

**DOING IT DIFFERENTLY:
AN EXPERIENTIAL ACCOUNT OF
PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL
CHANGE DURING THE PROCESS OF
RESEARCHING 'PEER SUPPORT' WITH
PUPILS IN A 'BESD' SETTING**

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*To be what one is, is to enter fully into
being a process*

What is most personal is most universal

Carl R. Rogers

Both from 'On Becoming A Person: A
Therapist's View of Psychotherapy'
(Accessed from goodreads. com)

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of researcher 'experience'; an experience of research which significantly changed the practitioner and her ideas of professional practice. The study originally started off with one focus, and then developed into something additional and different. My initial interest was in how the use of 'peer support' might have specific benefits for pupils identified as having social, emotional and behavioural needs, and involved training a group of boys in a specialist 'BESD' provision, in peer support skills, as reading mentors. As the research process unfolded, however, it became apparent that the boys' journey was in fact running parallel to a journey being undertaken by me, the researcher working with them, which necessitated a deliberate move to the 'I' position on my part, as the research took a different course. Using a narrative and autoethnographic methodology, informed by social constructionist perspectives, I seek to illuminate and give space to important, but largely unacknowledged, aspects of professional life, in which the sometimes challenging interface between the 'personal' and the 'professional' is explored, and the significance of the relationships we establish as practitioners, with our 'participants' and with ourselves and our own histories, is placed as central, not peripheral, to the practice itself. The implications for the approaches and processes employed by educational psychologists in work with and study of young people, the 'what' and the 'how' of the psychology that is engaged in, are also explored, with the specific proposal of moving towards an idea of a socially, politically and philosophically 'engaged' practice, which offers value both to the professional relationship, but also ultimately to the development and utility of the profession itself.

At the time of first writing, the term 'BESD' was the most commonly used acronym to describe young people identified as having social, emotional and behavioural needs, and is used (sparingly) within this thesis, in parenthesis, as acknowledgement of the socially constructed nature of this term.

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PROLOGUE

REFLECTIONS ON A PROCESS

This is both a personal and professional account of a research project, and necessarily so.

In starting life as a study of the potential value of peer support in work with pupils identified with social, emotional and behavioural needs, the research project sought to focus specifically on the benefits for this group (whose needs often meant that they struggled with social interaction) in order to offer an alternative perspective on peer support research which had tended to focus on benefits to supporter and supported within mainstream settings.

From this starting point, this research project came to be, in many ways, an exploration of how 'authentic' professional practice – **an idea of practice which, within the context of this thesis, can be understood as that which is constructed in rhythm with an ideological and philosophical sense of who and what we feel we are in the world within which we operate** - may be attempted.

This process involved looking closely at some of the societal narratives and constructions surrounding this cohort of young people, examining my own and others' perspectives regarding how best to do work with children and young people in general, and also questioning what might be thought to constitute 'proper' research. For me, this has necessarily meant having to bring to awareness my own assumptions: about what is 'right' or possible, or both, in work and research with young people, and, importantly, what the terms are for my own personal and professional 'authenticity'.

It is a narrative account, in which a strong reflexive, autoethnographic element, although not central to my thinking at the start of the process, became an increasingly key part of helping me understand the process as I was living it, and what the research project was beginning to represent in terms of my professional consciousness.

The study is deliberately set out in 'acts' and 'scenes', as opposed to discrete 'chapters', to reflect a life experience as something of an unfolding drama, which is rarely straightforwardly linear, or predictable, with themes and patterns within experience emerging, converging and overlapping to make up a 'whole', which can nevertheless be regarded as having its own coherence. This dramatic structure is also suggestive of life as performative - and specifically, of the professional and research practice described within this life experience, as 'performance'.

One theme which became particularly significant, was the tension I began to experience in keeping my personal perspectives and history separate from the professional research endeavour in which I was engaged. This at first caused me some consternation: I did not recognise these tensions as a part of any research process that had previously been described to me, and therefore assumed I must be doing something wrong. However, I came to tolerate, and even eventually to embrace, this unease, and to see it as indicative of something else taking place, running alongside and eventually becoming enmeshed with the 'research' process itself; I was beginning to break through my own assumptions and beliefs, learning through these latter formative professional experiences, about what it means to conduct 'good' research with children. I was beginning to challenge (with tutorial support that reassured me that it was permissible, indeed valuable, to do so) previously 'set' patterns of being and thinking, and to locate and navigate a different course than that previously travelled in my professional landscape; one in which my personal 'self' could be acknowledged. I was able to understand the importance of allowing space for who I felt myself to be; to see the relevance of this acknowledgement to my work, its influence on what I ultimately chose to research and why, and indeed, on the very methodology that I employed to undertake the research.

Importantly, I was also able to realise that my own particular way of thinking and relating to the world (influenced by any number of things, but not least by my own philosophical, ontological and epistemological assumptions) was as valid as any other, and could be applied, without apology, meaningfully and

authentically, to the methods and means I employed as a practitioner trying to do 'good' work with young people in need of support. I learned that it was possible to allow the 'I' within my professional persona to be fully present within those professional interactions; for my 'smallest, most timid, down-and-out self to take up so much space.' (See Quinlan, 2013, poem below).

And although at times this did lead to some feelings of vulnerability, through the research process I was able to learn a lesson about trusting in myself and in the vast, life-enhancing possibilities which exist within human interactions. I was able to decide ultimately, that these same possibilities can surely exist within 'professional' research and practice which holds true to a belief in the value of human relationships and in the humanity at the heart of them.

I was in fact, beginning to set out my professional 'stall', to allow my inner world to influence my external world, and in so doing, I was finding my 'authentic' professional voice.

ACT I – SETTING THE STAGE

SCENE ONE. STRUCTURE AND STYLE OF THE THESIS

This thesis is intended as an unfolding narrative account, representing my own journey of experiential learning as an educational psychologist (EP) trying to be a ‘good’ educational psychologist, doing ‘good’ research with young people.

It includes both what might be termed ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ elements, which serve distinct functions in supporting and developing the narrative of the study. For example, it is structured into ‘traditional’ literature review, methodology and discussion sections, but is divided into acts and scenes, to emphasise this idea of an unfolding narrative, with the use of prologues before subsequent acts, to ‘set the stage’ for the ideas which follow.

Act One introduces the intentions and scope of the study as a reflexive account. It introduces the main protagonists within the narrative - myself and my participants - in an attempt to place the study firmly within a human and relational context.

In Act Two, while the inclusion of a literature review near the beginning necessarily serves to pause the unfolding narrative at this point, coming as it does just after my exposing of the ‘me’ in this study, it represents an important personal ‘signposting’; a bringing together of the philosophical and theoretical threads which have come to be at the heart of my own professional practice, which underpin the study and which influenced and informed the evolution of the research. In this respect, the literature review provides the opportunity to introduce within the thesis, ideas of personal philosophy and spirituality, political and critical practice, social justice and altruism - themes which are subsequently referenced and represented through the body of the thesis.

While the interests of the group of boys, and what they represented, was central to my original motivation for the research, because I wished to set my developing relationship with them within the context of a developing professional awakening, in an earlier draft of this thesis, I originally elected in Act Three to first spend time examining theoretical considerations to do with practice and research. Somewhat ironically, however, the boys subsequently did not 'feature' fully until some way into the thesis within the analysis section, which somehow seemed to belie their significance within the research. While my initial structuring seemed to me symbolic of the need to think carefully about issues of practice in order to be able to do full justice to our interactions with young people, I decided ultimately to bring the practical and methodological account ahead of the theoretical considerations – and in many ways this reflected the chronology of events in relation to my own developing understandings within the journey of the research.

Thus, Acts Three and Four introduce the context for the methodology and methods of the research, of which the boys were a part. In trying to be mindful of not marginalising their accounts within this thesis, and despite the young people not being fully 'visible' until we come to the analysis sections, their presence can be taken as implicit within the subtext of the thesis, their interests informing the explicit motivations behind the study, and driving specific aspects of the narrative. (Act Three also introduces the research questions of the study, admittedly some way into the thesis, but again this is reflective of the journey of the research.)

