficult"* (analytic memo, page 90).

- **Practitioner reactions** - relating to my feelings of certainty/uncertainty around the pupil's response and how this confirmed or altered my original expectations. For example, *"I am unsure as to how much he has taken on board from the sessions" (analytic memo, page 102)* and *"I found it difficult to assimilate the constructs that he shared, perhaps as they did not fit with the issues that I believed important to him?"* (analytic memo, page 104).

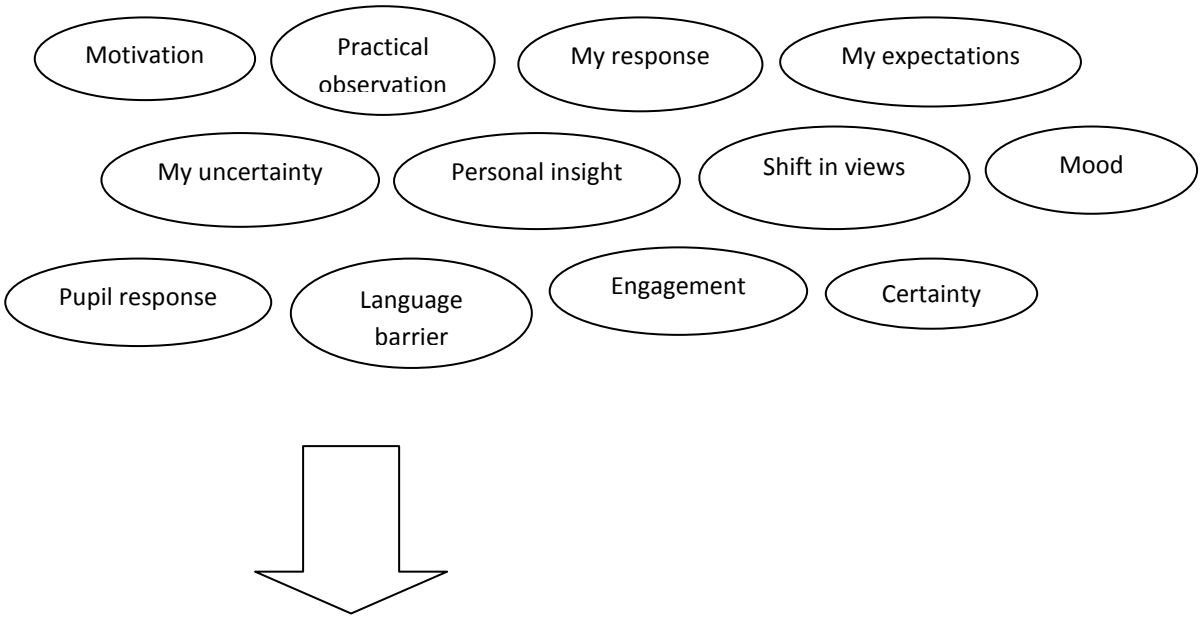
- **Pupil mood** - this was a key indicator during the sessions and related to pupil engagement, which impacted upon my feelings of success and achievement. For example, *"[Robin] seemed relaxed and interested throughout* (analytic memo, page 88) and *"Charlie arrived to the session in a slightly agitated state"* (analytic memo, page 104).

- **Pupil response** - relating to pupil response to the techniques I used, i.e. if they made extensions to their self-awareness or found the task difficult to engage with (observed through their behaviour). For example, *"it was immediately clear that Arty found this PCP activity more accessible. He seemed to enjoy drawing the picture"* (analytic memo, page 102) and *"the PCP technique therefore allowed me to access some of Robin's core constructs, helping him to then make sense of these by discussing how they relate to other aspects of his life"* (analytic memo, page 99).

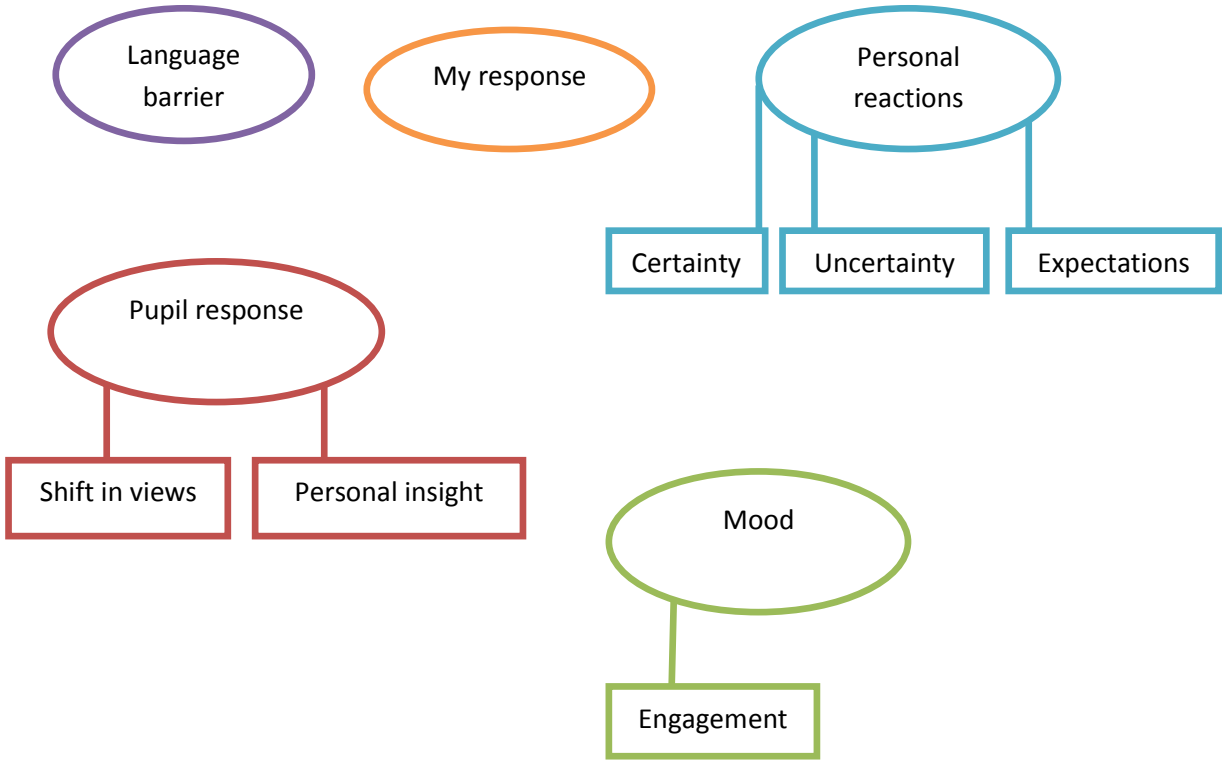
It seems that these themes relate more to the skills that I employed, as a practitioner, and how I came to notice and subsequently adapt my practice based upon the pupils' responses. For example, if pupils were showing difficulties in expressing themselves or understanding the language I used, I altered this or incorporated additional visual cues to support them to engage.

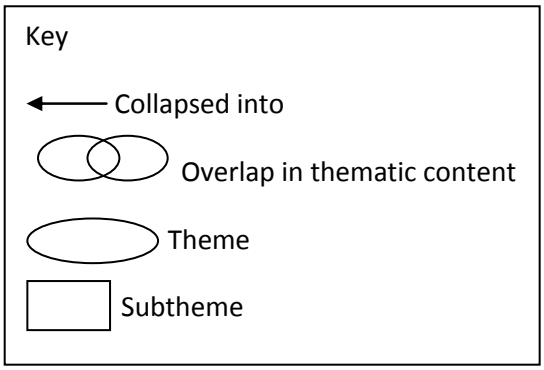
These themes are discussed further in the next chapter in relation to my overall conclusions and interpretations.

Figure 14 - overview of thematic analysis process



Thematic map





CHAPTER 5: SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSIONS

For this research project, I decided to investigate the use of PCP with pupils with a diagnosis of ASD; an area I considered important to my practice as an EP. My research into the area highlighted 'self-awareness' as a focal point for PCP and skill that would be beneficial for those with ASD to develop to potentially improve wellbeing.

I chose to adopt an AR design to allow me to develop my own practices and explore a PCP approach from a pragmatic standpoint. It was important that within my design I could change or develop different practices according to the needs of those involved. This work allowed me to gain an insight into whether I had been able to elicit aspects pupils' self-awareness (and if so, in what ways), and explore which tools/approaches had worked the best.

Engaging in an AR study, as a practitioner, did not lead me to develop specific outcomes, but allowed me to continue to reflect upon my practices and the tools I used; this study served as a starting point for my future skill development; as noted by Brydon-Miller et al (2003, p.11) "action research is a work in progress".

This chapter will summarise the key findings from my research, including the use of PCP, the extensions that pupils made to their self-awareness, and what I learnt in terms of how I was able to make modifications during the sessions to suit the needs of the pupils. I sum up this chapter by highlighting the limitations and discussing implications for practice and future research.

Key findings

How can I use PCP to elicit the self-awareness skills of pupils with a diagnosis of ASD?

My key findings fall into two main areas: 'processes of application' and 'use of PCP'. I will talk about each of these areas in turn before summarising with overall conclusions. I have attempted to address the specific sub-research questions raised at the end of chapter 2, as well as some additional points that appeared relevant to include.

Processes of application

What modifications were helpful and how did I decide which adjustments to make?

As highlighted in the thematic analysis, the modifications that I made were based upon the response of the pupils in the sessions. I used my observations, reflections of pupil reactions and comments made in the pupil evaluations to inform this. I did not make any universal changes, but some common factors were around the accessibility of the PCP techniques, i.e. incorporating visuals to explain the processes and increasing structure and visual cues.
I used my knowledge of 'what works' to support pupils with a diagnosis of ASD, e.g. including the use of visuals to support understanding. I took ideas from the literature about the changes that I could make, e.g. using a comic strip conversation and creating a card sort activity to allow pupils to evaluate the sessions in a more accessible way.

In addition, the PCP methods that I chose incorporated visual cues anyway, such as drawing or sorting cards according to different constructs. I knew from previous publications (e.g. NIHCE, 2013) that such methods would be the most appropriate to use with this population. If pupils found the tasks difficult, I simplified the activity even further by reducing the number of concepts that the pupil had to focus on, e.g. I prompted Arty to

draw a picture, focusing on just one pole of his core constructs, as he had found the Triadic Sort technique difficult to complete. Therefore, as PCP naturally incorporates many features that this population tend to find helpful, the techniques do not need a great deal of modification from their original description; this means that the practitioner would need to be aware of the available PCP activities and choose the one that best fits the child's profile.

Some of the challenges in this research were around my own uncertainty and assimilating the information that the pupils gave into my own expectations. For example, I found Charlie's final session (phase2: part 2) difficult in terms of following the structure I had planned and fully understanding the points he was making. While PCP advocates for taking what a person says at face value, he made comments that I had not expected and were not in line with what I thought his core constructs might be (based on previous comments he had made). I had to make a conscious effort to listen to him and not lead the conversation according to my agenda. I was unsure how valuable this session had been for him, as he made the least extensions to his self-awareness in this phase.

What sense did I make of my role in the process?

Through conducting a thematic analysis on my analytic memos, I highlighted a number of key themes relating to what I learnt, noticed or felt to be important in the sessions. The main themes were: language barrier; my response; practitioner reactions; pupil mood; and pupil response.

These themes highlight that something else was going on in the sessions, other than the use of a particular tool, i.e. the outcomes of the session were influenced by the combination of the individuality of each pupil and the skills and experience of the practitioner (myself). This means that I was constantly judging and responding to the behaviour, mood and engagement that the pupils were showing, using skills to support them as needed. This also

involved managing my own feelings, including uncertainty, and how I may have altered or adjusted my expectations and behaviour based upon this.

These themes therefore emphasise that there is a greater complexity than first considered, and that to answer my research question, I must consider different factors; how pupils engage with materials and make extensions to their self-awareness; practitioner skills (i.e. noticing and responding) and the PCP methods themselves.

In some ways, this was a surprising outcome as I was initially focused upon the utilisation of PCP techniques. However, in hindsight, it seems inevitable that practitioner skills would be important in order to successfully implement an intervention, e.g. as recommended by the 'You Need to Know Campaign' (NAS, 2010). It is not, therefore, enough to be knowledgeable and skilled about using PCP, but there is a need to also for a practitioner to develop their other skills, e.g. creativity and rapport/relationship skills. Towards the end of this chapter (under the heading 'educational psychology profession'), I sum up my key learning as a list of suggestions for future practice.

Previous research in the area did not focus upon practitioner skills when exploring the efficacy of PCP, e.g. Williams and Hanke (2007) explored the use of a PCP tool specifically, though did not address the skills that the practitioner might have needed to engage with and support the pupils to access the material. I feel that my results signify the importance of this, where other studies have lacked consideration of the importance of such skills.

Some authors write about AR as being an ongoing process, throughout a person's career. For example, Brydon-Miller et al (2003) report comments from practitioners who engage in a continuous cycle of improving their action research skills, which impact on their practice, and which subsequently improves their action research skills etc. For me, I can see how this process would be ongoing as I begin to work as a qualified EP. As I engage in more PCP work

with children and young people, I will continue to reflect, notice and adjust my practice, thus continuing to develop as a practitioner. I may also extend my action research skills into other areas of my work, e.g. if seeking to improve my skills in a particular area.

What have I learnt?

While each of the pupils had a diagnosis of ASD, I did not use the same PCP tools with each of them; to do so, I felt would have been a reductionist way of working. Though I already valued the importance of individual difference, this study taught me that intervention tools need to be flexible, and practitioners skilled enough to be able to adapt them accordingly. In this study, the overall outcomes were different for each pupil, though this finding is in line with the expectations of a PCP approach generally.

The principles of action research highlight how reflection must be embedded within any research; in this study, such practices enabled me to consider and act upon key factors. While my first sessions with the pupils focused upon building a relationship, I continued to develop this with pupils depending upon their response and reactions, as highlighted in the thematic analysis. For example, if I noticed they seemed uneasy about something, I adapted the session to give them space to discuss this, using my active listening skills to help them to relax. I therefore could not just rely on the knowledge that we had built rapport, but continue to notice and respond to pupils. I have learnt the importance of prioritising and actively managing rapport and relationships with pupils, ensuring I consider my role in maintaining boundaries and expectations for both the child and myself.

It was important to me that pupil voice was embedded within this study from the beginning. However, it emerged that some pupils found this more difficult than others (i.e. due to the language barrier). Rather than sticking to my original plan, it was necessary to create new

ways to allow pupils to engage with this process, for example, creating additional resources and developing ways to interact with pupils who found language a barrier.

I needed to be constantly aware of what was happening and could not just 'go through the motions', even when I had experienced a similar session just before. This highlights the constant need for an individualistic approach when working with children and young people.

This factor also includes working to advocate for the pupils involved, developing means for them to share their views, beliefs and wishes, rather than repeating neuro-typical expectations. This is a difficult and complicated task that cannot be underestimated; without embedded practices of reflection, it is unlikely that one could critically appraise comments made to understand how they apply to the individual.

The theme I identified in the thematic analysis, 'practitioner reactions', resembled Mason's (1993) concept of 'safe uncertainty'. This refers to the state of working alongside the client, using one's expertise to open up space to allow new meaning to develop. The process is described as fluid, consistent with the development of a collaborative, evolving narrative that joins together different understandings and perspectives. At times I may have been caught between a state of safe certainty (leading the pupil towards my fixed ideas) and attempting to back off and allow us to develop new meanings by taking the journey together.

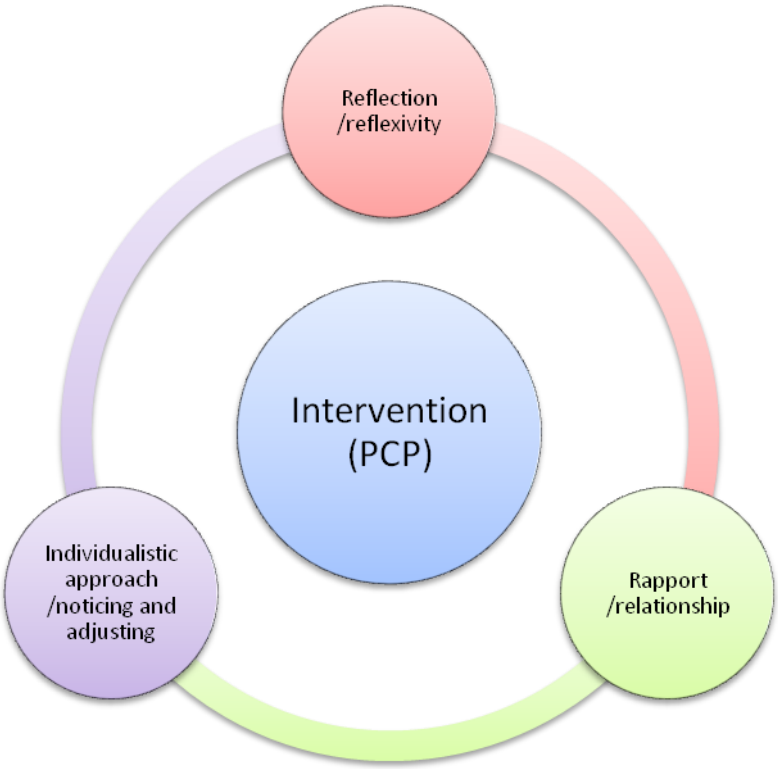
My analytic memos therefore highlight the importance of reflection towards creating conditions and relationships from a safe uncertain perspective to understand less quickly (Anderson and Goolishian, 1988), increase curiosity and take on a position of 'authoritative doubt' (Mason, 1993). Mason (1993) argues these factors create optimum conditions for the client to accept and try out a new course of action.

My results therefore suggest it is important to adopt a position of safe uncertainty to create conditions where children and young people are able to engage in intervention processes and where the practitioner allows space to create meaning together.

These combined factors contributed to the development of a 'shared meaning' of each pupil's understanding of themselves, which largely revolved around the pupil pen portrait that was negotiated between myself and each participant. I believe the related practitioner skills were vital to this and emphasise their importance to all practitioners to enable them to work in partnership with children and young people around achieving a mutually beneficial outcome.

Based upon my results from this study, figure 15 shows the relevant processes/features a practitioner must adopt when delivering an intervention with a child or young person. Each of these features are related to one other and 'above' the level of the actual intervention.

Figure 15: layers of practitioner skills when working with children and young people in a focused way.



Use of PCP

Overall, all pupils made extensions to their self-awareness following the use of a PCP intervention, compared to their baseline descriptor levels. As can be seen from the matrix analysis table (table 5), the pupils showed a range of self-awareness skills in the baseline phase (following use of interview questions). However, following the use of PCP activities, each pupil was able move on in their skills, enriching their pupil pen portrait further.

Results also indicate that engaging in PCP activities allowed pupils to make explicit links between different aspects of themselves and make more sense of who they are, potentially contributing to an increase in their 'I' component of self-awareness. This is discussed further in this section.

Outcomes of using PCP

Below I summarise the overall outcomes of using PCP with each pupil, particularly focusing upon the core constructs they revealed and how this links with writings around self-awareness. This involved making loose interpretations based upon my interactions with the pupils and reflections on these while considering relevant literature.

<u>Robin</u>

It appeared that using PCP techniques with Robin allowed him to create space to think about alternative ways of behaving, potentially leading to him having improved [social] experiences. He shared one of his core constructs, which related to experiences of being bullied (figure 10). Another approach might not have revealed his gaming fixation as a means of avoiding social interaction and thus bullying. He may not have known this himself before this activity.

During follow on conversations, Robin began exploring ways that he could break this cycle, possibly suggesting the activity may have enabled him to create a space to think about change. If using PCP as a direct intervention, the next phase for Robin would be to 'try out' his identified course of action, moving towards a position of being able to overcome some of his difficulties (based upon principles of 'self as a scientist', Kelly, 1955),

At the end of the final session, Robin asked to be there when I fed back to staff. He showed a strong interest in the cycle that we developed and shared his thoughts about this with the member of staff. Upon reflection, I wonder if this was this him showing motivation to change, something which I had previously questioned.