In Act Five, the analysis and interpretation section is presented through reflection and re-presentation of the life I lived, experienced and shared with my participants at key points during the journey of the research. Rather than a systematic analysis of themes or content, I chose to employ a number of particular narrative devices in the analysis and interpretation of my field and research texts, where I interrogate the data using reflective retrospective commentary on previously written journal entries and 'debrief' notes, and also a dialogue in letter-form, where I assume the position of

researcher in imagined reflective conversation with my interview respondents. The letters function as a reflexive tool, facilitating 'retrospective imaginings', and allow for a re-engagement with (and ultimate re-authoring of) my lived experience of the research interviews. Specifically, they provide a means of getting closer and re-attuned to the participants and my interactions with them during the process of the interviews, and of somehow making peace with that experience and the researcher I was. Ultimately, I feel that they enable a more philosophically honest and revealing appraisal and representation of the interviews than a different, perhaps more 'superficial', type of analysis might have given.

The final Acts, Six and Seven, return to issues of 'practice': Act Six in looking at how particular theoretical assumptions and positions are enacted within the performance of professionalism, while Act Seven attempts to pull together the conclusions of the research journey, and the implications for the performance of a personal educational psychology practice – namely mine.

The narrative methodology of the research as a whole is deliberately augmented within the thesis by the use of quotations and poetry, which inspired my thinking and which I felt resonated with the heart of the study; also the use of story, which can often reach the parts of the imagination that ordinary prose cannot.

Finally, and perhaps obviously, the reflexive nature of the research is reflected and emphasised through the use of the first-person voice, as I dare to open up my thoughts, motivations and also vulnerabilities, with regard to the research process, to the (hopefully sympathetic) scrutiny of the reader who, I acknowledge, is only able to judge the reflections as they are presented.

SCENE TWO. BEGINNING WITH ME

If I start with 'I,' can I use the big words?

*You know the ones: those locutions
that thunder and convulse;
those monumental lexemes that elevate
emotions to extremes;
those multisyllabic monstrosities
that vivify the senses in technicolor,
cacophonous decadence.*

*Can my smouldering burn of envy claim
conflagration instead of fire?*

*Can I embody anger so immense
and all-consuming it warrants fury?*

*Can my mind survive the vertigo
of not just freedom, but emancipation?*

*Can my smallest, most timid,
down-and-out self
take up so much space?*

(Writing the First Person Singular, *Kathleen M. Quinlan, 2013, Qualitative Inquiry, 19(5), 405.*)

The ideas which drive and underpin this study derive from two main sources: early and defining experiences from my personal history, as a first generation child of Nigerian immigrant parents, growing up in a working class area of inner-city London in 'unreconstructed' 1970's and '80's Britain; and also from a set of beliefs and understandings about the world which have formed subsequently. Some of these beliefs and understandings have inevitably been shaped by these earlier experiences, while others have grown and developed

through later encounters within my social, academic and, ultimately, professional life.

Retrospectively, it is possible to see how my early experience of education has led me to identify with children who are somehow marginalised and isolated within an education system which at times seems quite clearly to consist of 'winners' and 'losers'. Although described as 'bright' by class teachers, personal circumstances at home, leading to various internal and external struggles, meant that I was always somewhat 'behind the curve' in terms of having the emotional tools, or indeed understanding what was required, to 'get on' within an education system which often seemed to constitute dangerous and confusing territory. This was exacerbated by the fact that for my parents, my only early guides, the territory was even more foreign; this in a Britain which had not yet come to understand the need of support systems for parents and pupils that we can now, largely, take for granted. In addition, the fact was that my parents, like many others in their position - desperate for their children to do well in education, but trying to make their own way in challenging work/life circumstances, within an often inhospitable social and political environment - had other things to worry about.

As I plodded on, keenly aware of the expectations of parents who had travelled far, like many others, to make a better life for their family, yet trying to make sense of who I was and what this idea of 'education' might mean for me. I found myself in the unhappy situation of needing to retake exams (sometimes several times) before eventually scraping passes, as I struggled to find the motivation and self-belief that others around me seemed somehow to possess. Perhaps, I might today even be thought of as an 'able underachiever' (Pomerantz and Pomerantz, 2002), but what is certainly clear is that for children like me, from working-class backgrounds, grappling with the double-edged sword of a London life lived 'cheek-by-jowl' with middle-class contemporaries, things were not straightforward. Keeping going meant navigating a tight-rope walk between apparent success and failure – nurturing aspirations, picking oneself up after disappointment, struggling to develop confidence without the 'cultural capital' of a sense of entitlement to success -

set against a backdrop of unequal social, economic and familial circumstances. All had to be negotiated, worked out, and finally worked through, in one's own individual way. I learned that educational success, and to an extent, the social acceptance that comes with it, was certainly not a 'given' for a child like me, but was nevertheless within touching distance if only I could work hard enough and/or be lucky enough to work out the 'password', if not actually fortunate enough to have the key to the door itself. Thus, I realise, I came to particularly identify with some of these marginalised children I was later to work with, who often seemed voiceless and 'lost', in the way I had felt 'lost' - and also 'other' - by virtue of my class, my race and my culture.

On finally deciding on a career in psychology, after having taken the 'scenic route' through education (dropping out of University first time round), my work in mental health acute (and later secure) wards found me working alongside clinical psychologists whose main goal seemed to be to compete with the 'medical model' for control and influence. Justified or not, this was my overriding perception from my work in that period, and I decided that this 'psychology' was not for me. Just as significantly, my experience on these wards also taught me things that would stay with me, and that would later take on even more significance through my working life: that things often play out very differently for those who are most vulnerable, or who have least power; that those most vulnerable are often at the mercy of seemingly arbitrary decisions made by those holding power (often in institutions) which can have devastating impacts; that it is surprisingly easy to get sucked into particular ways of viewing people which ignore the potential that their lives can hold.

Upon beginning to practice, first as a teacher, then later as a psychologist, within the powerful institution that is the education system, I learned of and experienced the influence wielded by teachers, practitioners, policy makers and others (including myself) within the system. Later still, as I began to develop a more solid sense of myself, as a practitioner within this institution, I felt a strong and increasing sense of responsibility, particularly in terms of an awareness of some of the practices which seemed blithely to reinforce

injustice (and even oppression) against particular groups. Perhaps this awareness heralded the subtle beginnings of a professional 'radicalisation'. Certainly, together with an increasing sense, informed by Buddhist perspectives, that a central driver for personal growth and development is the awareness of our own innate potential and that of others, the key philosophical, political and pedagogical 'ingredients' for this research project were being established.

However, this section cannot be concluded without acknowledgement of the other, personal, factors which came to be catalysts for this research study. I had embarked on the doctoral process straight after completing my MSc, but with no real idea of what I was undertaking, and before I had felt in any way established as a practitioner. A year or so after, I found myself on an unexpected break from work, having discovered I was pregnant with my second child. The combined effects of the new demands and priorities brought on by this changed family situation, together with the totally unexpected emergence of an eye problem during this period, which left me with a diagnosis of 'visual impairment' and unable to drive, meant that I returned to work a different person. On a personal level, I had a child who refused to sleep in his own bed despite his parents' best efforts - admittedly very inconsistently - to return him back there (and this was to continue for five long years). I did not know what the prognosis was with regard to my sight, and in not being able to drive, I had lost an important means of independence - a double-blow as I had been a very anxious new driver but had felt enormous achievement at eventually overcoming my anxiety. On a professional level, I had now to get used to an unfamiliar (and unwieldy) world of accessing visual aids, booking taxis for school visits and suddenly being dependent on people and factors outside myself. I felt vulnerable. These feelings - only exacerbated by sleep-deprivation caused by the antics of the aforementioned small interloper - did little to support a sense of self-efficacy at work. At times, I felt like an imposter, having to pull off the greatest confidence trick of all - getting people to think that I knew what I was doing, when in fact I really didn't have a clue. Perhaps we all feel like this at times as professionals, but this was a bit too real and a bit too ever-present. I often felt

at the mercy of unpredictable storms without any ballast to keep me anchored, and it felt a little like a return to the insecurity of my teens. I call these now, my 'wilderness years'. As far as I know, the children I worked with during those years all survived, in some shape or form, at the hands of my practice, and while I sometimes feel this may have been down more to luck than judgement, I also know that in my 'not-knowing', I put everything I had in terms of personal resources, into trying to 'know better'.

Notwithstanding the turmoil of those years, I see that period now as life-changing, and as a 'gift', which allowed me to 'plumb the depths' in order to come up stronger and to be able to honestly re-evaluate my own position within my professional context; to decide what I wanted my professional life to be.

SCENE THREE. INTRODUCING THE PARTICIPANTS

The participants were a group of Year 8 pupils (who will be known by the pseudonyms Kyle, Brandon, Cain, Ryan and Liam) in a local authority, maintained specialist setting for pupils identified as having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. In keeping with access protocols for such settings, each had a Statement of Special Educational Needs, which identified these difficulties, and set out targets and provision in relation to these identified needs.

Four of the boys were of English/British heritage, while one was of mixed English and Afro-Caribbean heritage.

The boys had been invited to train to be Reading Mentors for their peers. The training took the form of group and follow-up sessions that took place over two terms in one school year. As the EP for the setting, I had met Kyle, Cain and Liam separately on one occasion previously, having been involved in meetings and assessment work for the annual review of their respective Statements, but did not know them well.

Through my previous work with Kyle, I knew him as someone who struggled with aspects of literacy, and he was the least able of the readers in the group. In school there was a query around dyslexia in relation to his learning needs, and the setting had recently started to access support around this. Kyle currently lived with many disruptions to his home and family circumstances; small, he was described by staff as often attempting to compete in the 'hard' stakes with some of the bigger boys, but was thought to be a sensitive soul on the inside – despite his outward actions. On first meeting him as part of the group, Kyle had been reticent, and not very forthcoming, probably needing time to develop trust in his relationship with me.

Brandon was a child 'looked-after' by the local authority, and was currently in a stable long-term foster placement. He had had some difficult early childhood experiences before having been taken into care, and subsequently struggled with allowing others to be in control, as this was when he felt most comfortable. While he could often rub his peers up the wrong way, his 'saving grace' was a good sense of humour, which endeared him, to the adults at least, around him. As part of the group, Brandon was often very loud and lively.

Cain was the youngest in a family, where there was a large gap between him and his next sibling, and therefore spent a lot of time on his own at home, although he described a loving relationship with his young nephew. He also had an unsettled home life in many respects, where his parents had more than once split up before getting back together. Cain was described by staff as bright and as having lots of academic potential. Although he could often display extreme anger and aggression, especially when he felt unfairly treated by others, or if not able to adequately express his emotions, Cain could also be extremely thoughtful in his emotional responses to situations with his peers, and in his interactions with adults in the school.

Ryan had been placed in the care of his maternal grandmother as a baby, as a result of his mum's substance misuse, and his dad's imprisonment. He often presented as unhappy in school, and was thought at one point to be

displaying signs (lethargy, lack of interest in self-care, poor sleep) of depression. Ryan's behaviour was sometimes described by staff as causing conflict within his peer-group (and this manifested at times within the group) but he could also be articulate and thoughtful, and he regularly expressed the fact that he wanted a chance to attend a mainstream school.

Liam was a quiet boy, who was described by staff as sometimes finding it hard to assert himself in a group, and to express his emotions appropriately, sometimes getting into conflicts with his peers as a result. The quietest in the group, Liam often took a back seat – perhaps through a lack of confidence in relation to the other boys. He struggled with some aspects of his learning and social interaction, but his sensitive nature was acknowledged by the teaching staff, who often praised him for the fact that he could be relied upon to be honest and to try his best at things.

The five boys were accompanied by Bea (Mrs Nuttall – also a pseudonym), a teaching assistant in the setting, who occupied the role of Learning Mentor in school. Bea had worked at the school for a number of years, and was very experienced in her role. She was often the member of staff called when additional support was required for heightened behaviour incidents, and had a calm, straightforward manner, with gentle but clear boundaries which the pupils seemed to respect. Bea was positive about being part of the Peer Support training with the boys, and lent energy and enthusiasm to the project.

Having introduced the participants, the 'human' perspective of the thesis will be further explored within the following story.

SCENE FOUR. A STORY: A BOY AND HIS TROUBLE

I wrote the following tale one afternoon, after struggling to get in touch with the 'heart' of my thesis. In relation to the study, I had become a bit lost, a bit tangled up in knowing what it was that I wanted to say, and how to say it. Seriously unsure of my ability to do either, I was in danger of losing all sense

of what had motivated me in the first place, in terms of the focus of the research: namely a dissatisfaction and unease at the practices (of which I was also part in my role as an EP) which often seemed to render children invisible and inert within the very processes supposedly set up to help them and make things 'better'.

This story came to me very quickly, emerging and materialising from the ether as if from a dream; and although at the time, I had read very little on narrative approaches, on re-reading the piece, I immediately recognised echoes of the narrative 'devices' (such as the language of 'externalising', for example) of which I was not consciously aware while writing, but was unconsciously drawing on. (Oh well, I guess there really is 'nothing new under the sun'). In any case, and notwithstanding unconscious 'sampling', I have a deep sense that writing this story helped me get back in touch with that dissatisfaction and unease, and gave me renewed energy to 're-find' what I wanted to say - and to be able to say it.

Specifically, it helped me re-connect with Brandon, Kyle and Cain (and Ryan and Liam), my co-travellers in the journey of this research.

Once upon a time, there was a Boy who found himself in Trouble. This Trouble followed him most (but not all) places that he went, and despite his best efforts, he could never succeed in making this Trouble stay away for very long. Don't misunderstand me – on some days, when the sun was shining and the world felt and sounded kinder, the Trouble would keep a little quiet and let the Boy get on with being young and carefree, but at other times - perhaps when the Boy was in particular situations, or with particular people - the Trouble would raise its ugly head and its ugly voice and the Boy would be back to square one. To make matters worse (if that were possible, for this 'Trouble' situation was surely bad enough for the Boy) the People around the Boy, who had the job to teach and care for him, themselves found the Trouble extremely troubling. And as well they might, for it was extremely difficult to know what to do about, and with, the Trouble. Some of the People became sad about the Trouble. Others became fearful or upset or even angry about it. All were a bit confused, for indeed the Trouble seemed to have a knack for 'messing with the minds' of everyone involved.

As you may be aware, I am relaying one particular Story about the Boy and the Trouble, but I must tell you that after a time, something interesting happened: another Story (within a Story) began to emerge. Many of the People began to talk and think less about the Boy as just the Boy, and more and more as if the Trouble and the Boy were the same thing (which they were not), and as if the two were destined to remain intertwined forever more. The Boy began to feel that perhaps some of the People did not really see him any longer: they only saw the Trouble. (This may not have been totally the case, but it felt this way to the Boy). He wondered what to do for the best. Now, because he was only a boy, the Boy did not find it easy to know exactly what to do. And sometimes he did not care what he did, and often, he thought it didn't really matter what he did; so at times he did what he secretly knew would not really help with the Trouble. But mostly, he did not know how to do the things he sensed the People wanted him to do; or more importantly, why he had had the misfortune to meet up with the Trouble in the first place.

What started to happen was that the 'Boy-as-the-Trouble' Story gathered pace. Things got worse for the People and for the Boy. The 'Boy-as-the-Trouble' Story, to some degree was something the People had become attached to, to help them try to manage what was happening in the Troubling situation - and now they used this Story to help them understand what to do next. (It is perhaps important to say at this point, that many of these People were not necessarily 'bad' people, but it is also important to say that many of their actions reflected the fact that they had developed particular ways of viewing the Trouble, and that they had been deeply affected by the Trouble, perhaps more than they were prepared to admit.)