Arty

Arty revealed a construct relating to a preferred pole of 'nice', revealing that this would involve him gaining more achievement points in school, e.g. by putting his hand up in class, and being less shy. He was able to identify ways to move towards his desired pole, which may show that the activity created some 'space' to test out alternative actions. Again, with follow up sessions, Arty might have begun to make such changes, showing an element of reconstruing.

Arty also revealed a degree of social isolation and strong fixation towards gaming. We were not able to explore this in detail, though I wonder if I can compare this to Robin's conclusions, i.e. does he engage in gaming as a means of avoiding social contact? However, PCP did not allow him to deepen his understanding in this regard, or surface his awareness of these concerns.

Charlie

It was somewhat difficult to access Charlie's core constructs during the PCP activities.

Charlie gave small consideration to how he might make changes to move closer to his desired pole, such as only interrupting people with very important information. However, such links were relatively modest, suggesting that while the PCP activities did allow him to show some extensions to his self-awareness skills, these did not appear to create the necessary space to allow him to trial new behaviours and seek a change within his life. It may be that additional sessions would have helped him to make more sense of what he was saying. This might have involved beginning with one construct, allowing him to explore this, before making things more complicated.

Which areas of self-awareness are open to extension using PCP?

During baseline exploration into pupils' levels of self-awareness, they each shared information relating to both the 'me' and 'I' self. This is somewhat in line with findings by Jackson et al (2012) who found that many of those with ASD in their study showed self-awareness relating to a range of descriptions, rather than just the here and now.

With regard to the extensions that pupils made to areas of self-awareness following PCP, the key areas (in terms of quantity and quality) were: 'impact of social skills'; 'psychological awareness'; 'influence on self'; and 'personal attributes'. Three of which relate to 'me' components of self; one of which relating to the 'I' part of self. This suggests that on this occasion, the PCP activities allowed pupils to make most extensions in areas of their 'me' self.

Robin showed the most extensions in areas relating to the 'I' component of self, perhaps suggesting that he benefitted most from the PCP interventions. The other pupils showed fewer extensions to this part of self-awareness, though with ongoing efforts, may have continued making progress. Jackson et al (2012) suggested that approaches should target the 'I' component of self in order to have the most benefit to emotional wellbeing.

PCP as quality change

As argued by Jackson et al (2012), there may be particular significance to developing components of 'I' self-awareness skills in those with ASD. By taking more of a holistic standpoint in consideration of the whole data set, I was able to explore quality change throughout the study. I feel that for at least two of the pupils, engaging in the processes of PCP allowed them to make links and further reflect upon their behaviours and the implications of these.

I felt that Robin was able to demonstrate an enhanced concept of self-agency by identifying his cyclical pattern of behaviour and how he is subsequently maintaining the potential implications of this (poor social skills). As he came up with this concept himself, it suggests that he was considering himself as an active agent of change, a key component in the development of self-agency.

Again, Charlie's engagement with PCP may also have shifted his thinking in terms of making links between different aspects of himself. This could possibly contribute towards an enriched sense of self-agency in terms of understanding how his thought processes might be having a wider impact upon his behaviour and consequent experiences in different situations.

I feel that these findings may suggest that PCP is a qualitatively different process to others, such as interview, and supports individuals to engage and reflect upon what they are saying, potentially having a greater impact upon the 'I' component of self-awareness. This process was observed for two of the pupils participating in this research. Though this study only included a small number of pupils, these findings may provide further insight for practice in relation to improving pupil emotional wellbeing.

Which PCP tools allow pupils to show greater extensions to their self-awareness?

As mentioned previously, it was most important to respond to the individual needs of the pupils, rather than delivering a 'one size fits all' approach. During phase 2: part 1, I used the same activity with each pupil, with different outcomes for each. I found that the PCP activity worked best when personalised and tailored to the young person's needs. However, I reached conclusions that PCP (in a general sense) appeared appropriate due to the structure and visual nature of many of the activities. Therefore, I cannot emphasise one activity over another, but for practitioners to choose a PCP activity based upon what they know about the person they are working with.

What would I use again?

My findings indicate that before beginning to use PCP tools with children and young people, it would be important to get to know them and their individual needs in order to put a structure and tailored approach into place.

It was important to have a range of PCP activities available in my 'tool box' so that I could modify my approach according to what the pupils responded best to, based upon my reflections and observations during the preceding session.

If using PCP activities with this population again, I would begin with the least complex tool, then build up to more complex activities based upon how they engage and the sense they make of the process. For example, beginning by focusing on just one construct, before later moving on to discussing two constructs, if able to manage this.

What do pupils take away and how do they rate the techniques?

All pupils said that they had enjoyed each session and therefore were happy to come back for the next. During each of my 'analytic memos', I noted the pupils' level of engagement,

mostly commenting that they were well engaged, and if not, I altered my approach to improve this. At the end of each session, I asked pupils to complete an evaluation form. I tried to make changes accordingly, e.g. at the end of the first session, Arty said that some of the questions were confusing and seemed repetitive. In the second session, I therefore introduced visual organisation (post-it notes) to help set out the PCP activity. I also used a comic strip conversation to help to explain the purpose of the session.

While my research aims were not geared towards supporting a change in those participating, I felt that to provide a degree of feedback would potentially be helpful, and a way of thanking them for taking part. I therefore made a 'handout' for them, including the enriched pupil pen portrait as well as some of the evaluative comments they made (appendix 24). I asked the pupils who they would like to share this with in their final session; they all said they would like their parents and a key adult in school to see it. One pupil (Arty) said that he wanted adults to see it but did not want to see it himself.

When considering the impact of PCP, I wondered what the pupils thought of the activities. One of the difficulties within this study was knowing whether I supported the pupils to gain a greater insight into themselves. While I made observations and saw the extensions they made to their pupil pen portrait, it was not measurable as to whether they had fully assimilated this information into their world view, for example, asking them 'what they had taken away' from the session may not have been an accessible question to them. Such information may only have been available through other means, e.g. conversations with teachers/parents within a longer term study.

By adopting a PCP stance, I was able to explore the unique perspective of the individual, moving away from the usually adopted neuro-typical stance. However, through reflection I begun to consider whether the pupils were showing me a true insight into their thoughts and beliefs about themselves, or whether they were (perhaps at an unconscious level) relaying constructs that they thought they should aspire to. For example, Sonny talked about

his feelings of difference from his peers and how he wants to improve his social skills and subsequently gain more friends.

However, it is entirely possible that throughout his life, this difficulty has been reinforced, meaning Sonny assimilated this information into his understanding about himself, rather than this being a core belief of his. It may have also been possible that he was telling me what he thought I wanted to hear, based upon his previous experiences working with different professionals, though I attempted to minimise such conflicts by taking a genuinely curious stance and not using language that was problem focused. I am unsure as to how these considerations could have been separated out or explored in greater detail.

What else did I find out?

While a large focus of my study was focused towards exploring the constructs elicited by pupils in relation to their self-awareness (through analysis using template 3), I have also considered the limitations of this and attempted to assemble aspects of 'the bigger picture'.

Pupils in my study were able (to a degree) to show some level of self-reflection, e.g. Arty compared his past and current behaviour. This may show some level of development of (possibly) earlier delayed processes, i.e. he does not show aggressive, reactive behaviour now, perhaps showing development of agency/executive function that he did not have when younger. Of course this is only speculation, though linking with my earlier discussion around literature in this area suggests he has developed compensatory mechanisms for areas that did not originally develop in a natural way.

The use of PCP allowed some of the pupils to piece together different pieces of information about themselves, i.e. the bigger picture. For example, Robin seemed to pull together his different experiences to develop an understanding of how his difficulties link together and the reasons behind them. This suggests PCP may have some utility in allowing pupils to

makes sense of, and join up their experiences through the elaboration of constructs, something that many argue they find inherently difficult to do (i.e. from a central coherence point of view). Therefore, the development of central coherence seems fundamentally linked to processes of self-awareness and should be a point of interest when adopting a PCP stance. It may be that these techniques are appropriate in supporting children and young people to develop processes to enable them to join up their experiences.

Previous research suggested several key domains of self-awareness that may be atypical in those with ASD. However, as such theorists paid little attention to development, it is difficult to explain results (as in this study) where individuals with ASD show a particular level of self-awareness, e.g. 'agency'. Pupils in this study were older than those generally included in previous research, meaning they may have already expended a great deal of effort in developing their self-awareness skills (e.g. ToM; as suggested by Frith and Happe, 1999).

Perhaps these skills had been supported through previous interventions they had received. This study is unable to comment upon such processes, though this might be an interesting exploration in the future.

This study counters previous evidence, e.g. Jackson et al (2012), which made generalised statements about self-awareness differences in those with ASD compared to typically developing peers. This study highlights a great deal of variation in terms of pupils' degree of self-awareness, suggesting general conclusions for this population cannot be formed. Processes contributing to such variation, whilst speculated about (e.g. cognitive skills), remain unclear and appear of great importance within future research.

Overall conclusions

Findings from this study suggest there was an interaction between using PCP methods to elicit constructs relating to self-awareness and environmental factors, i.e. having an

available and skilled practitioner to make materials accessible, for pupils to share their views with and support an extension in pupils' thinking by looking at the situation holistically. This suggests that PCP would not, in itself be helpful, without a reflective, creative and engaging practitioner.

In addition, while PCP does not seem largely helpful in extending an individual's self-awareness in terms of quantity of constructs elicited, there seems to be some indicative evidence from this study to suggest that qualitatively, an individual's self-awareness may become more enriched through the use of adapted techniques.

There was great variation in how each of the pupils responded to the use of PCP in terms of the quantity and quality of information shared. Based upon my observations and interactions, I feel that this relates in part to both their motivational level to engage in reflective activities and their ability to access material and engage with the higher-order thinking.

While I attempted to minimise the language demands and abstract components of the tasks, there was little I could do to increase their willingness to increase their self-awareness skills. Pupils in this study were asked for agreement to take part, but I feel that this is different to an individual choosing to engage in a process that might change how they see themselves and their outlook on life, even if potentially for the better. Perhaps this is inherently linked with a poor sense of self-agency thought to be typical of this population (Jackson et al, 2012). However, this leads to a more complicated conundrum: how might one motivate an individual to develop their 'I' level self-awareness skills, when their skills in this area might be so poor in the first place that they are not yet aware of the significance of developing them? This is one consideration that might be acted upon in future research.

Rigour in research

Validating knowledge claims

I saw the purpose of this particular research as improving a particular situation pertinent to my working practice, as suggested by McNiff and Whitehead (2010) in their descriptions around using an AR approach. However, as most research has wider implications, in terms of advancing knowledge towards theory generation, I will attempt to justify my assumptions and validate my claims to knowledge.

McNiff and Whitehead (2010) propose that to triangulate data (thus increasing rigour), a range of perspectives must be explored, usually at least three. There is some disagreement between what constitutes different perspectives, so I decided which interpretation was right for me. Within the context of this AR study, where advancing my own learning was the main goal, I have focused upon the following sources: my reflective logs around what I noticed (i.e. changes in the pupils' engagement); analysis of interview/session scripts; and pupil evaluations. I also analysed the data using different methods: template analysis, thematic analysis and a matrix framework. Following this, I reported the key findings that I used to attempt to answer my research questions, pulling together the relevant pieces of information as appropriate. This enabled me to form conclusions based upon the different sources of 'evidence'.

McNiff and Whitehead (2010) discuss processes of "making tacit implicit knowledge explicit" (p.191). This piece of AR involved many subjective processes and a strong personal commitment towards achieving its intended outcomes. Such processes, however, meant that I was embedded within the research and may have developed my own understandings and beliefs about results. I therefore aimed to make such implicit knowledge as explicit as possible through an open and reflective engagement in writing up my study, e.g. detailing

the steps that I went through, my learning at each stage and the subsequent changes that I made. In addition, I went through two main cycles of noticing and adjusting, therefore taking into account information across a period of time and letting my own observations, as well as feedback from the pupils, inform my decisions. I hoped that this would allow those reading my research to see how I reached particular conclusions.

Contributing to wider knowledge generation

McNiff and Whitehead (2010) discuss how our "individual stories" (p.192) allow us to share our experiences. They argue that an accumulation of such stories allow us to develop a knowledge base around a particular area. Within this small scale study, I was able to share my 'story' in terms of what I did and how I came to arrive at my conclusions. I have sought to validate such claims, supporting others to take on my learning. Other practitioners may replicate the steps that I took that allowed me to engage and work with individuals in terms of supporting their self-awareness through PCP. My results emphasise the importance of the practitioner adapting to the needs of the individual; therefore, it could be more helpful for them to explore how I arrived at my decisions, rather than just looking at what I did (i.e. which PCP activities I used), engaging in their own cycles of noticing and adjusting.

<u>Limitations</u>

While this study showed that, to a degree, all three pupils showed extensions to their self-awareness following individualised PCP techniques, there are potential confounding variables or limitations that I now seek to address:

- It has been recognised that not all of the pupil data collected was included within the analysis and results. Upon reflection, this can be considered a weakness of the study; if a similar procedure were to be reproduced, it would be important to make necessary adjustments to ensure that all data can be included in the final write up.

- Relationship with researcher - it could be argued that as I built rapport with pupils, this increased their engagement and therefore resulted in them showing extensions to their self-awareness. However, by reading back over my reflective logs, I feel that this is not the case. I noticed that in each of the sessions, for example, Robin was 'relaxed' and 'engaged' with me, choosing to share personal information in the very first session. I think that this suggests that it was (at least in part) a feature of the tools, rather than rapport and engagement that supported the process.
- Seeking out support vs. engagement in a research study - pupils who seek to change their behaviour may engage better and thus have better outcomes, e.g. Robin, who I felt took most away from the sessions, was up front from the start in saying that he wanted the chance to rant and to understand his Asperger's better. This leads me to wonder, would it have been helpful for me to ask pupils at the beginning to identify an area they may have wished to better understand about themselves? Would they have had enough personal insight to identify such an area anyway?
- Another issue relates to that of longevity of outcomes. Within my literature review, I outlined the recommended levels of intervention. However, within my methodology section, I considered the constraints upon my time within this study. This meant I was unable to incorporate the desired recommendations (of between 6-12 sessions), meaning the outcomes may have been less favourable than if I had been able to complete the desired level. Whilst the primary aim of this study was to explore the use of PCP upon pupils' degree of self-awareness, it was anticipated that the process might provide some therapeutic effect for the pupils taking part. The addition of subsequent research cycles may have allowed for further adjusting of PCP techniques to explore positive outcomes for pupils at a more in-depth level.

In addition, it may be that following the sessions, the extensions that pupils made were forgotten. A degree of follow up would have allowed this to be explored in greater detail, though the timescales of this study meant that this was not possible.

- One relatively inevitable difficulty relates to knowing the extent of the pupils' learning. I can access my own learning, but not the learning of those others. I was able to make observations and note what I thought pupils were taking away, but it was difficult to find a way for them to access evaluation questions. There may be points around this to address in future research, perhaps inviting other parties to note their observations, to enable the researcher to triangulate results. However, this would only be useful if pupils showed a change in their behaviour, which would not necessarily occur, even if extensions around self-awareness were made.
- This study only explored the use of one approach; therefore, there is little evidence that it was the PCP method in itself that supported the extension of self-awareness over others, or that there aren't better PCP techniques to try out. However, as I included a baseline level, I feel confident in saying that without PCP, the pupils would not have shown such an enriched sense of self-awareness, particularly in relation to 'I' components, compared to the initial conversation. Previous research suggested that PCP may have greater utility over other methods (e.g. Attwood 2007), therefore meaning that it may not have been necessary (at this time) to compare PCP to another approach. Based upon my own learning and engagement in this study, I support Attwood's claims.
- One final limitation of the original study design was the lack of consideration given to relevant theories of autism, prior to designing the intervention. If this consideration had been taken into account, a more robust framework may have been included to ensure outcomes were of greater relevance to those with a diagnosis of ASD.

Implications

In this section, I discuss my overall findings, in terms of the skills I have developed in my own practice and the wider implications that relate to the educational psychology profession. This involves practical recommendations, as well as meta 'thinking' skills that may be helpful to consider when engaging in similar work with children and young people. I conclude this section by discussing the next level of research stemming from the findings in this study.

My practice

I have developed my awareness of the most important skills a practitioner can utilise when working with children and young people with a diagnosis of ASD in relation to supporting developments to self-awareness. This will therefore mean that in the future, I will make a conscious effort to adapt my practice according to the key themes that emerged from this research. I have learnt that these factors are as important as the tools and approaches that I am using, so must remember to continue to engage in reflective and reflexive practices to support my overall interpersonal skills.

In particular, using a reflective diary and seeking supervision to enable me to explore factors such as safe uncertainty and pupil voice will allow me to continue to develop and expand my practice. I wish to continue to explore the potential impact of the neuro-typical perspective upon the view of those with ASD, creating ways to help them to overcome barriers while maintaining behaviours they find personally satisfying. This will include the way I consult with adults and pupils, incorporating practices as discussed by Ravenette (e.g. 1972).

I have also become more knowledgeable about the application of PCP; in particular, how I might use such tools when working with children and young people with a diagnosis of ASD. I have a better understanding of the particular techniques that can be useful and how children might respond to these. For example, using visual hierarchical structures as a

prompt to encourage the child to think through to the next level in order to access some of their core constructs.

One of the strongest themes that emerged throughout my research related to the importance of individuality. As a practitioner, I have learned the importance of creating ways explore and treat children and young people as individuals in a respectful and empowering way, ensuring the practices I adopt promote their voice, rather than the agenda of the adults.

The skills I have developed in the application of an AR methodology will be useful in my practice as a research practitioner. For example, when working at a systemic level with schools and in the community, I will be able to gather and evaluate data when attempting to bring about change. This might relate to teaching practices, interventions or in developing new practices for the wider EP profession.

Educational psychology profession

This study adds further support that PCP can be a useful approach when working with pupils with a diagnosis of ASD. Particularly in terms of exploring the child's world and point of view, as well as potentially creating space for positive change when used over a period of time, as suggested by Jackson et al (2012). I will continue to use such methods in my practice as I can see the potential value, both to helping the adults around the child to understand them better, but also to the child themselves in terms of becoming more self-aware.

I hope to have highlighted, through a small study, the value of using different PCP approaches to develop self-awareness in pupils with a diagnosis of ASD. I have also added knowledge to the relatively under-researched area of ASD/interventions to support emotional wellbeing as recommended by many researchers writing in this area (e.g. NAS, 2010).

In addition to the subject area, I hope to have highlighted throughout this study key considerations relating to 'meta-skills', i.e. how we think about our work and the ways in which we reflect about this thinking. This demonstrates the importance of practitioner skills that are above and beyond the adopted intervention (as referred to in figure 15), i.e. I think it would be inappropriate to deliver an intervention without considering one's practice in a wider sense. This is particularly important within an increasingly 'traded' world, where there may be potential for compromising the interests of the child in favour of the one purchasing the time.

I have identified a series of questions/prompts to help myself and other EPs to reflect on their general practice when working with children and young people with a diagnosis of ASD:

- Noise - is the environment suitable? Is the child able to communicate that it is too noisy? If not, how can you help them with this?
- Distraction - what tools have you got to keep the session on track? Are you able to notice and reduce distractions?
- Engagement/rapport - what activities can you introduce to support the child to feel comfortable and to build rapport? Are you presenting yourself as approachable, friendly and responsive?
- Language - how can you adapt your language to ensure the child is able to understand? What additional resources (i.e. visual cues) might be needed to support understanding or to allow the child to overcome their communication difficulties?
- Safe uncertainty - are you able remain comfortable in a position of 'not knowing' to allow the child the space to develop their story?
- Flexibility - are you able to notice the child's engagement or difficulties with the activities? Can you change your approach/modify techniques to account for the individuality of the child?

- Reflection - what processes are available to you to promote pupil voice rather than the adults? Whose problem is it and how might you best incorporate the views of the child/young person?
- Consideration of a neuro-diverse perspective; are pupils telling you their personal views or are they reflecting the stance that they should change to fit in with society? How might this be further understood? What are their desired outcomes from engaging in a piece of work?

I have also developed prompts relating to the practice of using PCP techniques with children and young people with a diagnosis of ASD:

- Provide a safe, comfortable setting with minimal environmental distraction. Support engagement and rapport (e.g. using above prompts).
- Choose an activity that explores one construct, e.g. 'drawing me as I am', to gain an insight into their core views of the world.
- Following on, build an activity incorporating two constructs (if the pupil is able to manage this), e.g. a Salmon Line technique, asking the child to scale between a construct from the first activity and its pole. Use visual prompts to engage the pupil in further discussion, e.g. marking where they are currently on the line, where they would like to be, and using arrows to indicate movement.
- Develop a 'bank' of PCP activities that are available to use. Break them down into key aspects so that you can quickly decide which activity is best for a child, e.g. how many constructs they focus upon, degree of visual vs. auditory information required to engage with the task and the type of expression the pupil is required to give e.g. through drawings or written words. Appendix 1 gives an overview of the PCP activities used in this study. This may serve as a useful starting point when beginning to compare and contrast different techniques in relation to the individual needs of a

pupil and what you hope to gain by using them (e.g. to elicit constructs or to bring about a change?).

- Use modelling/ share examples to support understanding of the activity.
- For more able pupils, hierarchical methods, e.g. a laddering technique, may provide the necessary structure and visual cue to enable them to extend their thinking and access some of their unconscious core constructs.
- Explore different ways of seeing any problem behaviours that are identified, e.g. in a circular flow chart. Working with a child in this way may help them to make links between different aspects and see a situation differently, which may help them to identify a way forward.
- Build in accessible ways for the child to give feedback or choose the focus of the session. This may allow for a greater degree of personalisation of the techniques as well as increasing their engagement by making them feel listened to.
- Self as a scientist - create space to allow the child/young person to try out different behaviours to possibly improve aspects of their lives, if focusing upon change as an outcome.

Tobias (2009) reports findings relating to the importance of pupils with ASD receiving support to increase their self-awareness in adolescence, particularly around understanding their diagnosis. Tobias also suggested that such interventions may "avoid the tendency towards anxiety or depression" (p.161), noted by the NAS (2010) enquiry as affecting up to 71% of those with a diagnosis.

It therefore seems there is potential utility in using a PCP approach with children and young people, perhaps following diagnosis of ASD (with older/more able pupils) to enable them to think about their skills/difficulties. This might help them to come to terms with their diagnosis, understand how this relates to them and potentially identify areas that they might

want to change in the future. It is useful to have an idea of what can be provided following diagnosis, when in the current system, there seems to be little knowledge around available post-diagnosis support.

Future research

The next level of research to attempt would be to use the PCP tools from this study with a wider sample of pupils with a diagnosis of ASD, incorporating similar modifications to those that I made, though tailored to the individual taking part. This would show how replicable the results from this study are, allowing for a wider bank of research knowledge to be generated in terms of understanding the needs of those with ASD when attempting to improve aspects of emotional wellbeing.

Future research may also address the issue of longevity; that is, following exploration of a person's self-awareness using PCP, do any extensions remain in the long term? Would other interventions (e.g. cognitive behaviour therapy) create the same outcomes (extensions to a person's self-awareness)?

Such research may need to develop ways to access pupil views around what they have taken away from the sessions, e.g. changes to their perspective or gaining further insight into themselves. It may also be helpful to include the perspectives of those around the child, e.g. noting the observations of parents and school staff, to see if the child has continued to make reflections of themselves or ask questions of others to help them to gain further insight.

The distinction of doing things *to*, rather than *with* children may also warrant further investigation in terms of exploring how outcomes may be shaped by willingness to participate, i.e. do those who identify a desire to change engage better with the material and therefore create more space to think about positive change?

In terms of wider theory generation there seems to be an indication to explore the development of self-awareness in those with ASD, including if, when and how different processes occur in those displaying poor self-awareness skills at an early age.

Overall, I valued the experience and knowledge that I gained through engaging in this piece of action research. I will be able to apply what I have learnt to my everyday practices when working with children and young people with a diagnosis of ASD and I believe PCP to be worthwhile technique for this population when carefully adapted.

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APPENDICES - overview

Appendix 23: Word bank

Appendix 24: Final pupil pen portraits for each pupil

Appendix 1: Overview of PCP techniques used in the study

Name of PCP technique and use	Description	Example
Triadic sort - used to elicit constructs	This involves pupils writing elements (usually the names of people in their lives) on separate cards or papers usually around seven or eight). They then have to place two elements together against another one, saying how the two are similar in some respect and then how the third element is different. The description of the similarities becomes an 'emergent pole' and the third [different] element becomes the 'contrast pole'. These poles are noted down on a separate piece of paper as 'constructs'. The language that the child gives should be written accurately. The process can be repeated with different combinations of elements until numerous constructs have been elicited.	Charlie came up with 8 elements: sister, granddad, dad, cats, grandma, neighbours, mum and Miss T. He first placed 'sister' and 'cats' together (based upon a similarity) against 'grandma' (who is different in some way). The emergent pole (sister and cats) was: **annoying;** and the contrast pole (grandma) was: **kind.** Therefore, the following construct emerged: **Annoying----------Kind** I then asked Charlie to do the same process for other combinations. He came up with three further constructs: **Bugging you ----------Stay out of your way** **Don't want to be around----------Usually around** **In the family----------Not in the family**
Portrait Gallery - used to elicit constructs	The pupil was asked to draw or sketch faces showing different feelings, e.g. "can you draw me a 'happy' face?" This is followed up with questions such as: "can you remember a time when you were happy?" "What were you doing?" and "What makes you feel happy?" Following this, they are asked to draw any other faces/feelings they know. The words/phrases given by the child form a selection of emergent poles.	Sonny drew three different 'faces': **happy, angry** and **sad**. He used the word bank I provided to help him to come up with the words. When I asked follow up questions, e.g. "what makes you feel sad?" and "can you tell me the last time you felt this way?" he came up with the following: • When I get homework • Monday's as I have to go to school Following this, I used the words he came up with (happy, angry and sad) to elicit the contrast poles, e.g. Sonny came up with:

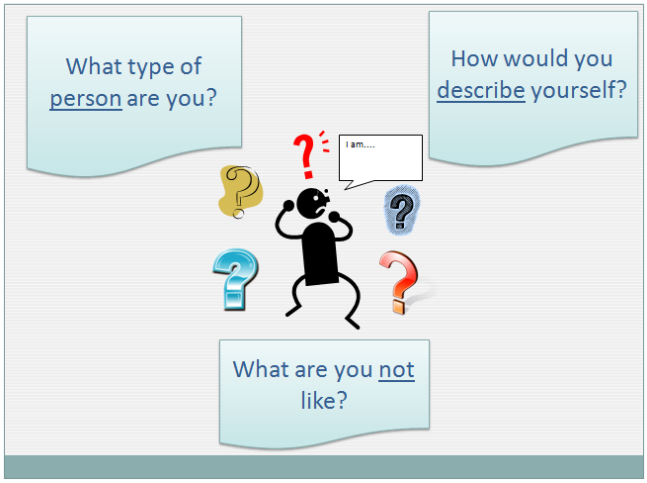
		Angry----------Happy
Drawing Me As I Am - used to elicit constructs	The pupil was asked to draw a picture of themselves doing something familiar and typical, e.g. the practitioner may ask "can you draw me a picture of yourself doing something that you do often. This might be something you do at home or somewhere else. You can choose which activity you are doing in the picture". Following this, they are asked a series of questions, e.g.: • What are you doing in the picture? • Where are you? • Who (if anyone) is with you in the picture? • How do you feel? • What are you thinking about? Etc. They are asked if they would like to write down their responses or if they would prefer an adult to write for them. The responses that the child gives form a selection of emergent poles. In order to elicit the bipolar construct, the practitioner can ask the following: "what would the other side to X look like?"	Arty engaged in the drawing me as I am technique. I asked him to draw a picture of himself doing something that he usually does. He chose to draw a picture of himself playing on his computer. I asked his the questions previously described and he gave these responses: • "Playing PVZ garden warfare" • "I am in my bedroom" • "I am on my own", "I talk to my friend" and "there are other people I know online, but they don't talk to me" • "I feel happy" • "When I'm in school I think about my game" • "I play on my game all day" I then wrote 'play on my game all day' and drew a line next to it. I asked "what would not playing on your game all day look like?" and he replied "bored". The following construct was elicited: **Play on my game all day----------Bored**
Salmon Line - used to explore constructs in greater detail, e.g. look at the sense children make of their experiences and how they relate themselves	Using constructs elicited in the pupil's own language (this can be done through different techniques, including triadic sort, drawing me as I am, portrait gallery), a practitioner can further explore the sense they make of their situations and experiences. The following questions are then posed:	When exploring Charlie's construct: **Annoying----------Kind,** I asked questions relating to the Salmon line description and he made marks according to where he sees himself at different points. For example, he said that he currently sees himself closer to the annoying pole. In the past, he thought he was closer to the 'kind' pole and would like to

to the construct	• Where on the line do you see yourself now? • Where were you in the past? E.g. when you were [age/attending school/living in a certain place etc.] • Where would you like to be in the future? E.g. when you are [age/in X year group/after school is finished/when you are an adult etc.] The practitioner may present the questions as prompt cards if deemed necessary. The child is encouraged to point to or mark the relevant point on the line. The practitioner (or the child) may make notes based upon comments that the child makes (using their language). Follow up questions may also include: • In what ways have they changed from the past to now? • What do they need to do to move closer to their goal? (If a large gap between present and goal, how could they move a step closer to it?) • What support might they need to move closer to their goal? • How would they know when they had moved closer to their goal? It may be helpful for the adult to draw arrows or other visual cues on the line to support understanding, e.g. an arrow from the point the child indicated in the past to the point they indicated for now to support the question: "how have things changed from the past to now?"	move closer towards this end in the future. I drew an arrow to indicate movement from the place he is now towards the place he would like to be and asked "what would need to happen for you to move closer to kind?" He answered: "be nicer and more cooperative" and "stop telling people off".
Laddering - used to	When using laddering, one begins with constructs previously	I introduced the laddering technique with Robin using

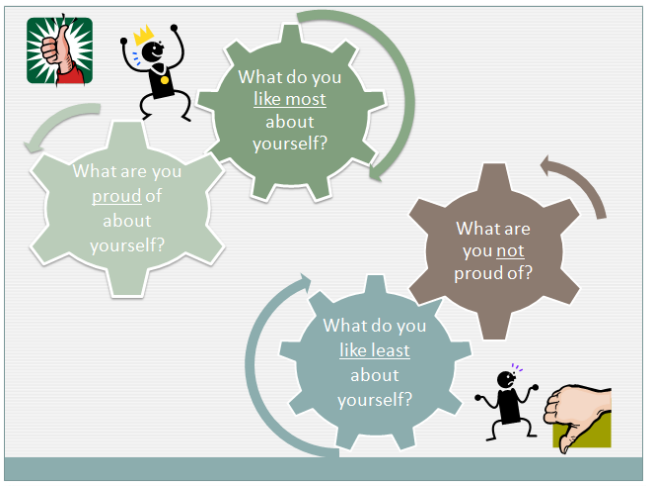
elaborate construct systems, e.g. to explore 'core constructs'	elicited (using other techniques). The selected construct (which may be chosen by the pupil or practitioner, though Butler and Green, 2007, argue that the start point is immaterial) is placed at the top of the ladder. This can be shown as a visual representation of a ladder. The child is then asked which pole "which pole describes you best?" or "which is your preferred pole?" The practitioner begins with this pole and asks questions, such as: • "Why is that important?" • "Why do you feel it is a good thing to be...?" • "Why does that matter?" • "What's so good about being...?" • "What's so bad about being...?"	constructs elicited from the previous activity (triadic sort technique): **Gamer ----------Not a gamer** I then asked "which description do you want to be closer to?" and he said "gamer", so we began exploring this pole first. I asked Robin questions, including: "how come it's important to get better at games?" and "why is it important that you play games for longer?" etc. Following this, we moved on to explore the polar side of the construct (not a gamer). I asked similar questions, such as "why does it matter if you don't play games as much?" and "why is being more social important?"
Pyramiding - used to elaborate subordinate constructs and 'check out' what a construct implies in practice	Pyramiding is a technique that characterises a construct, i.e. the behavioural elements that are lower down (towards the surface) in a person's sense of self. This may allow the practitioner to understand how the child makes sense of a particular construct, in terms of what it mean at a behavioural level. The practitioner then asks questions, such as: • "What does .... do?" • "How would .... behave?" • "What would you see them doing?" • "How come ... is preferred?" Following this, the behavioural features of the initial construct are revealed, i.e. what it looks like.	Charlie completed the Pyramiding technique. The construct we began with was: **Excited----------Calm** I first asked him which pole he preferred and he chose 'calm'. I then asked the questions described to elicit 'behavioural elements', e.g. • "How does a calm person behave?", to which he replied "make subtle movements" • "How come making subtle movements if preferred?", to which he replied "these people talk only when they need to" etc. Towards the top of the pyramid, Charlie shared the features: 'freak out, run away---don't freak out e.g. form an orderly queue'.

Appendix 2: Self-awareness interview prompt cards

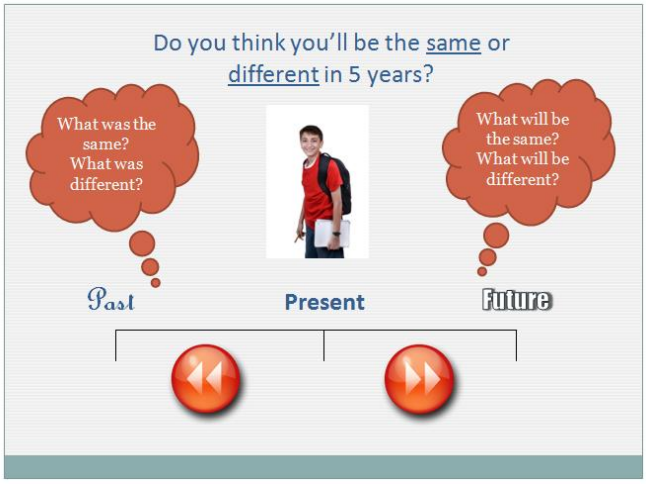
1. Self-definition



2. Self-evaluation



3. Self in the past and future



4. Self-interest

What type of person do you want to be?

What do you hope for in your future?

If you could have three wishes, what would they be?

5. Continuity

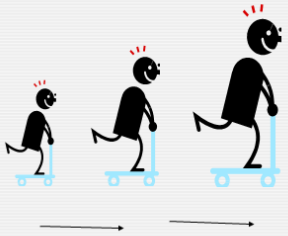
From year to year, what changes? What stays the same?

How do you know it's still always you?

6. Agency

How did you get to be the person you are today?

How could you become different?



7. Distinctness

Do you think there is anyone who is exactly like you?

What makes you different from anyone else?

Appendix 3: School agreement

Dear Head Teacher,

Area of research: Exploring whether an intervention raises the self-awareness of pupils with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

I am currently undertaking a three year doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology with the University of Sheffield, and am working on placement with X City Council.

I wish to identify around 3 or 4 pupils, aged between 10-14, with a diagnosis of ASD, possibly Asperger Syndrome or high Functioning Autism. It is important that the pupils are able to manage the language demands involved. It is likely that I will recruit pupils from one or two different schools.

I will meet with each child one or two times over the course of one week in the summer term 2014, and the same again in the autumn term, around 4 hours in total. Pupils will take part in a range of activities based upon a Personal Construct Psychology approach, including rating scales to explore where the child currently sees themselves and where they would like to be; sorting out different statements according to how true they are for them; drawings, such as self-portraits where children explore personal characteristics/feelings in relation to themselves; and sentence completion activities.

I will explore the possibility of students sharing material with school staff, though this will emerge as part of the research process. I will qualitatively analyse the data produced to explore whether or not the process has had an impact upon the child's self-awareness.

Parental and student consent will also be sought before I begin my research.

What do I need from your school?

- Identification of pupils who may be suitable to take part, through liaison with the SENCo
- Support in sending out the information sheet to parents and ensuring that the consent forms are returned
- A room for me to work with the student/s (approx 4 hours per pupil/week, over one week in the summer term and one week in the autumn term)
- An opportunity to speak with the SENCo/class teacher following completion of the study to give feedback and a debrief

I have included a school agreement to complete if you are happy for me to complete part of my research in your school.

Thank you for considering me to conduct my research in your school. A copy of my thesis will be available following completion, if requested.

Gemma Watson-Butterworth

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Edp12gw@sheffield.ac.uk

School Agreement

Area of research: **Exploring whether an intervention raises the self-awareness of pupils with a diagnosis of ASD**

I agree that Gemma Watson-Butterworth, Trainee Educational Psychologist, can complete part of her doctoral research in our school. This will involve:

- Liaison with the SENCo to identify appropriate pupils and to arrange parental consent
- A room for her to work with the student/s (approx 4 hours per pupil/week, over one week in the summer term and one week in the autumn term)
- An opportunity to speak with the SENCo/class teacher following completion of the study to give feedback and a debrief

Name of school: _____

Signed: _____

Name of Head Teacher: _____

Date: _____

Please pass this form to the SENCo. I will arrange to collect this from your school, following your agreement to take part.

Appendix 4: Parent information leaflet

If you or your child decide to withdraw your consent from the study once it has begun, I will attempt to debrief the child about what we have so far completed together and explain that the sessions will now have ended. Your child will be thanked for their involvement (when possible).

What are the pros and cons in taking part?

There is always a chance that a young person with difficulties in the area of social interaction may find it difficult working with a person who they do not know. This will be minimised by a period of 'getting you know you', as well as myself (the researcher) using skills and knowledge of this group of young people to gauge how comfortable they are in the sessions. The sessions are also designed to be enjoyable, hopefully allowing children to feel relaxed.

This study is exploratory in its nature and so therefore I cannot predict the outcomes for your child. However, previous research has suggested that some pupils engaging in approaches, such as Personal Construct Psychology, may develop a greater sense of self-awareness. It is also possible that participation in this project might enable staff working with your child to develop a better understanding of them.

Who oversees this research?

This project has been reviewed by the University of Sheffield, School of Education, Ethics Review Board. The research is being organised by myself, as a Trainee Educational Psychologist in conjunction with the University of Sheffield and Hull City Council, where I am working on placement.

If you have any concerns during or following your child being involved in the research, you have the option of contacting my research supervisor (details below). If you do not feel that any concern or complaint has been handled to your satisfaction then you can contact the University's 'Registrar and Secretary' Office of the Registrar and Secretary: Firth Court, Western Bank, Sheffield, S10 2TN

Where can I get more information?

If you would like to meet with me in person to discuss your child taking part, I will arrange a time to meet you in your child's school. I can then share further information about my study or answer your questions before you decide if you want to consent to your child being involved.

Contact details:

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information:

Researcher: Gemma Watson-Butterworth
Trainee Educational Psychologist
University of Sheffield and Hull City Psychological Service
Contact email: edp12gw@sheffield.ac.uk
Contact phone number: 01482 331466 (Hull Psychological Service)

Supervisor: Lorraine Campbell (Educational Psychologist and Tutor at University of Sheffield)
Contact email: l.n.campbell@sheffield.ac.uk

Invitation for your child to take part in a research study

The University Of Sheffield.

Parent Information

Area of research:
Exploring activities to help raise the self -awareness of pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
Researcher: Gemma Watson-Butterworth

Thank you for considering my request to include your child within my Doctoral research. Please read all of the information in this leaflet and do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or would like further information.

Once you have considered the information, please take your time to decide whether or not you would like your child to take part. I have included a consent form for you to complete and a child information sheet/consent form for you to go through with your child, should you be happy for them to take part.

Who is conducting the research?

My name is Gemma Watson-Butterworth and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist working on placement with Hull City Council. I am completing my Doctoral studies with the University of Sheffield and for my research project, I wish to further explore how Educational Psychologists can help to develop the self-awareness of pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorder using a Personal Construct Psychology approach. I will also use this approach to explore ways that pupil voice can be promoted to develop a shared understanding of a child's individualistic needs.

Why has my child been selected?