In any case, one day there was a Meeting, and it was decided that things had got so bad at the first Place, that there was nothing for it, but that the Boy would have to go somewhere else, where a different (better qualified / experienced) set of People would be able to manage him much better. In An Other Place.

Now, the Boy had not had very much to say when these important things were being decided. In truth, he had not really been asked.

To be fair, one of the People (with a particularly long title that he didn't quite understand) had asked him some questions about how he thought things were going at the first Place, but he had found himself getting a bit confused, mostly because it seemed that suddenly there were lots of people asking questions about lots of things that he didn't really understand.

Had he been inclined to, he might have tried to explain that in fact he would definitely rather stay at the first Place; that he had already had lots of moves to lots of different Places in his life and he didn't really want to go through what another move might mean. And what if he was not able to escape from his Trouble, even in this Other Place, or if there was even more Trouble to be found there – what then?

But as it happened, this chance to explain and express these worries never came (and even if it had, because we know the way of the world, we probably also know that the expression of these worries would not necessarily have changed the minds of the People who, after all were very much in charge) and The Decision was duly made.

In this Other Place, the Boy found himself with other Boys (and also some Girls) and he quickly picked up that they too, in one way or another, had met up with their own particular Trouble, and that Trouble of one shade or another, often felt very at home in this Place.

Now, as we know, (because real tales are not the same as fairy tales) all actions have consequences, and these consequences are not always the ones that had been intended or even predicted at the time. However, perhaps this is not always something that is kept very clearly in mind when important Decisions are being made – especially those concerning what should happen in the lives of Boys and Girls who find themselves with Trouble. Sometimes, the People with this particular privilege and responsibility may tell themselves that certain actions are 'for the best' at that time and prefer not to let thoughts of future possibilities blur their thinking. And sometimes, thoughts of future possibilities are too hard, or too slippery, or too impossible to imagine, and so are simply not permitted space.

But life never fails to move relentlessly on, and this too will happen for the Boy and his peers, now residing together in this new Place for the Children of Trouble. We cannot really know yet what will happen for him, but it is highly possible that within this new Place, it may be very hard for him to leave his Trouble far behind, to detach himself from the Story that Trouble has helped create for him and about him, and to once again be just the boy that he is. However, life also never fails to surprise, and it is also possible that while there are People who make it their business to be mindful of, and on the look-out for, the various effects that Trouble can have on situations and on us all, and are concerned to look out for the Boy (and the Girl) who may have inadvertently become lost within a version of one Troubling Story or another, there remains hope for future possibilities and future lives - even in the midst of the most troublesome of Trouble.

The End

This introductory section, as a precursor to some of the theoretical considerations within the thesis, has been intended as a means of grounding the study in the 'human' component that is at the heart of it.

It is intended that this 'humanness' be set alongside the 'theory' and be kept in mind as the thesis proceeds through philosophical, epistemological and theoretical considerations in the following Acts.

PROLOGUE TO ACT II:

INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE REVIEW

In the interests of authenticity, it is only fair to state that, unlike in most traditional research studies, this literature review was undertaken retrospectively, after the research project itself had largely been completed. In this respect, rather than being a critical exposition of the ideas and theories which laid the foundations for the research and how it was then conducted,

the literature review represents a 'journey of discovery' which mirrors the research process itself. It sets out some of the ideas and theorisations which, perhaps only partially known to me, had been lurking beneath the surface of my consciousness and practice and which, through the process of the research itself, became increasingly exposed and apparent.

The three main themes which serve as foundation stones for the thesis and for the study relate to the following: an egalitarian and humanistic view of individuals, which believes in the limitless potential of their lives; a social constructionist view of knowledge and learning, which sees both adults and children as active agents within their social and learning environments, influenced by prevailing narratives, but ever-open to new narratives and possibilities in relation to ways of working meaningfully together; and finally a consideration of the manner in which professionals interact and engage with children and young people in work they do with them, where the perceived need to be a particular type of 'expert' rather than simply allowing a shared humanity to prevail, is called into question.

The study involves a particular focus on work which involves young people who are often marginalised: those identified as having social, emotional and behavioural needs. Underpinning all three themes, a 'social justice' thread, which seeks to acknowledge particular societal power imbalances, runs through as a central core of the study - as indeed it exists as a central motivator in my life – incorporating ideas of equity, as well as involving concepts such as 'privilege' and 'power'. Thus, social justice can be seen as based on the premises that society is characterized by inequalities in resources and influence, and also a belief in the possibilities which abound within humanity, whereby individual and collective actions can transform society (Pigza and Welch, 2010).

Hand in hand with (and inseparable from) our personal awakening, the aim of Buddhist practice is to establish a truly peaceful society based on the empowerment of all individuals, a true state of equality and justice grounded in respect for the Buddha nature inherent in everyone .

(Daisaku Ikeda, *Wisdom For Modern Life*, 2006, p. 19)

ACT II - LITERATURE REVIEW

SCENE ONE. THE BUDDHA AND ME: PHILOSOPHICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE HUMAN SPIRIT

This introductory section will wind a path through philosophy, psychology and religion towards the 'spiritual', and a particular 'life philosophy', Nichiren Buddhism, which has major significance for me, and for my thinking. Precisely because of its significance in my life, I have chosen to explore it at the start of this thesis; specifically, it sits somewhere at the core of my soul (wherever that may be), and therefore the experiences, motivations and deliberations which have accompanied this research process cannot easily be separated from it. In the spirit of explicitly wishing to expose the 'I' (that is to say, 'me') in this research, there seemed little choice but to include within any representation of myself, this humanistic and spiritual dimension which forms an important part of my daily life and perspectives, and which has - in happy collaboration with other closely held political and social perspectives - given rise to particular core values, and ways of relating as a human being to other human beings.

While the inclusion of a spiritual or religious element may not sit without some controversy within an academic dissertation that is not focused on 'religion', it is certainly true that the contemplation of ideas pertaining to religion and spirituality within psychological paradigms is not new. There is evidence that the exploration of such ideas within contemporary mainstream psychological discourses is becoming more widespread (Kwee et al, 2006; Gersch et al, 2008; Ruddock and Cameron, 2010; Kwee, 2013) and while there is an acknowledgement of the discomfort felt in some quarters within scientific communities of practice, the appropriate inclusion of religious or spiritual considerations within academia can nevertheless be regarded as having merit (Gergen, 2009).

In the context of this study, my inclusion of Buddhist ideas leans less towards a focus on the religious, and more towards a consideration of how these Ideas might enable an engagement with some of life's questions and challenges in an optimistic and humanistic way. In addition, Buddhist ideas can be seen as occupying common ground with aspects of social constructionist thinking (in terms of the idea of there being no one 'reality' for example), as well as having much in common with key aspects of humanistic psychology.

To begin, links and points of departure within philosophy, religion and spirituality will be highlighted as a means of reflecting what I see as the complex relationship between how what we hold within our hearts and minds may influence our actions in the world, and indeed the place such ideas may have in our day-to-day lives. For me, this holds everyday significance for professional practice in the real world of human beings.

Philosophy

1. *'The study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, especially when considered as an academic discipline; A particular system of philosophical thought; The study of the theoretical basis of a particular branch of knowledge or experience'*; 2. *'Theory or attitude that acts as a guiding principle for behaviour'*; From Greek *philosophia* – 'love of wisdom' (Oxford Dictionaries Online).

Long before the emergence of 'psychology' as a distinct discipline, philosophy has been concerned with the nature of human experience, and in effect, what connects human experience as it is lived, to the real world. It has grappled with questions which concern the human quest for knowledge and meaning; concerns relating to 'mortal life: how to understand it and how to live it' (Nagel, 1979, p. ix). In this sense, the human questions which have interested philosophers for centuries, regarding 'knowledge reality and existence' as described in one of the definitions above, have occupied much common ground with those of psychology; distinct, but connected, both have been concerned with exploring some of the fundamental aspects of life and what it

is to be human. This constitutes an important area of shared space, the significance of which should not be minimised (Gergen, 2009).