I have chosen to explore how Educational Psychologists can work with children with Autism to develop aspects of their self-awareness. Your child has been considered as they have a diagnosis of Autism, possibly Asperger Syndrome or high-functioning autism, as it is important that they could manage the language demands involved. I have attempted to select children who are relatively settled in their school placements and who are likely to want to engage. The young people themselves will be asked for their consent and be provided with an explanation of the research (included with this letter).

Who else will be involved?

I will include 3 or 4 young people between the ages of 10 – 14 across one or two schools.

What will taking part involve?

I will use different Personal Construct Psychology methods during the sessions I work with children. These include: rating scales to explore where the child currently sees themselves and where they would like to be; sorting out different statements according to how true they are for them; drawings, such as self-portraits where children explore personal characteristics/feelings in relation to themselves; and sentence completion activities. The sessions are also designed to be enjoyable for the child.

How often will you see my child?

If you consent to your child taking part, I will book in a date to meet with them in school. I will meet with them one or two times in the summer term 2014. On this first visit, we will spend some time getting to know each other. When your child appears comfortable, I will begin introducing different activities. It is important that your child is available to attend all sessions. All sessions will take part while your child is at school. This may mean that they will miss a lesson they would otherwise attend. However, I will attempt to minimise disruption by taking them out of a lesson with least amount of impact on their learning (this will be discussed with a member of school staff). I will also return to their school in the autumn term 2014 and meet with your child again once or twice over the course of a week.

Once you have given your consent, you do not need to be further involved in the research. All of the sessions take part in school and there will be no restrictions or additional work to complete at home. In total, I will work with your child for no more than 4 hours.

What information are you collecting?

I will audio record the sessions to ensure that I have an accurate account of what your child said. This, as well as any drawings or notes, will form the data that I will use in my analysis

What will happen to my child's data?

Within the write up of my study, I will include information relating to how I worked with the children, the results that I found and discussions around the findings and the implications of these. The children will be given pseudonyms so that they cannot be identified. The research will be written up as a thesis as part of my Doctoral studies. There may also be further research publications where the outcomes of the research are published or the information might form part of training materials for education staff. Again, this will be confidential and it will not be possible to identify the children involved.

Any personal information obtained during the research project will be kept strictly confidential. I will store audio recordings in a locked cabinet and delete them as soon as my thesis is complete. Your child will not be identifiable within reports or publications.

What if I change my mind?

Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary and there will be no penalty if you decide that you would not like your child to take part. Your child will also be given the option of taking part and also reminded that they do not have to if they don't want to. I will gauge their participation and enjoyment in the sessions and use my judgement about whether they continue to be happy to take part. They will be reminded in each session that they can leave or we can stop at any time if they want to. You can also withdraw your child from the research once it has begun and can withdraw their data up to three weeks after I have finished working with them. You do not have to give a reason if you choose to withdraw your child.

Appendix 5: Parent consent form

Parent consent form

Area of research: **Exploring whether an intervention raises the self-awareness of pupils with a diagnosis of ASD**

Name of Researcher: Gemma Watson-Butterworth

Name of child: .....

School: .....

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information leaflet for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐
2. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time without giving any reason. ☐
3. I understand that the interview I take part in will be audio recorded and transcribed for use in Gemma's doctoral thesis. ☐
4. I understand that my child's data will be anonymised and kept confidential. ☐
5. I agree for my child to take part in the above research project. ☐

Would you like the opportunity to meet with me in your child's school on 11th July at 9am? **YES NO**

Would you like me to call you to discuss this research project? **YES NO**

Contact phone number:

_____ _____ _____

Name of parent Date Signature

(*or legal representative*)

Copies: parent/ project file (to be kept in a locked location)

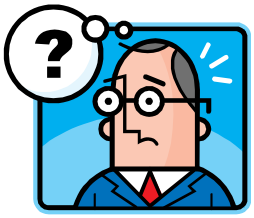
Please return this consent form, as well as your child's consent form, to school.

Thank you for taking part.

Appendix 6: Pupil information letter

Dear

My name is Gemma and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist. I am interested in how students learn best, make friends, feel and behave.



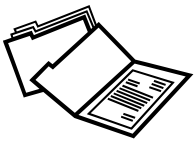
I am working on a research project in your school and I would like to invite you to take part. My research will try to help adults in school know how they can help you and other students to learn and feel happy at school. I will also try to find out more about who you are, what is important to you and your hopes for the future.

I will meet you in school one or two times in the summer term and one or two times in autumn term. We will talk about you and your interests. We might also do some drawing, sort some cards or play some games. I will use a Dictaphone to record what you say in the sessions, but will delete your recording when I have finished my research.

I have sent your parents a letter telling them about my research and to check that they want you to take part. If you want to take part, you need to sign the consent form on the next page. If you don't want to take part, you don't have to fill in the form. You do not have to give a reason why.

If you want to take part, your teacher will tell you when I am coming in to see you. You can change your mind at any time – if you decide later that you don't want to meet me, you can tell your parents or your teacher and we can stop meeting.

Once you have finished working with me, I will use your work to write up my research about how students learn, make friends, feel and behave in school. I will keep your name and school private in my report.



From

Gemma Watson-Butterworth

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Appendix 7: Pupil consent form

Consent form

I want to take part in your research study and I am happy to meet you in my school. I know that I don't have to take part and I can stop at any time without giving a reason.

Name: _____

Signed: _____ (by pupil taking part)

Date: _____

Please return this form to:

You should keep a copy of the information letter.

Appendix 8: Overview of research timeline

This table offers a brief overview of the action taken at various steps throughout this research.

Research Phase	**Timescale**	**Brief synopsis of action taken**
1 (pilot and preparatory)	February - August 2014	• Pilot work. • Identify potential schools/pupils. • Contact school SENCos/heads and distribute school information letter – identify contact person. • Consider which students may want to take part with SENCo/head and distribute parent/pupil information sheets/consent forms. • Offer parents an opportunity to discuss their child participating in my research. • Finalise participating students and book dates/facilities with school contact person.
		• Work individually with 5 students over the course of 1 week, 1 session/hour per pupil (1 pupil included for further pilot work; 3 out of remaining 4 to write up). • Activities to build rapport with the students. • Use adapted self-awareness interview with each of the pupils to gather baseline data. • Record/monitor/evaluate the sessions. • Develop a skeleton template of self-awareness using data gathered from the interviews. • Write up phase 1 draft for thesis, including 3 case studies. • Develop pupil pen portrait for each pupil to take to phase 2.

2 (part 1 and part 2) 'Trial of PCP materials'	September - November 2014	• Use data from phase 1 to make personalised adaptations to the PCP methods. • Book in dates and times with school. • Work with same 5 students over the course of 1 week (2 sessions of 1 hour each per pupil).
		Part 1 • Share pupil pen portrait and check that pupils are happy with it. • Try out different PCP methods with the students (see chapter 4/appendix 1 for details of the PCP methods I used). • Use appropriate resources to support understanding. • Record/monitor/evaluate the sessions. • Add to pupil pen portrait accordingly.
		Part 2 • Share pupil pen portrait and check that pupils are happy with the additions. • Try out different and adapted PCP methods with the students, including relevant resources. • Record/monitor/evaluate the sessions.
		• Draw conclusions based upon this phase in terms of how the research relates to the initial aims and questions. • Relate to theory and how the process has developed my practice. • Write up phase 2 draft for thesis.

Appendix 9: Ethical confirmation letter

The University Of Sheffield.

The School Of Education.

Gemma Watson-Butterworth
c/o DEdCPsy Programme

Head of School
Professor Cathy Nutbrown

School of Education
388 Glossop Road
Sheffield
S10 2JA

Telephone: +44 (0)114 222 8187
Email: edu-ethics@sheffield.ac.uk

Dear Gemma

ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER
Can I use Personal Construct Psychology to raise self-awareness skills of young people with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Thank you for submitting your ethics application. I am writing to confirm that your application has now been approved, and you can proceed with your research.

This letter is evidence that your application has been approved and should be included as an Appendix in your final submission.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely

Professor Dan Goodley
Chair of the School of Education Ethics Review Panel

CC Lorraine Campbell

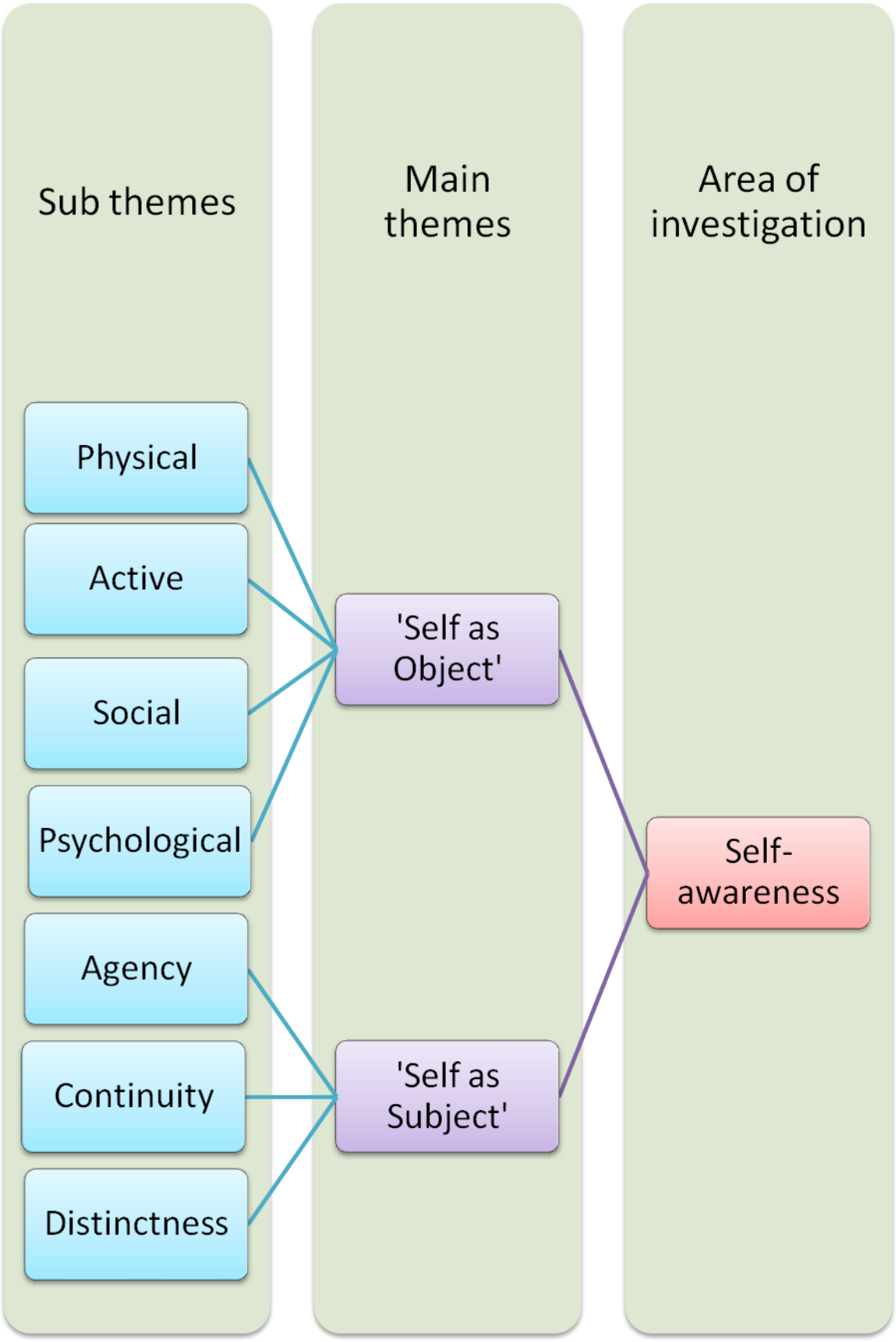
Becoming self aware...

Self awareness is a thinking skill that helps you to think about your own thinking, care about what other people think and feel and know why you choose to do things.

If I become more self aware, I might be able to step back to see if I made a good decision, check over my school work and be kind and understanding to my friends.

To become more self-aware, I can think about what I want in the future, how I get along with people and what I need to do to become the person I want to be.

Appendix 11: Template 1



Appendix 12: Overview of session record forms

Session 1:

Overview of session

1. Information sheet/consent form ☐
2. 'Getting to know you ' ☐
3. 'All about me' ☐
4. Evaluation of session ☐

Finish

Session 2:

Session 2 overview

1. Recap last session - pupil pen portrait ☐
2. Comic strip ☐
3. Comparing people in my life ☐
4. Scaling technique - how I see myself ☐
5. Evaluation ☐

Session 3 (example for Arty's final session)

Session overview

1. Becoming self aware ☐
2. Drawings ☐
3. Evaluation ☐
4. Sharing of pupil pen portrait ☐
5. Closure ☐

Appendix 13: self-awareness interview prompt sheet

Item 1: Self-definition: What are you like? What kind of person are you? What are you not like? How would you describe yourself?
Probes: What does that say about you? Why is that important? What difference does that (characteristic) make? What would be different if you were/were not like that?

Child response:

Item 2: Self-evaluation: What are you especially proud of about yourself? What do you like most about yourself? What are you not proud of? What do you like least about self?
Probes: What does that say about you? Why is that important?

Child response:

Item 3: Self in the past and future: Do you think you'll be the same or different 5 years from now? How about when you're an adult? How about 5 years ago? How about during your childhood?
Probes: What will be the same? What will be different? Why is that important?

Child response:

Item 4: Self-interest: What do you want to be like? What kind of person do you want to be? What do you hope for in life? If you could have three wishes, what would they be? What do you think is good for you?
Probes: Why do you want to… be that way?…wish for that?…believe that is good for you? What else do you…hope for?…wish for?…believe is good for you? Why is that good for you?

Child response:

Item 5: Continuity: Do you change at all from year to year? How (how not)? If you do change from year to year, how do you know it's still always you?
Probes: In what ways do you stay the same? Is that an important thing to say about you? Why?

Child response:

Item 6: Agency: How did you get to be the way you are? How did that make you the kind of person you are? How could you become different?
Probes: What difference did that make? Is that the only reason you turned out like you did? What else could make you different? How would that work?

Child response:

Item 7: Distinctness: Do you think there is anyone who is exactly like you? What makes you different from anyone you know?
Probes: Why is that important? What difference does that make? In what other ways are you different? Are you completely different or just partly different? How do you know? Are you different from everybody or just from some people? How can you be sure you're different from everybody else when there are many people in world you do not know?

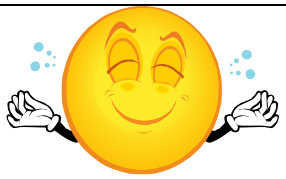
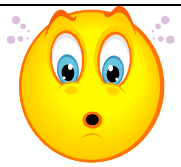
Child response:

Additional observations:

Appendix 14: Pupil evaluation form

Student evaluation

1. How did you feel in the session?

 Happy	 Relaxed	 Sad
 Confused	 Angry	 Something else?

2. Did you understand everything that I asked you to do?

Yes 	No 	Sometimes  (when?)

3. Did I understand what you told me?

Yes 	No 	Sometimes  (when?)

4. Did you like the question cards?

Yes 	No 

5. Was the wording on the cards OK?

Yes 	No 	Sometimes  (when?)

6. Which questions did you like?

7. Which questions didn't you like?

8. Is there anything else you wanted me to ask you?

9. What would have made the session better?

10. Do you have any ideas for improvements?

Appendix 15: Interview transcript from session 1- example (Robin)

Gemma: what type of person are you and how would you describe yourself?

Robin: I don't know

Gemma: hmm, so what are some of the words that you could use, to describe yourself?

Robin: gamer

Gemma: do you use that word or do other people use that word?

Robin: I use it, there, that's what I'm playing [shows Gemma an image]

Gemma: ahh, so self-chosen. So what other words would describe you or tell me about your person?

Robin: a nerd

Gemma: OK, so what does that mean to you?

Robin: I'm clever

Gemma: OK

Robin: self-chosen and also other people

Gemma: yep

Robin: but, I like being a nerd. People call me a nerd, that means they're saying I'm clever

Gemma: yeah I think you're right

Robin: yay

Gemma: so you're clever, is that important to you?

Robin: yeah, cause if I'm stupid, I'm just like 'duh'

Gemma: so what are you not like, would you say that you're not stupid?

Robin: I'm not stupid, but I can act stupid sometimes, but that's cause of something...

Gemma: ...what does that mean, you act stupid? What does that look like?

Robin: yelling at my mum, getting very angry, swearing, I do that a lot

Gemma: OK

Robin: but probably cause of Asperger's

Gemma: so what does that mean if you've got Asperger's?

Robin: erm means I'm bad at social stuff, like talking and with other people, but makes me good at technology, that's why I like gaming

Gemma: hmm, so it sounds like there's some pros and cons there?

Robin: yeah but most of the time it works out good, cause I stick with my technology and no one insults me, apart from the people who do, apart from the people who do

Gemma: yeah that's...

Robin: it's like saying 'I didn't do anything apart from murder a whole family

Gemma: yeah, so can you think of any other words to describe your person, you've got gamer, a nerd, Asperger's, you think that you're not stupid but sometimes you can act stupid. So any other words, or anything that's not like you, any words that don't describe you

Robin: I'm sometimes funny

Gemma: OK

Robin: I'm sometimes selfish, I'm sometimes spoilt and sometimes I just think that my mum is on the wrong side, although sometimes I'm on, I'm in the wrong

Gemma: mmm

Robin: but, she doesn't admit that she's in the wrong so I'm always in the wrong

Gemma: OK

Robin: she just says 'well maybe if you didn't do this'

Gemma: yep

Robin: and I said 'well maybe if you didn't kick off all the time'

Gemma: yeah, tricky, isn't it. So do you think that all of these things are important to you? Do you think that they all make you, you?

Robin: yeah

Gemma: would anything be different, would you be different...

Robin: ...wait, I'm also sort of like, a bit, what is it where you ask questions about what you are and what's going on in the world? Philosical?

Gemma: inquisitive? Philosophical?

Robin: yeah, I wasn't sure if it was that

Gemma: which one?

Robin: philosophical

Gemma: so why is that important to you?

Robin: cause you know, makes me, me

Gemma: what does it say about you?...

Robin: ...sometimes I sit down and think

Gemma: ahh OK, I see what you mean. And what does it say about you to be philosophical?

Robin: that I don't think about what's happening around us, I'm not logical like the Asperger's would say, so I'm not actually controlled by my Asperger's

Gemma: OK

Robin: I sometimes, I'm not who I'm supposed to be

Gemma: ahh

Robin: I'm different

Gemma: so is that a good thing?

Robin: so, yeah, cause some people would think they're controlled by a mental problem

Gemma: ahuh

Robin: but instead of being like logical

Gemma: ahuh

Robin: and thinking this has to happen cause it's logical, I think, but say this is all a dream, maybe this is just my life flashing before my eyes right now and I'm about to die

Gemma: that's a very philosophical stand point

Robin: I thought about that last night

Gemma: did you? How long do you think about these things for?

Robin: erm, 2-3 minutes

Gemma: so it doesn't take up a lot of your time?

Robin: no, I just sit there, say someone says something on one of my videos, 'but what if'

Gemma: that's an interesting insight, isn't it, 'but what if'. OK, have you got anything else to tell me to answer this question, or shall we move on?

Robin: yeah, that's about it

Gemma: that's a very good answer, very insightful. OK, so it's in two parts. So what are you proud of about yourself, what do you like most about yourself?

Robin: I'm good with computers and technology

Gemma: yeah, anything else?

Robin: I'm that [points to my notes] I'm not controlled by my Asperger's

Gemma: yeah, why is that important?

Robin: like I said earlier, I think outside of what I should be doing, so I'm sort of breaking what I should, logically, there's Asperger's coming in, be doing

Gemma: mmm

Robin: so it's more of like a good thing than a restriction

Gemma: mmm

Robin: although, I do act stupid in social situations sometimes, still, but that's just...

Gemma: ...do you think that's important, that you do that? Do you think it matters in your life?

Robin: yeah, because, I'll make some friends because of the way I am, I'll make some enemies because of the way I am

Gemma: OK

Robin: like everyone else, it's just, I'm a bit different, bit more different than everyone else, because, everyone else is normal, I have like, Asperger's, so...

Gemma: do you think everyone else is normal?

Robin: I know some other people with stuff like that. Kai is saying he's got Asperger's, which, I've been thinking he does

Gemma: right

Robin: some of my friends might have stuff. I know John's brother does, I know my brother might

Gemma: OK

Robin: I know my dad probably will, cause he doesn't think what should come first

Gemma: right

Robin: no, the new girlfriend must come first, instead of his family

Gemma: right, OK

Robin: not being able to get any food for the week

Gemma: OK. So what do you like least about yourself, or what are you not proud of?

Robin: erm, social thing, I can mess stuff up sometimes

Gemma: OK

Robin: and also that, well, I don't know

Gemma: that's OK

Robin: there's a weird part to me, I think. Sometimes I sit there and like I do with the philosophy and stuff, and think 'why?' 'Why life?' There is a lot of parts to me

Gemma: hmm

Robin: you might say some people are two-faced, I have 50 faces. Actually, I've only counted 3 up to now

Gemma: so what does this say about you, these things?

Robin: I'm abnormal

Gemma: and is that something that you don't like, or something that you like?

Robin: something that I don't like, but also, something that I like

Gemma: yeah

Robin: cause abnormal is different

Gemma: so you like to be different?

Robin: yeah

Gemma: and what are the bad parts of being this, this word?

Robin: people bully me more

Gemma: right

Robin: although I do remember one person who was particularly annoying and got what he deserved

Gemma: right, OK

Robin: jumped on my back trying to choke me when we had a fight

Gemma: ahh

Robin: but

Gemma: and did that ever happen again?

Robin: no

Gemma: did you get in trouble?

Robin: no we [unclear] no one saw

Gemma: right OK. So...

Robin: ...but if anyone did see, they just thought 'nope'

Gemma: so is this something that is a big problem in school at the minute, or not?

Robin: yeah, quite a few people are bullying me, but you know, you get used to it

Gemma: do the teachers know?

Robin: no, can't be bothered to tell them, cause if I do, they just get worse. Teachers never do nowt, primary school teachers never did owt, they just said 'stay away from them then'. Nope he followed me, I didn't follow him, and anyway, if I stay away from him, I won't be able to be with all my friends, cause he's friends with my friends

Gemma: OK, let's go on to the next one. Do you think you'll be the same or different in 5 years?

Robin: certainly different, don't know why but

Gemma: OK

Robin: I will

Gemma: so in 5 years, you'll be...

Robin: ...cause I've only just realised the Asperger's thing and there's a lot of stuff going on in my family. Can we turn the recording off for this bit?

[stopped recording while Robin shared some personal family circumstances with me]

Gemma: so what will be the same in 5 years time?

Robin: erm, me

Gemma: what about you? What do you think, about you?

Robin: the Asperger's thing, I'll still be great with computers, bad with social, but I'll get used to it more and I'll know about it. I might get more philosophical, I might think 'if this is happening, how can we learn this?' then go into science and think 'how can we stop this, blah blah blah'

Gemma: yeah

Robin: and I might become one of the greatest inventors of all time

Gemma: that's a little like my job, my jobs not about science or computers, but I do a lots of thinking about people and how things are and why things happen, so in some ways, there are lots of different jobs you could get where you could use that approach, you know what I mean?

Robin: ahuh

Gemma: and how you can change things based on lots of thinking

Robin: I'm just adding the philosophical thing [adds to self-portrait]. Cause I've got a sword in me and them I'm going to do another dreaming thing, coming out of it, with like, my life, saying my life, 'my life'

Gemma: so, 5 years ago, when you were, well, about 6 or 7, were you the same or were you different?

Robin: very different

Gemma: right, how were you different then?

Robin: I actually had quite a lot of friends when I was younger

Gemma: right

Robin: a lot more than I do now

Gemma: OK

Robin: people actually respected me a bit more

Gemma: you mean like people your age?

Robin: people my age and younger, and sometimes even older, and I used to be better at certain stuff and, you know when you're younger and you just don't care about being embarrassed or stuff

Gemma: yeah, you just get on with it

Robin: I remember one time when one of my friends walked into the classroom with a bunch of toilet paper hanging out of his trousers, he didn't look embarrassed at all

Gemma: no

Robin: cause he was young

Gemma: so was anything the same when you were that age?

Robin: not really, a lot of things have changed in the last few years, or months, even

Gemma: OK

Robin: but, I'll get used to it

Gemma: that's what happens

Robin: that's what being human is about

Gemma: yeah. OK, number 4. What type of person do you want to be?

Robin: now that's a question

Gemma: that's...

Robin: ...I don't want to be, well saying on the philosophical side, if I'm dead right now, I don't have any control over it. If this is God controlling me, I don't have any control over it. But if there is no God, there is no light flashing before my eyes, I have my own choice right now

Gemma: so who do you think controls things?

Robin: there might be someone that controls stuff, there might not, there might just be a massive game of Sims, might just be life

Gemma: have you not decided yet?

Robin: no, cause you can't, there's no proof to this stuff, not until you die, if there's a heaven, well, I was wrong. I don't believe in God

Gemma: mmm

Robin: so I was wrong, if there's no heaven, I was right

Gemma: so what kind of person...

Robin: ...if I reform, then I was wrong again. If, just before I get to the end of my life, I realise this was all a dream, cause there is parts of my life, or what I think is my life, right now, that I think feels like it's in a dream

Gemma: OK

Robin: I just feel real dizzy for a second then I feel like it's in a dream or sommat. I've just woken up from it. So, that sort of puts a bit of evidence into my theories

Gemma: mmm

Robin: some other people's theories as well

Gemma: what type of person do you want to be? What do you hope for in the future?

Robin: I hope to be kind and not like my dad. I don't want to fuss around with a girlfriend, don't plan to get a wife, no, no wife. Not trying to be sexist, just, I don't want to end up like my dad

Gemma: OK, well it's your life

Robin: and I want to be a little nerd in the corner

Gemma: so what would you like to do?

Robin: on my computer

Gemma: is that what you'd like to do?

Robin: I've been thinking about coding, but then I saw someone a year younger than me, who probably has 5 years on me of coding and learning how to code, so that sort of shattered my dreams of coding

Gemma: do you think that you can't do that anymore? Do you think you can't catch up?

Robin: I think it's too late for me to start

Gemma: do you think?

Robin: I've started a new hobby

Gemma: what's that?

Robin: coding on scratch, but I find someone, a year younger than me, that's got 5 years on me of what you can do. He's actually made a real game and posted it

Gemma: wow. Have you seen the film, with, about how Facebook was developed?

Robin: no

Gemma: have you heard of that? Mark Zuckerberg, he was into coding and now he's a multi-billionaire because he developed Facebook, and that's what, you can be successful, I guess, can't you, with these things?

Robin: yeah, but, scratch is for beginners. I've only just started learning it, in class, and I'm brilliant at it, but this kid taught himself with his dad and he's actually earned a million pounds. Him, on his own, has earned a million pounds, and already spent it

Gemma: that's amazing. So if you had 3 wishes, for now or the future, what would they be?

Robin: be able to develop stuff faster, say like, erm, I could learn coding really fast and become rich, very rich

Gemma: so is that...

Robin: ...or, instead of becoming rich, have a great idea. That idea could make you even richer, but also, instead of just being a fat rich man, getting drunk all day, say like if you developed a cure for cancer

Gemma: ahuh

Robin: it's gonna cost you a lot of money to make it, but you're gonna be a hero

Gemma: you would be a hero for the world, wouldn't you? So have you got a third wish?...

Robin: ...cure for the common cold?

Gemma: yeah. Have you got a third wish, or are you not sure?

Robin: to have infinite lives. I'd like to see what it's like

Gemma: so would that be as you?

Robin: that would be, there's everyone, say people die, they just reappear, everyone has infinite lives

Gemma: so would it be like reincarnation where you come back as something else, or...

Robin: ...no

Gemma: would you be you?

Robin: no, they get hit by a car, their head gets crushed or sommat

Gemma: ah right, yeah

Robin: they just reappear, behind the car, and they are back to normal. But if they die naturally, then they die

Gemma: ah right

Robin: so still old age, it's just, massive tornado hits, everyone just reappears, all the buildings and money is wasted, everyone reappears, with clothes on obviously

Gemma: well yeah, we wouldn't want people to be naked. From year to year, what changes and what stays the same?

Robin: erm, my height, that changes a lot

Gemma: yeah

Robin: erm, me, like before, in the, I changed lots, from when I was younger to now

Gemma: OK

Robin: compared to 5 years

Gemma: yeah you did. So what stays the same?

Robin: erm, what stays the same is I'll always be me

Gemma: what does that mean, when you say I'll always be me? What do you mean?

Robin: I will never be, say the kid called Bill on the end of the street

Gemma: yeah

Robin: I'll never have a different family, I'll never have different people to talk to, I'll never be in a different country, I'll never have different understandings of stuff

Gemma: ahh

Robin: unless I develop them myself. I'll never be told like, you're worthless

Gemma: ahuh

Robin: and then just think, no, cause I always think about stuff. I say, I get called stupid, I think 'am I stupid?' I get called a bully, I think 'am I a bully?' Sometimes they're right, but sometimes they're very wrong

Gemma: yeah

Robin: but some people just let it pass over 'em, I'd always think about it. I'm the kind of person that thinks about stuff without people knowing, listens without people knowing. Cause I got my headphones on, on the Ipad, playing a game, may dad talks about something to Angie, then 2 **weeks** later, he says, 'you don't know this, but blah de blah is happening', yeah I do dad, I'm not stupid

Gemma: cause you've overheard it?

Robin: yep, I've already heard it

Gemma: so how do you know it's still always you, if things are changing all the time? How do you know it's still always you?

Robin: because, I'll always see through my eyes, I'll always see from my point of view, really, and my point of view might change a bit, but it will always be, basically the same thing

Gemma: yeah

Robin: so, that's how I'll know it's always me, just by what I do and how I react, but it will still change a lot, but slowly, so I'll act stupid sometimes, but slowly, that might just go away

Gemma: ahuh

Robin: but I'll still be me cause it will slowly go, not just like, I'm acting real stupid one day, then the next day, not gonna happen again

Gemma: yeah, I know

Robin: it always happens slowly, so you know it's always you

Gemma: good answer. OK, number 6. How did you get to be the person you are today? I know you already started saying something about that, when you said your thoughts about who controls you and things like that. So have you got anything further to add to this one?

Robin: not really. How could I become different? Different things happening around me, it's never what I would do, because if you think about it, someone in your family dies when you're about to go to an audition for something

Gemma: yeah?

Robin: that's one universe same as a parallel universe, one universe you get that audition, and you become a massive star, billionaire, richest person alive, the other one, you go to your family member and you end up in a dump, slum or sommat

Gemma: so I've put here [shows Robin the notes] that environmental factors can change your circumstances...

Robin: ...stuff around you, mostly

Gemma: is that what you mean? It can change your circumstances and your opportunities?

Robin: yeah, but if you think about it for everyone, it doesn't really make sense, like other stuff. Like saying 'this sentence is false', paradox

Gemma: so could, so other than, do you think it's environmental factors that shape who you are?

Robin: yeah

Gemma: so, do, how do you think you might be able to change as a person?

Robin: if you really try hard to do something, then you can change, but if you just do small stuff, say I do a little bit of boxing, sometimes, then I won't be a master at it. If I do, like hours a day, I'll get really good, really fast

Gemma: ahuh

Robin: so, I, I'm using a lot of examples

Gemma: no that's good, examples are good. So do you think, where does that change come from? Who causes that change to happen?

Robin: if, you can do it yourself

Gemma: yeah

Robin: or it happens naturally, just like growing up. You can die your hair purple or it will just go grey naturally. But it's stuff around you that affects you, but if you try really hard to do something yourself, you can change it. But if you don't do anything, you just let stuff control you, then you might actually become that person who does that audition

Gemma: yeah, I know what you mean

Robin: or, if you focus on your family and care about them and stuff, it's what you focus on doing more

Gemma: yep

Robin: if I'm caring about people, then you go home and miss the audition. If you focus on your dream, then you might say, I'll come after my audition

Gemma: yeah, so do you think that's about your choice?

Robin: how you focus and what you focus on

Gemma: OK, last question. Do you think that there is anyone out there that is exactly like you?

Robin: no, that's all I'm saying. No philosophical answer needed, just no

Gemma: do you think that anybody could be partly like you?

Robin: yeah

Gemma: do you have any follow up?

Robin: I'd never know

Gemma: mmm

Robin: but partly like me, yes, exactly like me, no

Gemma: yeah. What parts do you think could be the same?

Robin: Asperger's and my job

Gemma: ahuh

Robin: when I get older, or my hobbies. Lots of things that you could change yourself, but if you think about it environmentally, there's an even lower chance of it happening

Gemma: so that nobody else has had the exact same, is that what you mean?

Robin: nobody will go through the exact same stuff as you. You're born in a house, someone else might be born in a hospital, someone else might be born on the street, someone else might be born on a river, on a boat or

Gemma: yeah

Robin: in a car

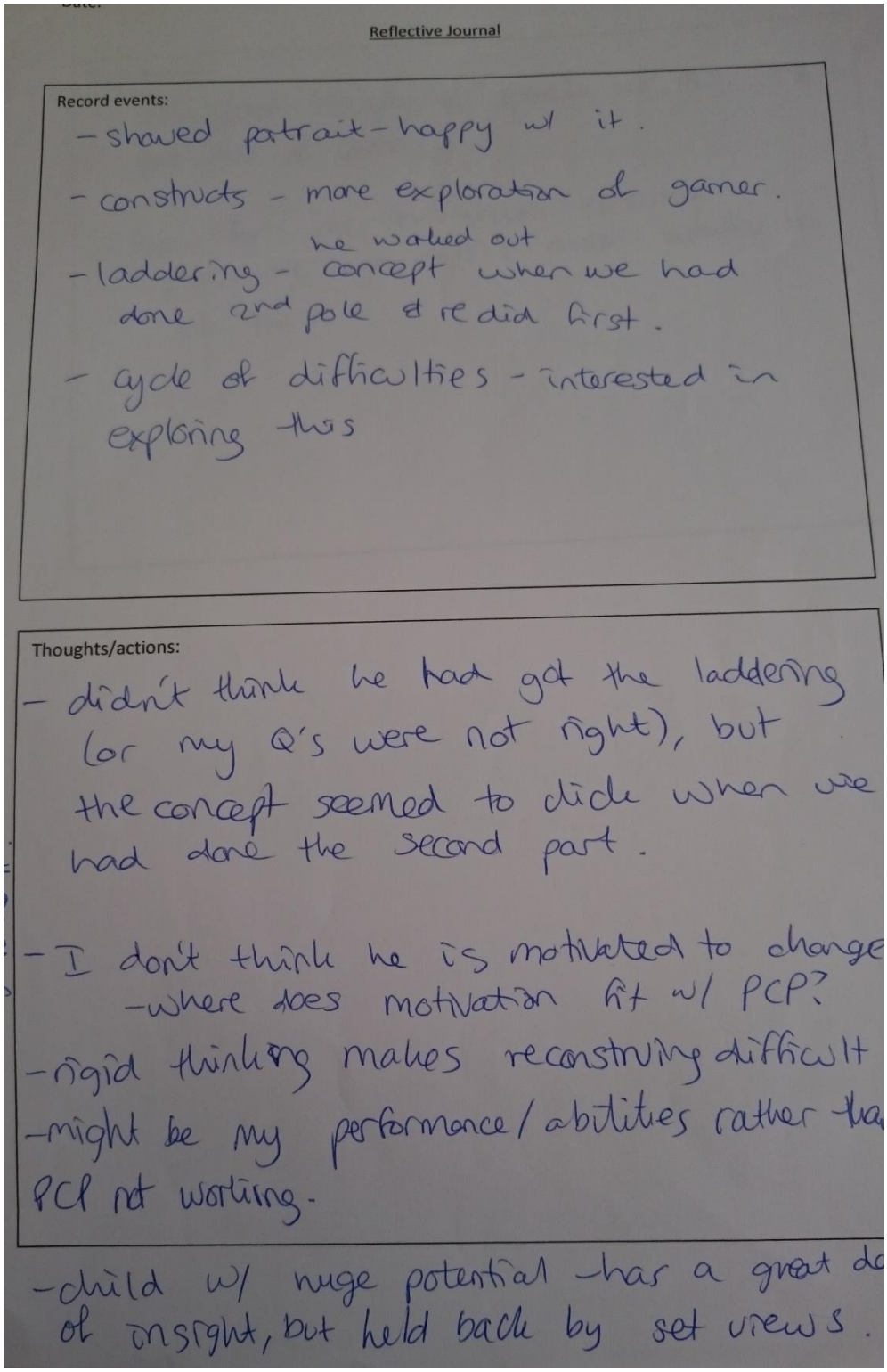
Gemma: so if I were to say what makes you different from anybody else, do you think that's it, or do you think it's something else?

Robin: environmental stuff and what you choose to do yourself

Gemma: yep

Robin: there is a chance that someone out there is exactly like me, but I say no. There is like a <0.0000000000001, at the end of a billion zeros

Appendix 16: Example of my reflective journal following a session with Robin



Reflective Journal

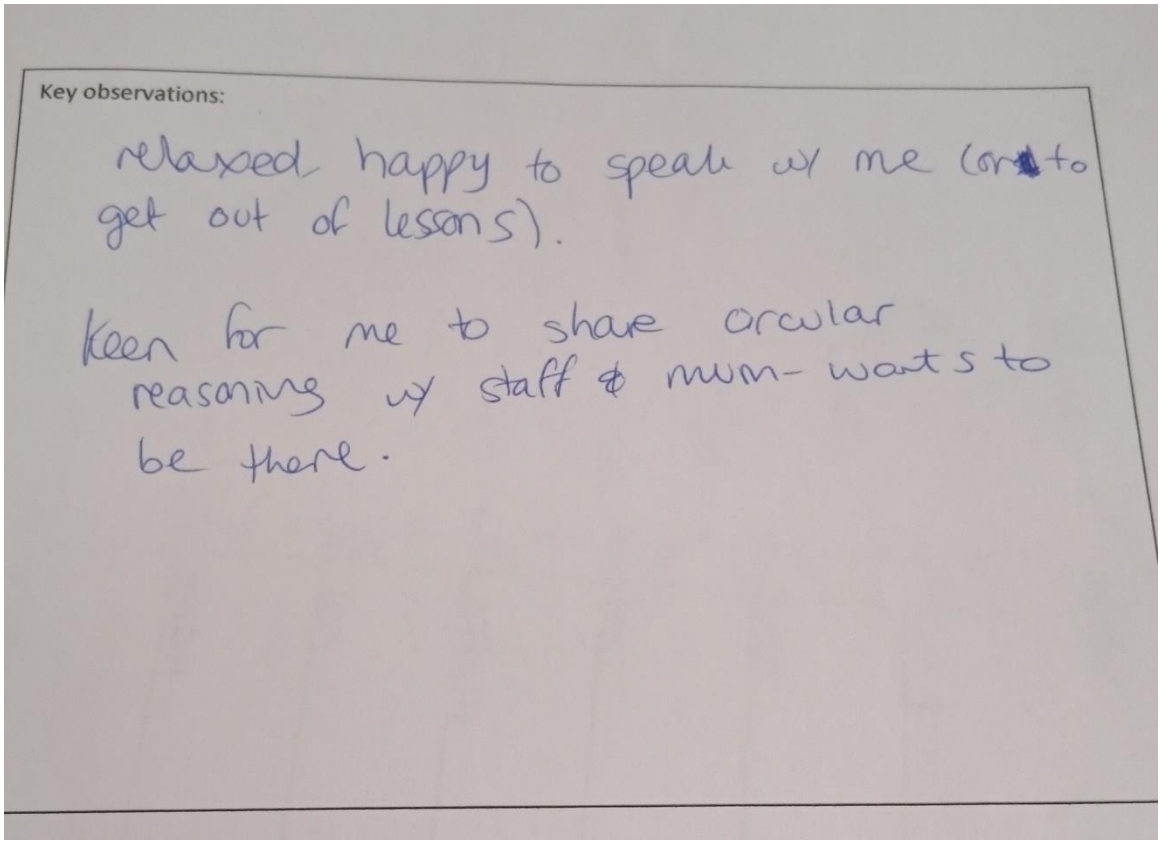
Record events:

- showed patrait - happy w/ it.
- constructs - more exploration of gamer.
- laddering - he walked out concept when we had done 2nd pole & re did first.
- cycle of difficulties - interested in exploring this

Thoughts/actions:

- didn't think he had got the laddering (or my Q's were not right), but the concept seemed to click when we had done the second part.
- I don't think he is motivated to change -where does motivation fit w/ PCP?
- rigid thinking makes reconstruing difficult
- might be my performance / abilities rather tha PCP not working.