Today, it could be said that these same questions are now being explored by forms of neuroscience and neuropsychology, which add an extra dimension of curiosity in their attempts to, for example, map conscious experiences such as feelings and emotion, onto the workings of the brain (and vice-versa) and gain an understanding of a distinct concept of 'mind' (Damasio, 2000, 2003).

In this specific regard, while there exists debate as to whether the quest of neuroscience with regard to being able to 'map' the mind, is in fact a viable, or even possible, one, this contention is often belied by the degree of certainty conveyed by much of the discourse surrounding the potential and possibilities of the discipline. Notwithstanding this, it can nevertheless be said that some of those specific questions of philosophy (including that of the mind-body-brain relationship) have been re-imagined and re-conceptualised in terms of their implications within the human quest for self-discovery; via modern processes, they have been given new significance by current thinkers:

'Are mind and body two different things, or just one? If they are not the same, are mind and body made from two different substances or just one? If there are two substances, does the mind substance come first and cause the body and its brain to exist, or does the body substance come first and its brain cause the mind? Also how do these substances interact?...These are some of the main issues involved in the so-called mind-body problem, a problem whose solution is central to the understanding of who we are...'

(Damasio, 2003, p. 183)

Some of these questions relate very strongly to Eastern philosophies such as Buddhism, which tend not to engage with dualistic understandings of phenomena, and for whom the mind and body co-exist on an interdependent basis.

(As intimated earlier, the notion of 'mind' itself is not without its controversy, and it is pertinent at this point to highlight the distinction between a concept of an individual 'mind' as a self-contained, unitary 'thing' existing separate from

other 'minds', as challenged within social constructionist thinking for example (Gergen, 1999), and an understanding of the 'mind' as a 'process' (Damasio, 2000). In relation to the former, just as it has been argued that 'the discourse of the mind is socially constructed' (Gergen, 1999, p. 164), so too, the concept of 'mind' itself, can be viewed as a function of discourses which centre on 'individualism', where body, self - and also 'mind' - take on the description of 'bounded containers' (Sampson, 2005). In the context of this study, however, understanding the 'mind' as 'process' allows for an acknowledgement of the 'mind' as having more fluid and relational dimensions, and as constantly influenced by its relational context.)

It is noteworthy that psychology emerged as a science out of religion and philosophy, bringing in a new age of psychological thinking that diverged from its philosophical roots. While acknowledging the distinctive nature of each, pioneers of the time, such as William James, the 'psychologist-turned-philosopher' writing in the latter half of the 19th Century, understood that lines between psychology and philosophy, and indeed religion, were largely artificial, and saw the potential for a more pluralistic understanding of human life and experience. In particular, James saw a futility in an over-defining of boundaries between disciplines, and was a proponent of there being more 'fluidity' between categories (James, 1985). Certainly, at the turn of the century, under the influence of James and proteges such as John Dewey (1859-1952), the 'psychology of religion' began to prosper, along with the idea of religion as being a pathway, as philosophy before it, for unlocking the 'secrets of the universe':

'...Dewey does not identify a specific internal power. For him, 'the religious' is a generalised term for that which supports and encourages people in the active pursuit towards the good and the valuable...'
(Ikeda, 1993, p.158)

Thus, an interest in religion in terms of its function and value within individuals' lives gained prominence, and in 'Jamesian' terms, psychology, philosophy and religion were understood as sharing important unifying functions for understanding human experience. James saw religion as

'mankind's most important function'; as dealing with human needs and wants (James, 1985). His focus largely by-passed what we might think of today as 'organised religion', and centred on singularly human concerns; for example, religion when it dealt with 'the way an individual's life comes home to him, his intimate needs, ideals, desolations, consolations, failures, successes (James, 1902, 1985, p. xxi). As the quote suggests, James was interested in the nature of belief, and what motivated individuals' religious pursuits and in their uniquely personal and private experience of it. This explicit leaning away from an overly formalised reading of religious observance towards an emphasis on 'experience', serves to highlight the range and possibilities within an understanding of 'religion', and moves into the territory of more modern narratives of 'spirituality' which is positioned more as a subset of religion (Ruddock and Cameron, 2010) and characterised by a state of meaningfulness which has implications for the way that life is subsequently lived:

'Spirituality is that aspect of human existence that gives it its 'humanness'. It concerns the structures of significance that give meaning and direction to a person's life and helps them deal with the vicissitudes of existence'

(Swinton, 2001 in Ruddock and Cameron, 2010, p. 25).

While static dictionary definitions of religion may often stress more traditional elements such as in, 'the *worship of a superhuman controlling power*', or 'a *particular system of faith and worship*' (Oxford Dictionaries Online) these reflect a more 'mainstream' understanding of religion. In contrast to a notion of spirituality as just described, what these definitions are less able to convey is a more dynamic and contextual idea of the function that religion may play in influencing the form, shape and meaning of people's lives (in the sense that James was interested in it), or in the function of religion as something which motivates attitudes, actions and behaviour. This moves us into the realm of ideas concerning morality and ethics, dealing with principles that govern a person's behaviour. This relates to Socratic questions of what kinds of people we should be, and can be seen as one area in which psychology, philosophy and religion intersect in relation to the tricky human concerns of how to behave and why. While moral questions can be fluid and subject to change

according to time or cultural attitudes, ethics are more perennial. Nagel (1979) put forward the assertion that 'ethics should govern action, not just belief':

'In trying to solve ethical problems, we are trying to find out how to live and how to arrange our social institutions – we are not just trying to develop a more accurate picture of the world and the people in it. Therefore ethics is connected with motivation. It begins not with pre-reflective ideas about what the world is like, but with pre-reflective ideas about what to do, how to live, and how to treat other people...'
(Nagel, 1979, p. 144)

This links to Aristotle's so-named Nichomachean ethics, and specifically, the concept of 'eudaimonia' (sometimes translated as 'happiness', but thought to translate best as 'well-being' or 'flourishing'); the essential idea being that we become better persons through practice, and that someone who is flourishing, is living the 'good', 'virtuous' life. According to Aristotle, all people seek to flourish, and aspiration for good, leads to good habits. For Aristotle, man is a rational, social animal, in that order, and he felt that in order to flourish, man must attend to the features and needs (physical, social and rational) which relate to these qualities. An example would be to posit that if we were creatures who flourished as hermits, the need for trust and cooperation would not be so pressing (Gilkey, 2008); to be flourishing, therefore, we need to be flourishing in one of these aspects. It was deemed that we become virtuous through education and habit, and we therefore need to develop good habits of activity and action in order to hone 'practical wisdom' (phronesis) that results from embodying these virtues in a balanced way. While Aristotle's account suggests a particular type of 'humanness', criteria which in today's terms might actually serve to exclude certain among us, the idea of the need to engage in activity which 'speaks' to those 'human' qualities, in order to be fulfilled and flourishing, is an interesting one when attempting to consider the functions (positive and negative) of human activity in our everyday lives.

Nagel's emphasis on how values should or could influence action, and Aristotelian ideas about how actions and values contribute to a virtuous, flourishing life, resonate with the notion of a philosophy-psychology-religion 'for life' as previously discussed: the way that we live that life, and the motivation for our actions therein. In this respect, the notion of a 'philosophy

for life', and questions of where philosophy ends and religion or spirituality begins and how each might intersect or share similar space, are ones which bring us neatly to contemporary (and historical) understandings of Buddhism, with its own unique religious, philosophical and also psychological traditions. Defined by one commentator as 'a religion and a metaphysical or ethical philosophy, and at best as a philosophical psychology' (Kwee, 2013), Buddhism, as well as being a major world faith, might indeed be usefully described as offering a 'guiding principle for behaviour', as in one of the definitions of philosophy considered earlier.

Let me now consider the background and genesis of Buddhism in more depth, and how the different facets within it - of religion, psychology, spirituality and philosophy - come together to inform a particular way of viewing, acting and interacting within the world.

Buddhism

Buddhism originates in the teachings of Shakyamuni, Prince Siddhartha Gautama, born some 2,500 years ago in a small kingdom at the foot of the Himalayas, south of what is now central Nepal. Although, as Prince of the 'Shakya' clan, his destiny was to ultimately succeed his father as King, the narrative goes that as a young man, Siddhartha became deeply troubled by what he saw around him in terms of the problems of human suffering. Siddhartha, who subsequently became known as 'Shakyamuni Buddha', promptly renounced his wealth, and left his comfortable life in order to seek a solution to the 'four sufferings' common to all humankind: birth (into the troubled world), sickness, old age and death. Specifically, he sought answers to the nature of suffering, the causes of suffering and how suffering could be overcome (SGI-UK, 2008).

The Sanskrit word *Buddha* means 'one who is awakened [to the truth]', and while widely employed by various schools of the time, the term eventually came to be used exclusively in reference to Shakyamuni.

After years of effort and practice, Shakyamuni is said to have experienced a profound enlightenment to the nature of life; specifically to the causes of suffering and how to resolve it through an awareness of the great potential inherent in life. He spent the remainder of his life sharing his insights through teachings or 'sutras', throughout India. Shakyamuni's final teaching before he died was the Lotus Sutra, which has special significance for Nichiren Buddhists, who deem this to be his highest teaching, and this tradition will be explored in more depth presently.

After Shakyamuni's death, the sutras were spread by disciples through Asia, and while the tendency is to associate Buddhism solely with Shakyamuni, it seems clear that in later periods the faith was propagated by a number of significant others, following on from Shakyamuni.

Buddhism, as it spread, subsequently took different forms: in particular: the Theravada (or Hinayana – 'lesser vehicle') and the Mahayana ('greater vehicle'). As Buddhism followed the commercial 'silk route' from India to China and beyond, the sutras were translated into the many different languages of those lands, and the teachings became enmeshed with the many different cultures. Many new traditions developed as a consequence, leading to the great diversity and variety within the practices of Buddhism that we see today across Asia.

Although the historical Buddha did not actually commit any of his oral teachings to writing during his lifetime (and it was not until three or four hundred years after his death, as far as can be said, that the first written forms emerged), nevertheless, the spirit of his words have evidently endured, albeit through various interpretations. As eminent Buddhist writer and thinker Thich Nhat Hanh states:

'...Like all traditions, Buddhism needs to renew itself regularly in order to stay alive and grow. The Buddha always found new ways to express his awakening. Since the Buddha's lifetime, Buddhists have continued to open new Dharma doors to express and share the teachings begun in the Deer Park in Sarnath. Please remember that a sutra or a Dharma talk is not insight in and of itself. It is a means of presenting insight, using words and concepts....The Buddha said many times, 'My

teaching is like a finger pointing to the moon. Do not mistake the finger for the moon...'

(Thich Nhat Hanh, 1998, p. 17)

Nichiren Buddhism, following the teachings of the 13th Century monk, Nichiren Daishonin ('great teacher'), is a tradition which offers a particular perspective on human experience, and a way of engaging with life's challenges and triumphs. Based upon the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Buddhism holds the teachings contained within the sutra as primary, and emphasises the potential of all human beings to attain 'Buddhahood', a state characterised by the specific qualities of courage, compassion and wisdom. Nichiren Buddhism emphasises the preciousness of each individual's life, and also how life's challenges can be transformed to create value:

'The teachings of the Lotus Sutra and the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, with their life-affirming quality, represent a philosophy of revitalisation that views all things as having infinite value and potential... This philosophy of hope is the core of a genuinely humanistic religion, for it teaches the great path that enables us to feel deep appreciation for being alive at each moment...'

(Ikeda, 2007, p.157)

This 'humanism', characterised as compassion for the needs of others as well as our own, is central to Buddhist theory and practice; as well as the notion of 'loving kindness', this compassion ('taking away sorrow and replacing with joy') is enacted through an acknowledgement of the 'Buddhahood' potential that all individuals possess:

'Compassion is the heart of Buddhism and the essence of the Lotus Sutra..... Compassion is the hallmark of all Buddhas. Awakened to the truth that the ultimate Law of the universe exists within their own lives, Buddhas are aware that this Law also resides in the lives of all others...'

(Ikeda, 2007, p. 284)

In Japan during Nichiren's time, many of the Buddhist schools operated on a hierarchical level. Nichiren was said to have challenged these established

schools, asserting that every individual, regardless of gender, race or position in society, had the capacity to overcome life's challenges, and to positively influence their community through developing a life of creativity and value. In this sense, Nichiren Buddhism emphasises a greatly optimistic perspective, based on equality, as well as a deep respect for all life:

'The essential teaching of Buddhism is that the life of the Buddha resides in every plant and tree, even in the smallest dust mote. It's a philosophy founded on a profound reverence for life.'

(Ikeda, 2006, p. 16.)

Although innate in all people, this 'life-enhancing' capacity may remain latent, and the primary purpose of Buddhist practice is seen as the 'awakening to' and unlocking of this innate positive potential or capacity for 'enlightenment'. While some strands of Buddhism emphasise meditation as the path to enlightenment, when one can break free from 'delusions', and see the world and experiences as they truly are, Nichiren Buddhism comes from the perspective that to chant 'Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo' (the title of the Lotus Sutra, and representing what is termed the 'Mystic Law') is the way to awaken the Buddha qualities latent within us, and achieve enlightenment from this moment to the next. While emphasising the transformational quality of this process of awakening, there is also an acknowledgment of the ongoing struggle for human beings, between our 'Buddha nature' and our 'delusion'.

'The significance of Buddhism lies both in the discovery of the Buddha nature in all beings and in the establishment of a practical method for bringing it out, so that human beings can derive maximum meaning from their lives.....'

(Ikeda, 2006, p. 103)

While a central question for moral philosophy might be about the *what* and *how* to be and do 'good', the key questions for Buddhists may be encapsulated in the questions: 'how to be happy and fulfilled' – and the two are seen as linked. These were questions not overlooked by William James within his own theorisations:

'If we were to ask the question: 'What is human life's chief concern?' one of the answers we would receive would be: 'It is happiness.' How to gain, how to keep, how to recover happiness, is in fact for most men at all times the secret motive of all they do, and of all they are willing to endure.'

(James, 1985, p. 78)

James, in fact, went so far as to highlight Buddhism, along with Christianity, as the 'completest religions', in which 'the pessimistic elements are best developed...They are essentially religions of deliverance' (James, 1985, p. 165).

While in contemporary times, happiness, or 'well-being' has now become something of a social and political issue as well as a focus for academic research (Seligman, 2002; Haidt, 2003), for Buddhism, the focus takes on the perspectives of happiness as a 'process' rather than an end-point to be reached. In this respect, a distinction is made between 'relative' happiness and 'absolute' happiness, where how we are able to respond to difficulties, rather than the lack of difficulties themselves, is the key to personal growth and the state of happiness:

'Without opposition there is no growth. It is hard to argue with that logic. A state in which we are free from problems or constraints is not happiness. Happiness is transcending all opposition and obstacles and continuing to grow.'

(Ikeda, 1999, p. 276)

The concept of 'karma' is now very well embedded within the zeitgeist. It refers to the accumulation of causes that we make in our lives, and the effects of these causes, deep within our lives, ultimately influencing our present and our future existence.

The Sanskrit word 'karma' originally meant 'action', and in Buddhism, this translates into the idea that every mental, physical or verbal action – everything that we think, do or say – imprints a latent influence in our lives. This influence, or karma, has a dynamic element, and becomes manifest when activated by an external stimulus, which then produces a corresponding effect. In this respect, our actions in the past can be seen as having shaped

our present, while, our actions in the present, in turn shape our future; thus Buddhism sees all life as deeply connected.