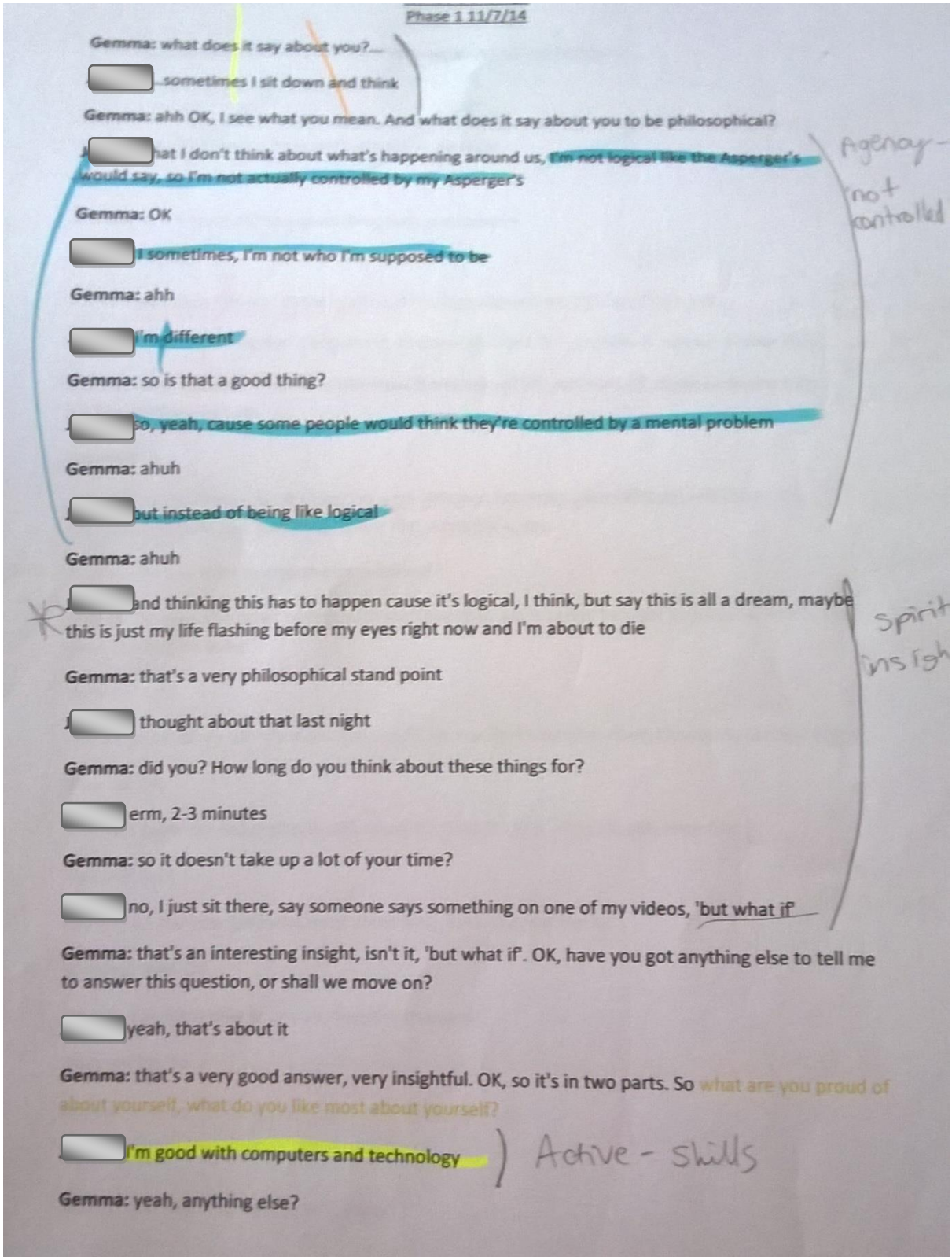
- child w/ huge potential - has a great de of insight, but held back by set views.


Key observations:

relaxed happy to speak w/ me (or to get out of lessons).

Keen for me to share circular reasoning w/ staff & mum- wants to be there.

Appendix 17: Example of colour coding transcript



Phase 1 11/7/14

Gemma: what does it say about you?...

[redacted] ...sometimes I sit down and think

Gemma: ahh OK, I see what you mean. And what does it say about you to be philosophical?

[redacted] ...at I don't think about what's happening around us, I'm not logical like the Asperger's would say, so I'm not actually controlled by my Asperger's

Agency - not controlled

Gemma: OK

[redacted] I sometimes, I'm not who I'm supposed to be

Gemma: ahh

[redacted] I'm different

Gemma: so is that a good thing?

[redacted] ...so, yeah, cause some people would think they're controlled by a mental problem

Gemma: ahuh

[redacted] ...but instead of being like logical

Gemma: ahuh

[redacted] ...and thinking this has to happen cause it's logical, I think, but say this is all a dream, maybe this is just my life flashing before my eyes right now and I'm about to die

Spirit insigh

Gemma: that's a very philosophical stand point

[redacted] thought about that last night

Gemma: did you? How long do you think about these things for?

[redacted] erm, 2-3 minutes

Gemma: so it doesn't take up a lot of your time?

[redacted] no, I just sit there, say someone says something on one of my videos, 'but what if'

Gemma: that's an interesting insight, isn't it, 'but what if'. OK, have you got anything else to tell me to answer this question, or shall we move on?

[redacted] yeah, that's about it

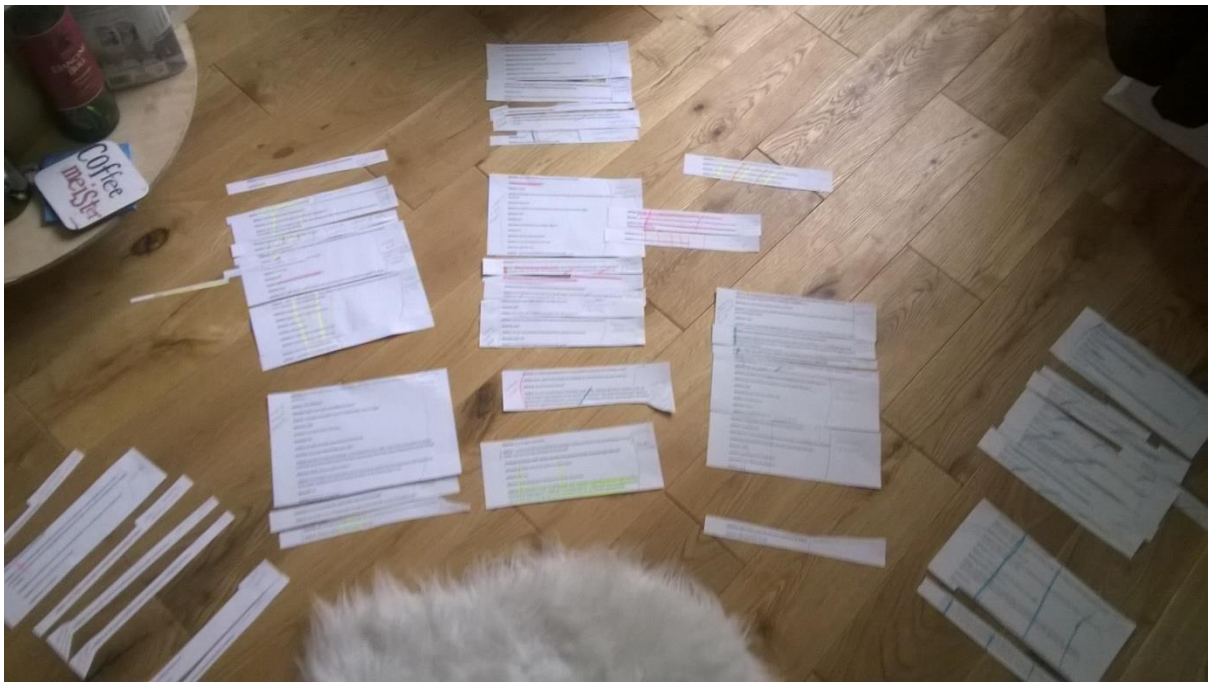
Gemma: that's a very good answer, very insightful. OK, so it's in two parts. So what are you proud of about yourself, what do you like most about yourself?

[redacted] I'm good with computers and technology

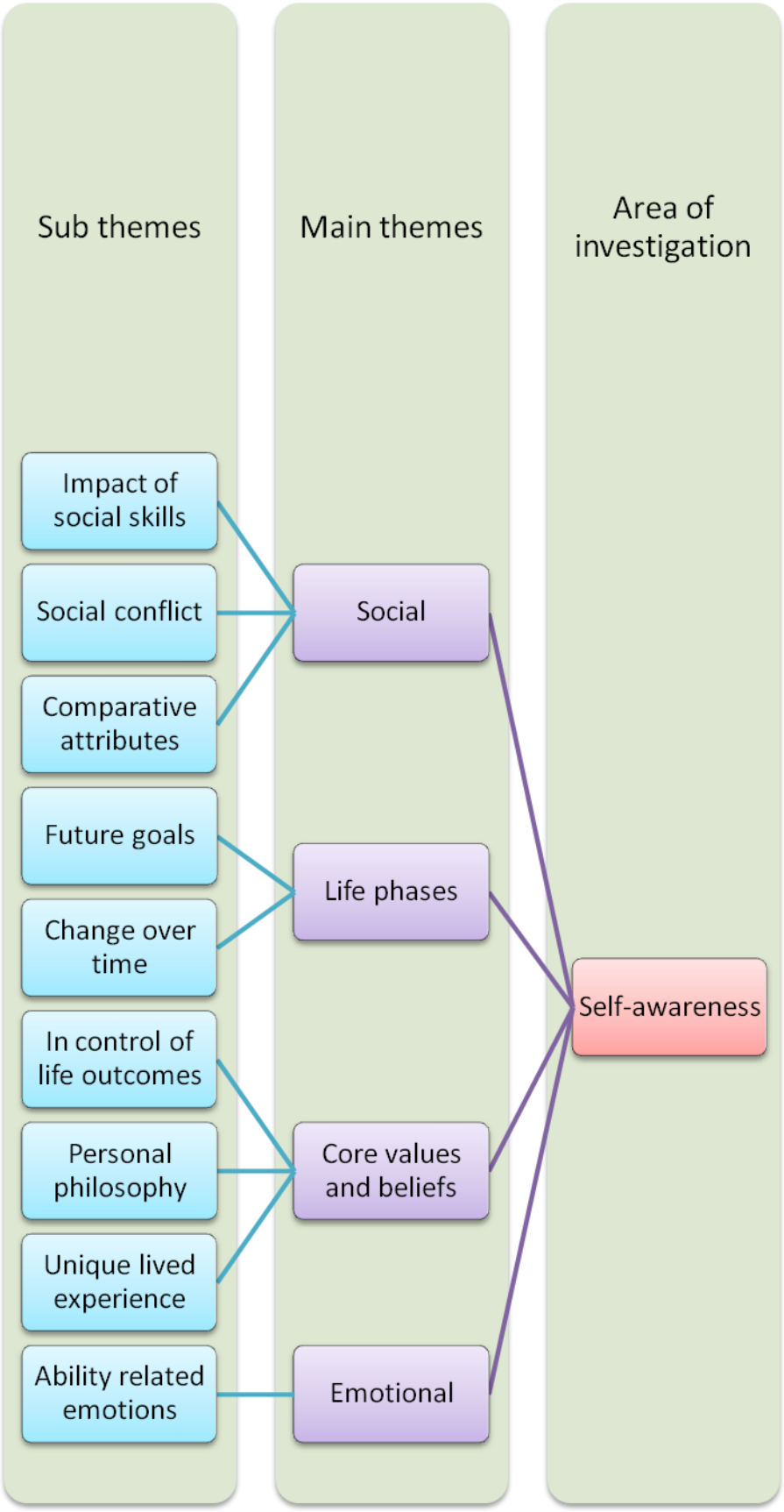
Active - skills

Gemma: yeah, anything else?

Appendix 18: Example of sorting codes into categories



Appendix 19: Template 2



Appendix 20: Initial pupil pen portrait example (Charlie)

Charlie

Impact of social skills

I'm not good with conversations, which can make it hard to make friends.
I might have more friends if I were better at conversations.

Comparative attributes

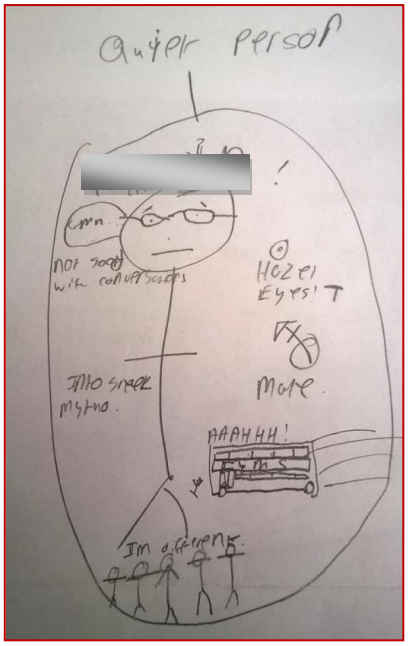
I have different interests to other people my age. I am unique.
I correct people, such as teachers, which is quite unique to me.

Psychological awareness

I don't like the fact that I can't concentrate. This might cause something negative to happen in my future.
It is important that I do my best to make my hopes and dreams come true.
I don't want to be a stroppy teenager.
I'm proud when I try new things.
I sometimes cry a lot. I should stop doing this so much.
I think it is important to show our emotions.
I don't like noisy environments.
It bothers me that I am different to other people.
Sometimes I don't like that I have autism.
I don't like being put under pressure.
I like to collect things.
I want to get rid of my fear of heights.

Personal attributes

I'm shy and quiet.
I have a broad imagination.
I am not a loner or a mute.
I am not a thief.



Stable characteristics

I have always needed glasses.
I am always an optimist.
The amount of work I have to do stays the same.

Future considerations

When I am an adult, I want to live in New York and work in the new World Trade Centre.
I would like to get married.
I want to be able to cope with working long hours.
I'm trying to learn stocks for my future career.

Change over time

I change as I get older. I have become happier and more eager.
I used to have a temper when I was younger. My voice and mood have changed.
I might change when I become a teenager.
When I get older, I will be preparing for work, so will be on my games less.

Influence on self

The internet has shaped my interests.
My parents have shaped who I am today.

Appendix 21: Analysis of interview transcript

Theme	***Example quotation/s***	***Summary of constructs***
Future considerations	**Robin:** I hope to be kind and not like my dad. I don't want to fuss around with a girlfriend, don't plan to get a wife, no, no wife. Not trying to be sexist, just, I don't want to end up like my dad **Gemma:** so what would you like to do? **Robin:** on my computer **Robin:** I've been thinking about coding, but then I saw someone a year younger than me, who probably has 5 years on me of coding and learning how to code, so that sort of shattered my dreams of coding **Robin:** be able to develop stuff faster, say like, erm, I could learn coding really fast and become rich, very rich **Robin:** ...or, instead of becoming rich, have a great idea. That idea could make you even richer, but also, instead of just being a fat rich man, getting drunk all day, say like if you developed a cure for cancer **Gemma:** ahuh **Robin:** it's gonna cost you a lot of money to make it, but you're gonna be a hero So have you got a third wish?... **Robin:** ...cure for the common cold?	I want to be kind, different to my dad. I would like to work with computers, possibly in coding if I can learn the skills I need. I want to do something useful with my life, like invent or create something.
Change over time	**Gemma:** OK, let's go on to the next one. Do you think you'll be the same or different in 5 years? **Robin:** certainly different, don't know why but I might get more philosophical, I might think 'if this is happening, how can we learn this?' then go into science and think 'how can we stop this, blah blah blah'	I think I will be different in 5 years. My thoughts about the world might develop. I am different now compared to when I was younger. I used to have lots of friends and was well respected.

	Robin: and I might become one of the greatest inventors of all time **Robin:** I actually had quite a lot of friends when I was younger **Gemma:** right **Robin:** a lot more than I do now **Gemma:** OK **Robin:** people actually respected me a bit more **Gemma:** you mean like people your age? **Robin:** people my age and younger, and sometimes even older **Robin:** ...cause I've only just realised the Asperger's thing and there's a lot of stuff going on in my family. **Gemma:** so, 5 years ago, when you were, well, about 6 or 7, were you the same or were you different? **Robin:** very different I used to be better at certain stuff and, you know when you're younger and you just don't care about being embarrassed or stuff **Gemma:** yeah, you just get on with it **Robin:** I remember one time when one of my friends walked into the classroom with a bunch of toilet paper hanging out of his trousers, he didn't look embarrassed at all **Gemma:** no **Robin:** cause he was young a lot of things have changed in the last few years, or months, even [gap] but, I'll get used to it	I now know that I have Asperger's People change when they get older, they are more concerned about what other people think of them. I have changed physically over the years. Change happens slowly, over time.

	Robin: erm, my height, that changes a lot **Robin:** erm, me, like before, in the, I changed lots, from when I was younger to now **Robin:** so, that's how I'll know it's always me, just by what I do and how I react, but it will still change a lot, but slowly, so I'll act stupid sometimes, but slowly, that might just go away **Gemma:** ahuh **Robin:** but I'll still be me cause it will slowly go, not just like, I'm acting real stupid one day, then the next day, not gonna happen again **Gemma:** yeah, I know **Robin:** it always happens slowly, so you know it's always you	
Impact of social skills	**Gemma:** hmm, so it sounds like there's some pros and cons there? **Robin:** yeah but most of the time it works out good, cause I stick with my technology and no one insults me, apart from the people who do, apart from the people who do **Robin:** although, I do act stupid in social situations sometimes, still, but that's just... **Robin:** yeah, because, I'll make some friends because of the way I am, I'll make some enemies because of the way I am **Robin:** erm, social thing, I can mess stuff up sometimes **Gemma:** and what are the bad parts of being this, this word? **Robin:** people bully me more **Robin:** although I do remember one person who was particularly annoying and got what he deserved **Gemma:** right, OK	I sometimes find social situations hard. I can act stupid and mess up. Sometimes other people are unkind to me or bully me. I the past, I have been in conflict with others. Sometimes I find it hard getting on with my mum and dad. We don't always have the same point of view.