One of the fundamental tenets of Buddhism is that of 'dependent origination' which states that all phenomena arise from mutually interdependent relationships of various causes and conditions. In other words, nothing can exist in isolation, and all things are mutually dependent upon, and influence, one another:

'...Buddhism teaches that no human being can exist in a state of total isolation; instead we congregate and live by supporting and helping one another. This philosophy opposes the idea of rejecting or shutting out certain persons or groups of people. If anything, the principle of dependent origination leads us to give the utmost consideration to how to enable others to reveal their potential, how to establish better human relations and how to create the greatest possible value.'

(Ikeda, 1995, p.148)

This profoundly 'relational' perspective, resonating with Gergen's (2009) ideas of life as primarily relational, and also having strong parallels with Gestalt's relational theory of self (Harris, 2003) specifically stresses the profound connection between one's own happiness and the happiness of others. In seeming to support an idea of a 'self' which could be interpreted as an 'individualistic' concept (Sampson, 2003, MacNaughton, 2005), this Buddhist idea of a 'self' might at first glance seem to sit somewhere separate from the social constructionist notion of realities being constructed through discourse and interaction. However, in emphasising that key elements of one's existence and experience necessarily influence and are influenced by the actions and interactions of those around us, Buddhism has some parallels with social constructionist thinking, and would similarly challenge the idea of a 'self' as a totally bounded 'self-contained' entity, which exists separate from others (Sampson, 2003; Gergen, 2009).

Nichiren philosophy holds that Buddhism can enable empowerment and positive change in the lives of ordinary people, living amidst the struggles and challenges of ordinary life. This is done by reaching outside ourselves. In this sense, Nichiren Buddhism could be described as an 'engaged Buddhism' (a term first coined by Zen Buddhist philosopher Thich Nhat Hanh in reference to

the activist stance he pioneered in response to the Vietnam War in the 1970's). In the Nichiren sense also, individuals' actions contain the potential for them to actively influence their own destinies and consequently, the destinies of those in their environment. A related concept, also central to Nichiren Buddhism, is that of 'human revolution', understood as a process of inner transformation which takes place as we struggle against life's hardships. This transformation enacts a dynamic interplay, where an individual's growth is also seen as having impact on those around them:

'When we change, the world changes. The key to all change is in our own inner transformation – a change in our hearts and minds. This is human revolution.'

(Ikeda, 2007, p. 51)

And again, the relational aspect is seen as key:

'A great inner revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of an entire society and, further, will cause a change in the destiny of humankind.'

(Ikeda, 2006, p. 214).

There is an acknowledgement that this process of struggle and transformation can yield benefits perhaps initially unforeseen, a capacity also acknowledged by non-Buddhist thinkers:

'...It is in the course of the quest and only through encountering and coping with the various particular harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which provide any quest with its episodes and incidents, that the goal of the quest is finally to be understood. A quest is always an education both to the character of that which is sought and in self-knowledge.'

(MacIntyre, 2000, p. 219)

Since travelling across the East, Buddhism has also migrated to, and become increasingly popular in, the West. Particular forms of the philosophy, of the Mahayana strand, such as Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, have increasingly become attractive and accessible to a secular audience, particularly as a way

of combatting some of the stresses of Western life. At the same time, an increasing professional and lay interest in holistic approaches to understanding the complexity of individuals has seen the development of research and the application of practices such as mindfulness meditation within education, psychotherapy and psychology (Nhat Hanh, 1998; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Kwee, 2013).

While focusing on the quest of individuals to become happy, Buddhism, as mentioned, minimises the notion of an objective 'self', in favour of an idea that we are continually changing and evolving 'in the moment', and within the particular context that we are in. The concept of the 'ten worlds' describes how at any one time, our state of life can be seen as emanating from 'worlds' which ultimately affect the way we see and experience the world around us. As such, therefore, there is no objective reality, merely an experience of life which is continually being influenced by the 'lens' through which we are able to view things at the time. This again resonates with a social constructionist view of the world, which sees our experience of reality as emanating from perspectives which are mutually constructed via various cultural, social and political 'lenses' or discourses (Gergen, 1999). As well as the idea of objective reality, Buddhism rejects a 'dualistic' view of life, with an emphasis instead on mind and body, person and environment, as inseparable: life and environment as reflections of one another, and mind and body as two interrelated phases of the same entity. Resonating with the 'mind-body' conundrum of neuroscience, Nichiren Buddhism talks of the concept of 'esho funi' – 'two but not two, not two but two' as a way of describing how both entities are able to coexist.

While Buddhism may sometimes be viewed as a teaching that aspires to the acquisition of a state of perfect inner tranquillity, or 'nirvana', which could be understood as a desire to escape the real world, Nichiren Buddhism sees the essence and aim of practice as a process of real spiritual engagement within the very vicissitudes of our everyday lives:

'The Western impression that Buddhism is all about meditation is alien to the spirit of Shakyamuni. The goal of Nichiren Buddhism is neither escape from reality nor passive acceptance. It is to live strongly, proactively, in such a way as to refine one's own life and reform society

through a constant exchange between the outside world and the individual's inner world.'

(Ikeda, 2006, p. 90)

Thus, Nichiren Buddhism locates itself very firmly within the context of the struggles of everyday life, the facing of which has the effect of bringing forth inner resources – and 'happiness' can be found within this very struggle:

'Adversity gives birth to greatness. The greater the challenges and difficulties we face, the greater the opportunity we have to grow and develop as people. A life without adversity, a life of ease and comfort, produces nothing and leaves us with nothing...'

(Ikeda, 1999, p.127)

While this view may seem to minimise the fact that many experience great hardship in a manner which constricts rather than 'grows' their lives, Buddhism would posit that regardless of the hardships we encounter, what is of most importance is the state of mind, of victory or defeat, in which we are able to approach them.

A New Humanism

The Buddhist principles just discussed have very clear parallels with the concepts of self-actualisation, transcendence and relatedness found within humanistic psychology. Humanistic approaches emphasise personal growth and fulfilment as a basic human drive, and the notion that in different ways, humans seek to grow psychologically and continuously (McLeod, 2007): this has been captured by the term 'self-actualisation'. Central to the humanist theories of Rogers (1943) and Maslow (1943) is the subjective, conscious experience of the individual, and the assumption that humans are essentially 'good' with an innate need to make themselves and the world better (McLeod, 2007). This is an optimistic approach which emphasises the value and active creativity of the individual, especially to overcome difficulties and to fulfil their potential. In particular, it has enabled an understanding of what helps to motivate and inspire us as individuals in our endeavours in the world (McLeod, 2007). Maslow (1954) (as indeed Aristotle had done over two thousand years earlier) identified the physical, social/emotional and rational/intellectual motivations for individuals and, adding a 'spiritual'

element, felt that as one becomes more self-actualised and self-transcendent, one develops greater wisdom for use in a wide variety of situations. Alderfer's (1972) hierarchical conceptualisation of motivational needs centred on the individual's compulsion to be creative and productive within his or her environment, to engage with problems, and develop relationships with significant others. It stresses a notion that individuals are intrinsically connected to each other, and that the need for connectedness is a central human motivation. These ideas suggest an optimistic conceptualisation of human beings as having great potential for engaging with the environment and with each other, as we endeavour to solve the problems which arise around us. In the same way, Nichiren Buddhism refers to the idea that in revealing our potential, we reveal the qualities of Buddhahood, which can then be manifested in actions which 'create value' within our relationships and within the environment, as the previous quotes have suggested. The focus, ultimately, is on upholding the dignity and rights of each individual and in the process, creating a more just and peaceful society; this realisation is the central motivation for Buddhist practice:

'Everyone has a right to flower, to reveal his or her full potential as a human being, to fulfil his or her mission in this world. You have this right and so does everyone else. This is the meaning of human rights ...Prizing human rights and respecting others are among our most important tasks.'