	Robin: jumped on my back trying to choke me when we had a fight **Gemma:** ahh **Robin:** but **Gemma:** and did that ever happen again? **Robin:** no **Gemma:** did you get in trouble? **Robin:** no we [unclear] no one saw **Gemma:** right OK. So... **Robin:** ...but if anyone did see, they just thought 'nope' **Gemma:** so is this something that is a big problem in school at the minute, or not? **Robin:** yeah, quite a few people are bullying me, but you know, you get used to it **Gemma:** do the teachers know? **Robin:** no, can't be bothered to tell them, cause if I do, they just get worse. Teachers never do nowt, primary school teachers never did owt, they just said 'stay away from them then'. Nope he followed me, I didn't follow him, and anyway, if I stay away from him, I won't be able to be with all my friends, cause he's friends with my friends and sometimes I just think that my mum is on the wrong side, although sometimes I'm on, I'm in the wrong **Robin:** but, she doesn't admit that she's in the wrong so I'm always in the wrong **Gemma:** OK **Robin:** she just says 'well maybe if you didn't do this' **Gemma:** yep **Robin:** and I said 'well maybe if you didn't kick off all the time' **Robin:** self-chosen and also other people	

	Robin: I'm not stupid, but I can act stupid sometimes, but that's cause of something... **Gemma:** ...what does that mean, you act stupid? What does that look like? **Robin:** yelling at my mum, getting very angry, swearing, I do that a lot	
Comparative attributes	**Robin:** I'm different **Robin:** like everyone else, it's just, I'm a bit different, bit more different than everyone else, because, everyone else is normal, I have like, Asperger's, so... **Gemma:** do you think everyone else is normal? **Robin:** I know some other people with stuff like that. Kai is saying he's got Asperger's, which, I've been thinking he does **Gemma:** right **Robin:** some of my friends might have stuff. I know John's brother does, I know my brother might **Gemma:** OK **Robin:** I know my dad probably will, cause he doesn't think what should come first **Gemma:** so what does this say about you, these things? **Robin:** I'm abnormal Do you think that there is anyone out there that is exactly like you? **Robin:** no, that's all I'm saying partly like me, yes, exactly like me, no What parts do you think could be the same? **Robin:** Asperger's and my job **Robin:** nobody will go through the exact same stuff as you. You're born in a house,	I am different to other people. I have Asperger's, which makes me have different qualities. I know some people who might be the same as me. My past experiences have shaped the person I am today, making me unique. Other people can be similar to me, but not exactly the same.

	someone else might be born in a hospital, someone else might be born on the street, someone else might be born on a river, on a boat or **Robin:** there is a chance that someone out there is exactly like me, but I say no. There is like a <0.0000000000001, at the end of a billion zeros **Gemma:** do you think that anybody could be partly like you? **Robin:** yeah **Robin:** coding on scratch, but I find someone, a year younger than me, that's got 5 years on me of what you can do. He's actually made a real game and posted it , but this kid taught himself with his dad and he's actually earned a million pounds. Him, on his own, has earned a million pounds, and already spent it	
Personal attributes	what are some of the words that you could use, to describe yourself? **Robin:** gamer So what other words would describe you or tell me about your person? **Robin:** a nerd **Robin:** but probably cause of Asperger's **Gemma:** so what does that mean if you've got Asperger's? **Robin:** erm means I'm bad at social stuff, like talking and with other people, but makes me good at technology, that's why I like gaming **Robin:** I'm sometimes funny **Robin:** I'm sometimes selfish, I'm sometimes spoilt **Robin:** ...wait, I'm also sort of like, a bit, what is it where you ask questions about what you are and what's going on in the world? Philosical? **Gemma:** inquisitive? Philosophical? **Robin:** yeah, I wasn't sure if it was that	I am a gamer and a nerd. I have Asperger's. I'm good at technology, but not good socially. I'm sometimes funny. I can be selfish or spoilt. I'm philosophical. I'm clever.

	Gemma: which one? **Robin:** philosophical **Robin:** I'm clever	
Stable characteristics	**Gemma:** so what will be the same in 5 years time? **Robin:** erm, me **Gemma:** what about you? What do you think, about you? **Robin:** the Asperger's thing, I'll still be great with computers, bad with social, but I'll get used to it more and I'll know about it. **Robin:** erm, what stays the same is I'll always be me **Gemma:** what does that mean, when you say I'll always be me? What do you mean? **Robin:** I will never be, say the kid called Bill on the end of the street **Gemma:** yeah **Robin:** I'll never have a different family, I'll never have different people to talk to, I'll never be in a different country How do you know it's still always you? **Robin:** because, I'll always see through my eyes, I'll always see from my point of view, really, and my point of view might change a bit, but it will always be, basically the same thing	My Asperger's is a stable characteristic, meaning that I will always be great with computers, bad with social. I might get used to it more in time. My unique experiences will always be the same. My view of will world will mostly stay the same.
Psychological awareness	**Robin:** but, I like being a nerd. People call me a nerd, that means they're saying I'm clever so you're clever, is that important to you? **Robin:** yeah, cause if I'm stupid, I'm just like 'duh' **Gemma:** what does it say about you?... **Robin:** ...sometimes I sit down and think	I like being thought of as clever. I don't want to be stupid. I spend a lot of time thinking about the meaning of life. I consider spiritual aspects, such as afterlife.

	Robin: but instead of being like logical **Gemma:** ahuh **Robin:** and thinking this has to happen cause it's logical, I think, but say this is all a dream, maybe this is just my life flashing before my eyes right now and I'm about to die **Gemma:** that's a very philosophical stand point **Robin:** I thought about that last night **Gemma:** did you? How long do you think about these things for? **Robin:** erm, 2-3 minutes **Gemma:** so it doesn't take up a lot of your time? **Robin:** no, I just sit there, say someone says something on one of my videos, 'but what if' **Robin:** I'm good with computers and technology **Robin:** something that I don't like, but also, something that I like **Gemma:** yeah **Robin:** cause abnormal is different **Gemma:** so you like to be different? **Robin:** yeah **Robin:** I'm just adding the philosophical thing [adds to self-portrait]. Cause I've got a sword in me and them I'm going to do another dreaming thing, coming out of it, with like, my life, saying my life, 'my life' **Robin:** that's what being human is about **Robin:** ...I don't want to be, well saying on the philosophical side, if I'm dead right now, I don’t have any control over it. If this is God controlling me, I don’t have any	I'm good with computers and technology. I like being unique. I develop my own theories about the world and why things happen. I don't have all the answers to the questions I raise. I am aware of what is going on around me, more than people realise sometimes.

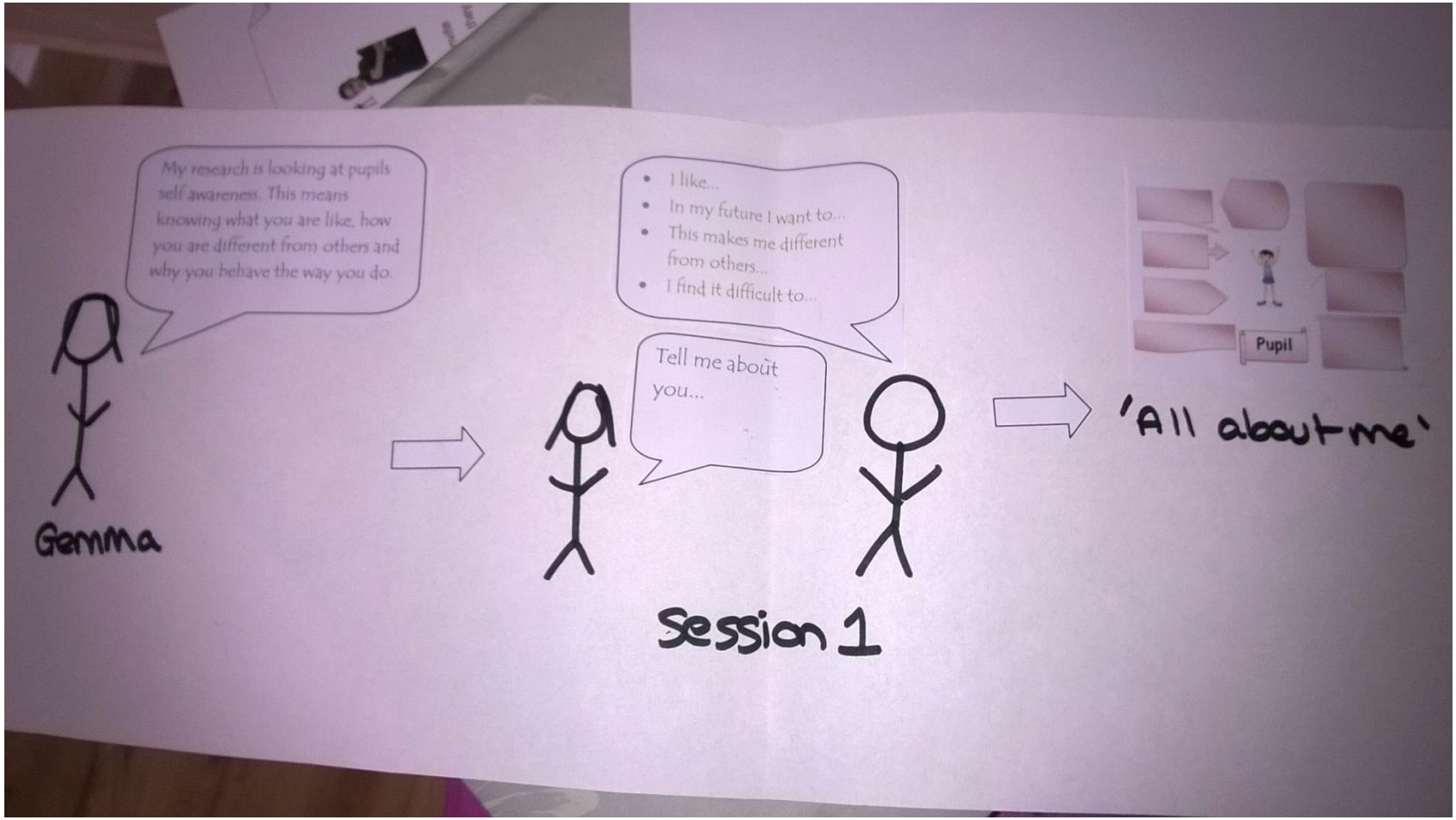
	control over it. But if there is no God, there is no light flashing before my eyes, I have my own choice right now **Gemma:** so who do you think controls things? **Robin:** there might be someone that controls stuff, there might not, there might just be a massive game of Sims, might just be life **Gemma:** have you not decided yet? **Robin:** no, cause you can't, there's no proof to this stuff, not until you die, if there's a heaven, well, I was wrong. I don't believe in God **Gemma:** mmm **Robin:** so I was wrong, if there's no heaven, I was right **Gemma:** so what kind of person... **Robin:** ...if I reform, then I was wrong again. If, just before I get to the end of my life, I realise this was all a dream, cause there is parts of my life, or what I think is my life, right now, that I think feels like it's in a dream **Gemma:** OK **Robin:** I just feel real dizzy for a second then I feel like it's in a dream or sommat. I've just woken up from it. So, that sort of puts a bit of evidence into my theories **Robin:** and I want to be a little nerd in the corner **Robin:** yeah, but, scratch is for beginners. I've only just started learning it, in class, and I'm brilliant at it **Gemma:** yeah. Have you got a third wish, or are you not sure? **Robin:** to have infinite lives. I'd like to see what it's like **Gemma:** so would that be as you? **Robin:** that would be, there's everyone, say people die, they just reappear, everyone has infinite lives **Gemma:** so would it be like reincarnation where you come back as something else,	

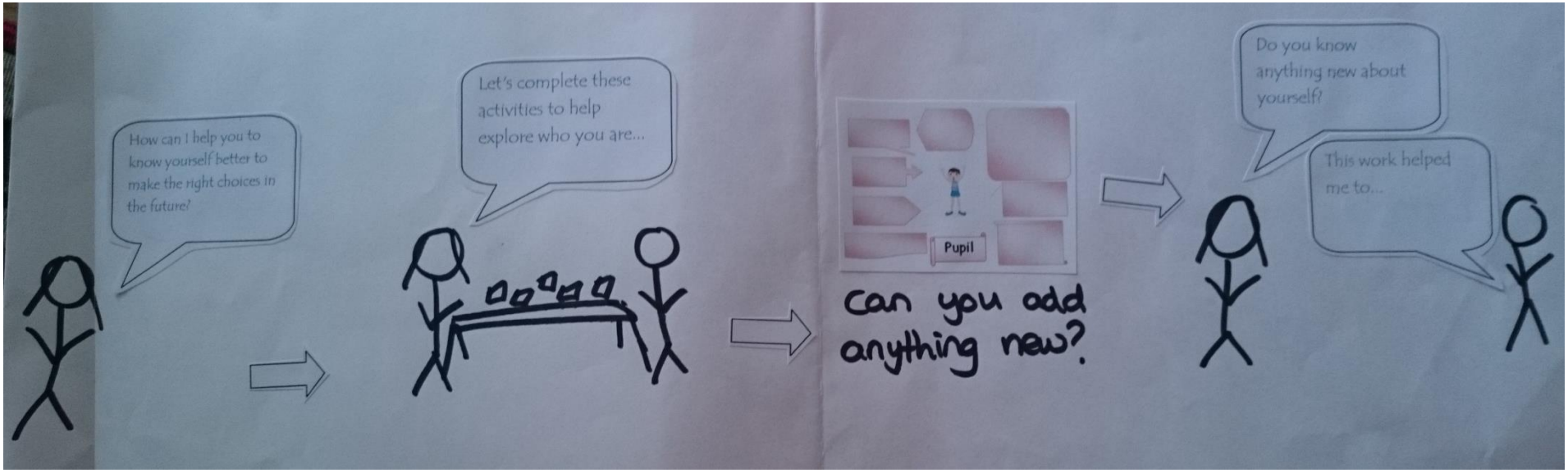
	or... **Robin:** ...no **Gemma:** would you be you? **Robin:** no, they get hit by a car, their head gets crushed or sommat **Gemma:** ah right, yeah **Robin:** they just reappear, behind the car, and they are back to normal. But if they die naturally, then they die **Gemma:** ah right **Robin:** so still old age, it's just, massive tornado hits, everyone just reappears, all the buildings and money is wasted, everyone reappears, with clothes on obviously **Robin:** and then just think, no, cause I always think about stuff. I say, I get called stupid, I think 'am I stupid?' I get called a bully, I think 'am I a bully?' Sometimes they're right, but sometimes they're very wrong **Gemma:** yeah **Robin:** but some people just let it pass over 'em, I'd always think about it. I'm the kind of person that thinks about stuff without people knowing, listens without people knowing. Cause I got my headphones on, on the Ipad, playing a game, may dad talks about something to Angie, then 2 **weeks** later, he says, 'you don't know this, but blah de blah is happening', yeah I do dad, I'm not stupid **Robin:** yeah, but if you think about it for everyone, it doesn't really make sense, like other stuff. Like saying 'this sentence is false', paradox **Robin:** there's a weird part to me, I think. Sometimes I sit there and like I do with the philosophy and stuff, and think 'why?' 'Why life?' There is a lot of parts to me **Gemma:** hmm **Robin:** you might say some people are two-faced, I have 50 faces. Actually, I've only counted 3 up to now	
Influence on self	**Robin:** that I don't think about what's happening around us, I'm not logical like the	I'm not controlled by my Asperger's.

	Asperger's would say, so I'm not actually controlled by my Asperger's **Gemma:** OK **Robin:** I sometimes, I'm not who I'm supposed to be **Robin:** so, yeah, cause some people would think they're controlled by a mental problem I'm not controlled by my Asperger's **Robin:** like I said earlier, I think outside of what I should be doing, so I'm sort of breaking what I should, logically, there's Asperger's coming in, be doing I'll never have different understandings of stuff **Gemma:** ahh **Robin:** unless I develop them myself. **Robin:** if you really try hard to do something, then you can change, but if you just do small stuff, say I do a little bit of boxing, sometimes, then I won't be a master at it. If I do, like hours a day, I'll get really good, really fast Who causes that change to happen? **Robin:** if, you can do it yourself **Robin:** or it happens naturally, just like growing up. You can die your hair purple or it will just go grey naturally. But it's stuff around you that affects you, but if you try really hard to do something yourself, you can change it. But if you don't do anything, you just let stuff control you, then you might actually become that person who does that audition **Gemma:** yeah, I know what you mean **Robin:** or, if you focus on your family and care about them and stuff, it's what you	I think that people's choices influence their opportunities. People can change if they choose to. Environmental factors can influence who a person becomes.

	focus on doing more **Robin:** how you focus and what you focus on do you think that's it, or do you think it's something else? **Robin:** environmental stuff and what you choose to do yourself How could I become different? Different things happening around me, it's never what I would do, because if you think about it, someone in your family dies when you're about to go to an audition for something **Gemma:** yeah? **Robin:** that's one universe same as a parallel universe, one universe you get that audition, and you become a massive star, billionaire, richest person alive, the other one, you go to your family member and you end up in a dump, slum or sommat **Gemma:** so I've put here [shows Robin the notes] that environmental factors can change your circumstances... **Robin:** ...stuff around you, mostly **Gemma:** is that what you mean? It can change your circumstances and your opportunities? **Robin:** if I'm caring about people, then you go home and miss the audition. If you focus on your dream, then you might say, I'll come after my audition **Robin:** when I get older, or my hobbies. Lots of things that you could change yourself, but if you think about it environmentally, there's an even lower chance of it happening	

Appendix 22: Comic strip




How can I help you to know yourself better to make the right choices in the future?
Let's complete these activities to help explore who you are...
Pupil
Can you add anything new?
Do you know anything new about yourself?
This work helped me to...

Appendix 23: Word bank

Word bank

Happy	Sad	Confused	Scared
Excited	Bored	Frightened	Embarrassed
Loner	Cheeky	Worried	Proud
Tired	Hungry	Surprised	Tense
Jealous	Shy	Guilty	Brave
Friendly	Argumentative	Tidy	Helpful
Thoughtful	Active	Sporty	Angry
Kind	Lonely	Quiet	Popular
Loud	Naughty	Confident	Cooperative

Appendix 24: final pupil pen portraits

I came up with this diagram about my social difficulties:

We talked about how the cycle would need to break in order to make a change. I might need some help to find the right place to break the cycle.

These are some of the things that I would like more help with:
- paying attention and listening to what other people say.
- understanding more about my Asperger's and the impact this has on my social skills.
- being bullied less in school.

Thank you for taking part in Gemma's research. It was lovely getting to know you.

Taking part in Gemma's Research:

I worked with Gemma 3 times in school. Her research project was looking at how to help pupils to increase their self-awareness. Self-awareness means thinking about my own thinking, caring about what other people think and feel and knowing why I choose to do things.

Increasing my self-awareness might help me to step back to see if I made a good decision, check over my school work and be kind and understanding to my friends.

I would like to share this document with my mum and the school staff who help me.

Here are the comments that I made about myself. Gemma sorted them into different areas of my self-awareness

Impact of social skills

I sometimes find social situations hard. I can act stupid and mess up.
Sometimes other people are unkind to me or bully me.
In the past, I have been in conflict with others.
Sometimes I find it hard getting on with my mum and dad.
We don't always have the same point of view.
My gaming has an impact on my kindness.
I can interrupt people.
I don't always pay attention or listen to others.
I want people to be able to talk to me and trust me.
I start a lot of sentences with 'I played...' My friends are interested in these conversations, but adults not so much.

Comparative attributes

I am different to other people. I have Asperger's, which makes me have different qualities.
I know some people who might be the same as me.
My past experiences have shaped the person I am today, making me unique.
Other people can be similar to me, but not exactly the same.
I spend a lot of time on my games, making me different from other people.

Psychological awareness

I like being thought of as clever. I don't want to be stupid.
I spend a lot of time thinking about the meaning of life.
I consider spiritual aspects, such as afterlife.
I'm good with computers and technology.
I like being unique.
I develop my own theories about the world and why things happen.
I don't have all the answers to the questions I raise.
I want to become a better person.
I am stuck in a cycle where my poor social skills mean that I am bullied more, which makes me like people less and therefore play on my games more. If I didn't play on games so much, I might develop my social skills.

Stable characteristics

My Asperger's is a stable characteristic, meaning that I will always be great with computers, bad with social. I might get used to it more in time.
My unique experiences will always be the same.
My view of will world will mostly stay the same.

Personal attributes

I am a gamer and a nerd. I have Asperger's.
I'm good at technology, but not good socially.
I'm sometimes funny.
I can be selfish or spoilt.
I'm philosophical and I'm clever.
I am aware of what is going on around me, more than people sometimes realise.
I'm not very trustworthy.
Gaming is a big part of my life.

Change over time

I think I will be different in 5 years. My thoughts about the world might develop.
I am different now compared to when I was younger. I used to have lots of friends and was well respected.
I now know that I have Asperger's.
People change when they get older, they are more concerned about what other people think of them.
I have changed physically over the years.
Change happens slowly, over time.
I recognise my need to change how much I play on my games.
I have become more engrossed in gaming as I have got older.

Influence on self

I'm not controlled by my Asperger's, but it has an impact on my social skills.
I think that people's choices influence their opportunities.
People can change if they choose to.
Environmental factors can influence who a person becomes.
If my parents turned off my computer, I would game less.
I will choose to come off my games when I get older.
Currently, I am more motivated towards continuing with my games than I am to choosing to come off them.

Future considerations

I want to be kind, different to my dad.
I would like to work with computers, possibly in coding if I can learn the skills I need.
I want to do something useful with my life, like invent or create something.
I think that need to come of my games to reach my future goals, but I lack the motivation to do this at present.
I might need to improve my social skills for job interviews in the future.

These are some of the things that I would like help with:
- I would like to be less shy and put my hand up in class.
- understanding more about my autism and how this affects me.
- being more helpful without being asked and getting more achievement points.

These are some of the things that I found helpful to understand Gemma's instructions:
- having a quiet room
- when Gemma spoke in short sentences
- giving me time to think about the words she used
- showing me an example of what to do
- used cards and pictures
- showed me the comic strip about what we were doing
- gave me an overview of what we would be doing

Thank you for taking part in Gemma's research. It was lovely getting to know you.

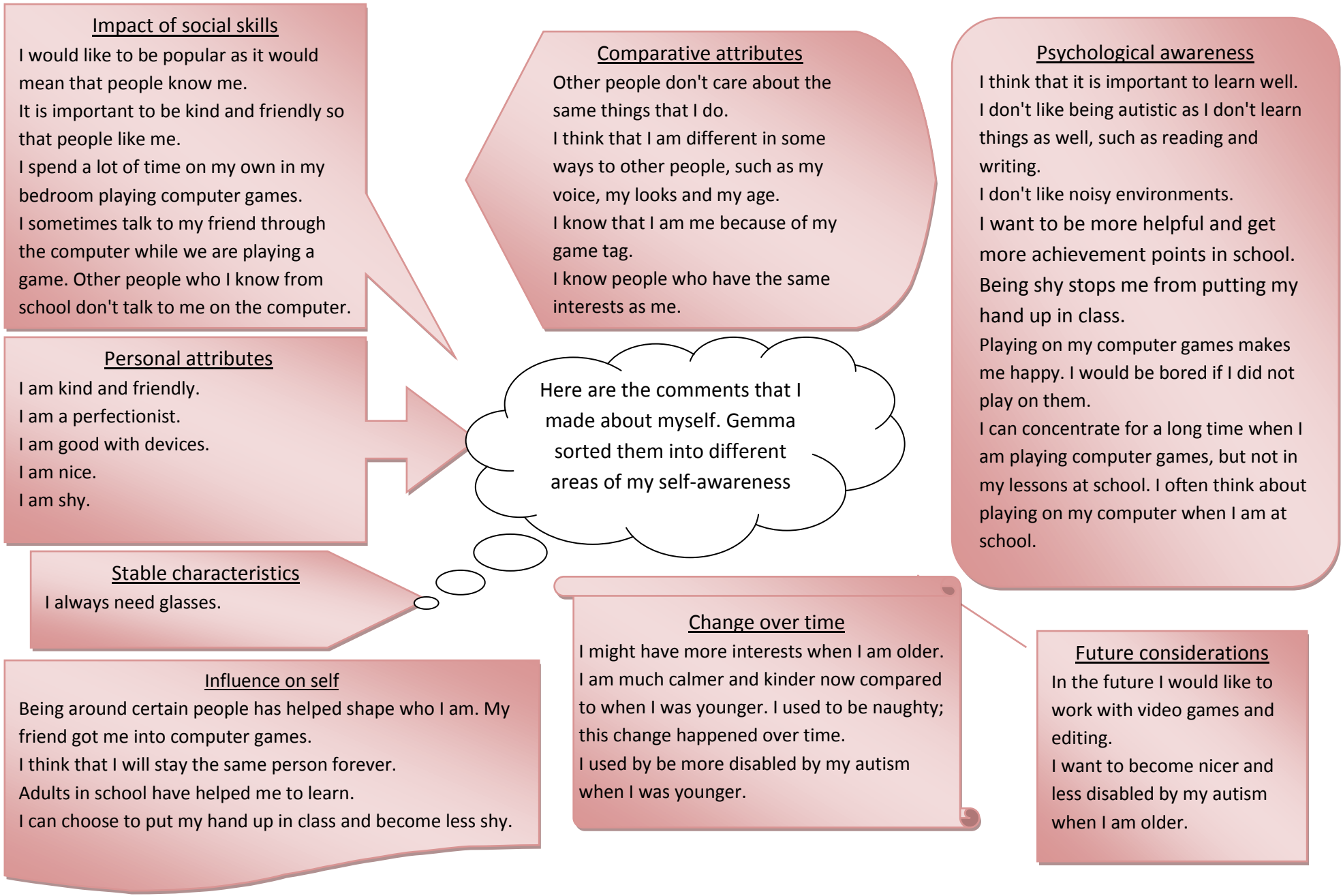
Arty

Taking part in Gemma's Research:

I worked with Gemma 3 times in school. Her research project was looking at how to help pupils to increase their self-awareness. Self-awareness means thinking about my own thinking, caring about what other people think and feel and knowing why I choose to do things.

Increasing my self-awareness might help me to step back to see if I made a good decision, check over my school work and be kind and understanding to my friends.

I would like to share this document with my parents and the school staff who help me, but I don't want to see it.


Impact of social skills
I would like to be popular as it would mean that people know me.
It is important to be kind and friendly so that people like me.
I spend a lot of time on my own in my bedroom playing computer games.
I sometimes talk to my friend through the computer while we are playing a game. Other people who I know from school don't talk to me on the computer.
Comparative attributes
Other people don't care about the same things that I do.
I think that I am different in some ways to other people, such as my voice, my looks and my age.
I know that I am me because of my game tag.
I know people who have the same interests as me.
Psychological awareness
I think that it is important to learn well.
I don't like being autistic as I don't learn things as well, such as reading and writing.
I don't like noisy environments.
I want to be more helpful and get more achievement points in school.
Being shy stops me from putting my hand up in class.
Playing on my computer games makes me happy. I would be bored if I did not play on them.
I can concentrate for a long time when I am playing computer games, but not in my lessons at school. I often think about playing on my computer when I am at school.
Personal attributes
I am kind and friendly.
I am a perfectionist.
I am good with devices.
I am nice.
I am shy.
Here are the comments that I made about myself. Gemma sorted them into different areas of my self-awareness
Stable characteristics
I always need glasses.
Change over time
I might have more interests when I am older.
I am much calmer and kinder now compared to when I was younger. I used to be naughty; this change happened over time.
I used by be more disabled by my autism when I was younger.
Future considerations
In the future I would like to work with video games and editing.
I want to become nicer and less disabled by my autism when I am older.
Influence on self
Being around certain people has helped shape who I am. My friend got me into computer games.
I think that I will stay the same person forever.
Adults in school have helped me to learn.
I can choose to put my hand up in class and become less shy.

These are some of the things that I would like help with:

- I would like to become calmer, such as making subtle movements, concentrating and not taking part in the misbehaviour of others.

- I want to be less annoying to others.

These are some of the things that I found helpful to understand Gemma's instructions:

- having a quiet room

- when Gemma spoke in short sentences

- showing me an example of what to do

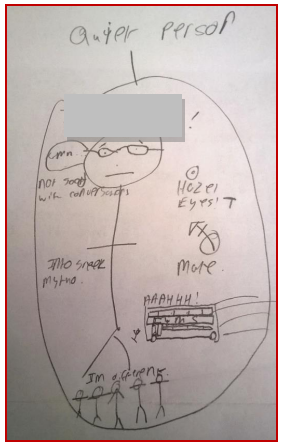
- used cards and pictures

- showed me the comic strip about what we were doing

- gave me an overview of what we would be doing

- having a word bank to look at

Thank you for taking part in Gemma's research. It was lovely getting to know you.



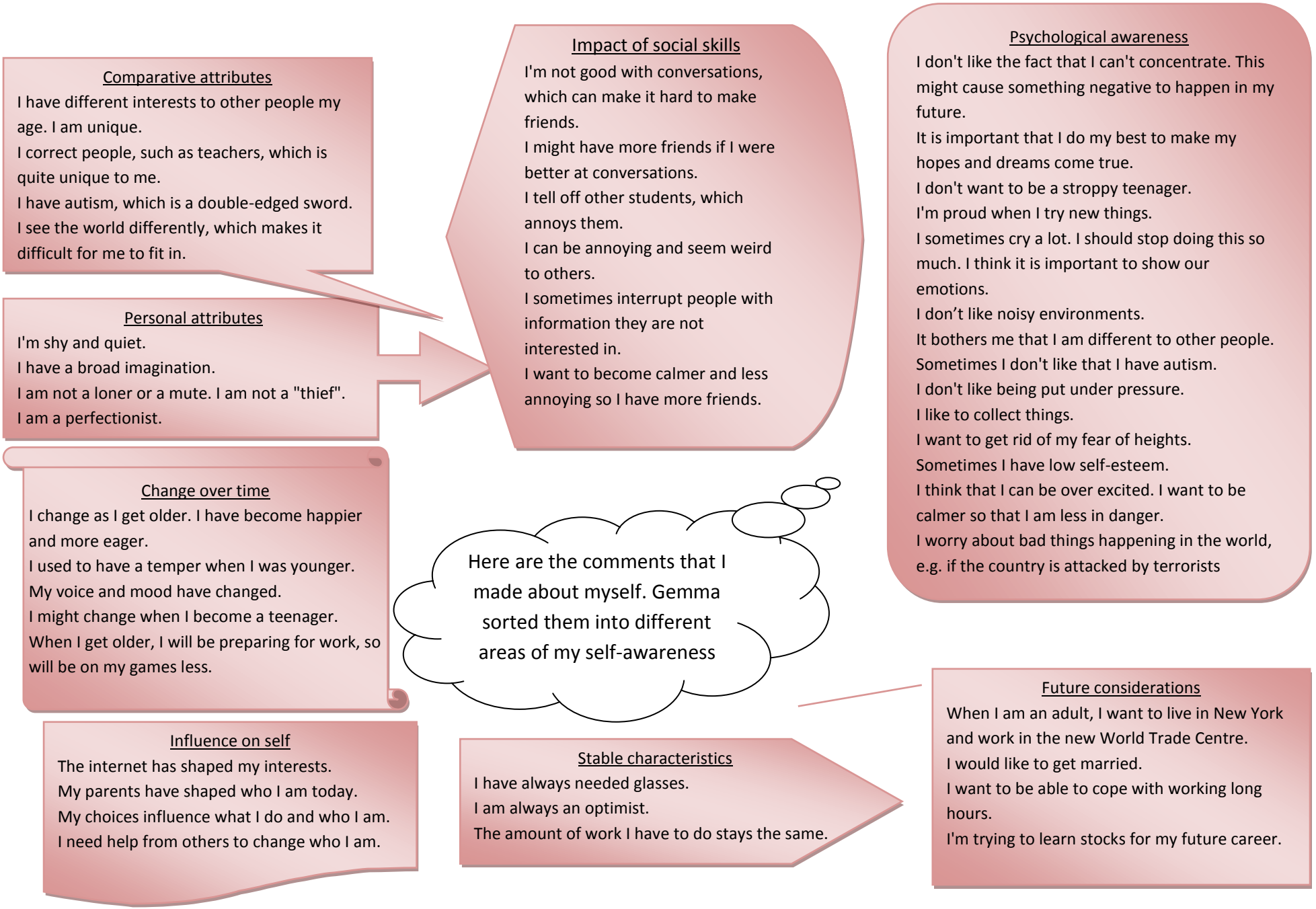
Charlie

Taking part in Gemma's Research:

I worked with Gemma 3 times in school. Her research project was looking at how to help pupils to increase their self-awareness. Self-awareness means thinking about my own thinking, caring about what other people think and feel and knowing why I choose to do things.

Increasing my self-awareness might help me to step back to see if I made a good decision, check over my school work and be kind and understanding to my friends.

I would like to share this document with my mum and the school staff who help me.


Comparative attributes
I have different interests to other people my age. I am unique.
I correct people, such as teachers, which is quite unique to me.
I have autism, which is a double-edged sword.
I see the world differently, which makes it difficult for me to fit in.
Personal attributes
I'm shy and quiet.
I have a broad imagination.
I am not a loner or a mute. I am not a "thief".
I am a perfectionist.
Impact of social skills
I'm not good with conversations, which can make it hard to make friends.
I might have more friends if I were better at conversations.
I tell off other students, which annoys them.
I can be annoying and seem weird to others.
I sometimes interrupt people with information they are not interested in.
I want to become calmer and less annoying so I have more friends.
Psychological awareness
I don't like the fact that I can't concentrate. This might cause something negative to happen in my future.
It is important that I do my best to make my hopes and dreams come true.
I don't want to be a stroppy teenager.
I'm proud when I try new things.
I sometimes cry a lot. I should stop doing this so much. I think it is important to show our emotions.
I don’t like noisy environments.
It bothers me that I am different to other people.
Sometimes I don't like that I have autism.
I don't like being put under pressure.
I like to collect things.
I want to get rid of my fear of heights.
Sometimes I have low self-esteem.
I think that I can be over excited. I want to be calmer so that I am less in danger.
I worry about bad things happening in the world, e.g. if the country is attacked by terrorists
Change over time
I change as I get older. I have become happier and more eager.
I used to have a temper when I was younger.
My voice and mood have changed.
I might change when I become a teenager.
When I get older, I will be preparing for work, so will be on my games less.
Here are the comments that I made about myself. Gemma sorted them into different areas of my self-awareness
Influence on self
The internet has shaped my interests.
My parents have shaped who I am today.
My choices influence what I do and who I am.
I need help from others to change who I am.
Stable characteristics
I have always needed glasses.
I am always an optimist.
The amount of work I have to do stays the same.
Future considerations
When I am an adult, I want to live in New York and work in the new World Trade Centre.
I would like to get married.
I want to be able to cope with working long hours.
I'm trying to learn stocks for my future career.

These are some of the things that I would like help with:

- I would like to be more helpful to people.

- I want to develop my social skills and make more friends. I would like to get to know other people my age.

These are some of the things that I found helpful to understand Gemma's instructions:

- having a word bank in front of me helped me to say the right word.

- I preferred having shorter questions to answer.

Thank you for taking part in Gemma's research. It was lovely getting to know you.

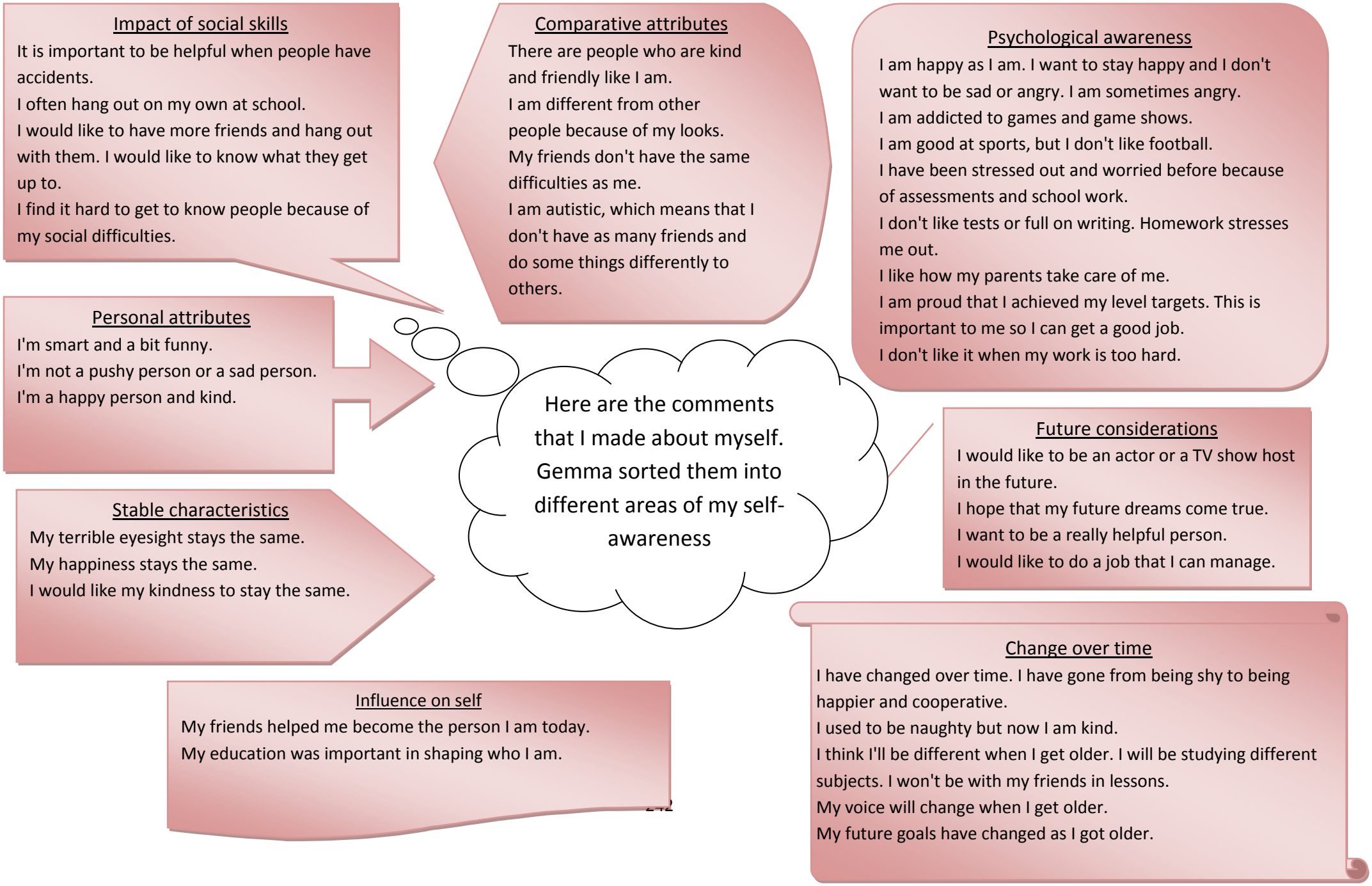
Sonny

Taking part in Gemma's Research:

I worked with Gemma in my school. Her research project was looking at how to help pupils to increase their self-awareness. Self-awareness means thinking about my own thinking, caring about what other people think and feel and knowing why I choose to do things.

Increasing my self-awareness might help me to step back to see if I made a good decision, check over my school work and be kind and understanding to my friends.

I would like to share this document with my mum and the school staff who help me.


Impact of social skills
It is important to be helpful when people have accidents.
I often hang out on my own at school.
I would like to have more friends and hang out with them. I would like to know what they get up to.
I find it hard to get to know people because of my social difficulties.
Comparative attributes
There are people who are kind and friendly like I am.
I am different from other people because of my looks.
My friends don't have the same difficulties as me.
I am autistic, which means that I don't have as many friends and do some things differently to others.
Psychological awareness
I am happy as I am. I want to stay happy and I don't want to be sad or angry. I am sometimes angry.
I am addicted to games and game shows.
I am good at sports, but I don't like football.
I have been stressed out and worried before because of assessments and school work.
I don't like tests or full on writing. Homework stresses me out.
I like how my parents take care of me.
I am proud that I achieved my level targets. This is important to me so I can get a good job.
I don't like it when my work is too hard.
Personal attributes
I'm smart and a bit funny.
I'm not a pushy person or a sad person.
I'm a happy person and kind.
Here are the comments that I made about myself. Gemma sorted them into different areas of my self-awareness
Future considerations
I would like to be an actor or a TV show host in the future.
I hope that my future dreams come true.
I want to be a really helpful person.
I would like to do a job that I can manage.
Stable characteristics
My terrible eyesight stays the same.
My happiness stays the same.
I would like my kindness to stay the same.
Influence on self
My friends helped me become the person I am today.
My education was important in shaping who I am.
Change over time
I have changed over time. I have gone from being shy to being happier and cooperative.
I used to be naughty but now I am kind.
I think I'll be different when I get older. I will be studying different subjects. I won't be with my friends in lessons.
My voice will change when I get older.
My future goals have changed as I got older.