(Ikeda, 2006, p. 39)

This of course has been my own construction of a narrative around Buddhism, encompassing ideas from a particular strand of Buddhism which has become meaningful to me in terms of what it offers as a compassionate and profoundly optimistic approach, as I navigate my personal and professional life. The key messages of Buddhism, whether as a religion, philosophy or simply a perspective on life and humanity, seem to me to be in promoting a belief in one's own capabilities, wisdom and potential and at the same time having the same belief in others' potential – and in seeing the two things as interconnected; as 'two sides of the same coin'. This informs an attitude of

what might be called 'compassion' in Buddhist terms, and puts respect for human experience and existence at the centre of our motivations for self and others. This might usefully be termed 'humanism', but a key facet of this humanistic message is a belief in the virtue of shared benefits arising from this perspective, which balances an otherwise 'individualistic' (Gergen, 1999; Bradley, 2005) reading of humanism: a belief in 'your happiness is my happiness', and vice-versa. (And while notions regarding the 'self' and personal drives and motivations might seem to contradict a social constructionist idea of 'selves' being produced out of human relations and discourses (Gergen, 1999), in also recognising that language constructs social reality, it is possible (for me at least) to be at peace with this apparent contradiction.).

These relational ideas have significance for the ways in which we attempt to navigate life's course, how we engage with one another, and ultimately, the nature and quality of our relationships.

In a professional context, especially where the professional is engaged in work with children, this has particular significance. Because adults hold positions of power and influence that children do not hold, we need to be ever mindful of the actions and decisions that we take on their behalf and in relation to them - and be reflective regarding what those actions and decisions are based on. One could argue that it is impossible to exclude from professional interactions with children, our closely-held assumptions about their experience, their motivations, their potential. Whether we are aware of them or not, these motivations and assumptions in relation to children and young people affect our expectations of them, how we consider them, and how we subsequently work with them. Some of these motivations will be explored in the following section.

**SCENE TWO. WORKING WITH (AND FOR) CHILDREN:
DEVELOPMENTAL, CULTURAL AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGICAL
PERSPECTIVES**

*No printed word, nor spoken plea
Can teach young minds what men should be,
Not all the books on all the shelves
But what the teachers are themselves.*

- Anonymous

*'Teacher's Prayer': 'Let me be more mother than the mother herself in my
love and defence of the child who is not flesh of my flesh. Help me to make
one of my children my most perfect poem and leave within him or her my
most melodious melody from that day when my own lips no longer sing*

-Gabriela Mistral, humanistic educator, 1956, *The Educational Forum*
Vol 20, Issue 4, pp 400-4000. Published online: 30 Jan 2008)

As adults, the way we think about and understand young people is a central thread of what informs our communication and engagement with them, and how we choose to subsequently work with them. On a simple level if we, for example, think of children as 'vulnerable' beings, we may seek to protect them; if we think of them as 'incorrigibly unruly', we may seek to be in control of them. On another level, our thoughts and assumptions about, for example, what constitutes 'normal development', or the role that we as adults should assume in our interactions with young people, will similarly have an effect on our behaviours towards and with them.

Further, at a societal level, alongside our own personal perspectives and biases, the way that we think about children and young people can often reflect the dominant discourses which abound in our social contexts, and our interactions with these discourses also in turn influence how we relate to these young people; in this sense, these discourses construct and position children in particular ways within our understandings as well as within our communities and our culture (Gergen, 1999; Burman, 2008). Often these ideas may float around unconsciously; at other times, they may be more explicitly known to us and to those we interact with. Certainly, without the space to consciously reflect on what may be informing our attitudes, and indeed on those attitudes themselves, there may be a danger that we become adults whose actions serve to dominate, or patronise, or worse still, close off possibilities of 'being' (Billington, 2006; Mercieca, 2011) for the children in question. Of note here, are two ideas: one, that our actions with children do not exist in a philosophical or cultural vacuum, but are often an external reflection of inner and outer processes, assumptions and expectations; and two, that our actions and interactions with children, however fleeting or incidental, are always of significance. They constitute a relationship between the two parties - of connections which are ultimately influenced and reinforced by the past experiences of those involved, and by the various, and sometimes shifting, understandings and constructions of the world which each party holds and is influenced by.

Such an interpretation places emphasis on understanding people as social and cultural beings, and also acknowledges their experiences as inseparable from an understanding of their 'whole' selves. Increasingly, the child may be understood, rather than passive, but as an active, dynamic part of its social context. The importance of this social dimension seems to be central. Other approaches also seek to acknowledge this social and cultural context: Gestalt psychology, to name but one, recognises that human beings are active co-creators of their own experiences through a wide range of learning processes, and emphasises a phenomenological perspective in our thinking and learning (Harris, 1998). Similarly, a social constructionist perspective emphasises the idea that we construct the world in the context of our relationship with others (Gergen, 1999).

Thus, while we seek to understand children, at the same time, our understandings of ourselves as professionals working with them - our influences, beliefs and constructs of the world – also take on key significance. We can equally be seen as products of, and as experiencing the world according to, what we have learned, understood and been exposed to, and as such, just as for the children in question, influenced by our social, historical, educational and cultural contexts which in turn influence our professional actions. Indeed, as Billington reminds us, ‘professional theory-choice’ has an impact on children’s lives and can lead to particular forms of language being used with regard to children, and in particular representations of children (Billington, 2006).

In acknowledging the importance and influence of historical and cultural viewpoints, it is useful to consider some of the early models that have most informed our current perspectives regarding children’s development, and which have significantly influenced educationalists and disseminated out into wider cultural understandings. The offerings of Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky will briefly be explored in this regard, as their influence on thinking in relation to children continues to prevail today – as well as some other contributions which offer perspectives on our interactions with and for children.

Working Developmentally

Theories about how children think and learn have long been debated - by philosophers, educators and psychologists. The influences which have shaped modern views about children and their development can be traced back to Ancient times, culminating in competing views on the nature of learning and education that continue to be debated today (Wood, 1988). Castle (1970, quoted in Wood, 1988) explored these historical perspectives, and the way in which ideas about the nature of infancy and childhood dictate the ways in which we think about teaching and education in particular (Castle, 1970). In reference to Castle’s work, Wood asserts: ‘our images of children-as-learners are reflected, inevitably, in our definition of what it means to teach’ (Wood, 1988, p.1). In other words, what it may mean to be a ‘teacher’ will rest,

amongst other considerations, on how we construe and understand children within their learning environments. This becomes particularly important when thinking about professional decisions regarding approaches and interventions which can best support children and young people in their cognitive but also social and emotional development.

In the Western world, many of these discourses have, to a greater or lesser degree, been influenced by a number of prominent theories of child development. Some of these theorisations, as they exist within an understanding of 'developmental psychology' have received rigorous critique (e.g. Burman, 2008) in terms of the theories, methods and the socio-political perspectives which underpin them (and particularly the gender and cultural assumptions built into them) but they nevertheless continue to exert considerable influence both on educational practices and on how we seek to understand children.

Notwithstanding Freud, three of the most influential theorists, on whose theories much of current interpretations of childhood development are based, are Jean Piaget, Jerome Bruner and Lev Vygotsky.

These theories reflected the historical and cultural contexts from which they emerged; in particular they contributed towards a developing understanding of the child as an entity within its environment - physical, social and cultural. (For the purposes of this literature review, I do not intend to undertake anything approaching a critical exploration of their work, and my critique will be deliberately narrow and restricted to elements of their work which link to the themes of this study.) They will be considered in turn here, and the focus will lie less in examining the minute detail of the respective theories, than in looking at the parallels between them, and some of the key implications for understanding children's development in the context of the relationship between adult, child and environment.

While Freud had emphasised the influence of internal drives, Piaget (1921; 1971) was interested in the development of cognitive processes, while Bruner (1966; 1973) and Vygotsky (1978; 1986), emphasised social learning and the significance of the social context.

Piaget, as mentioned, through his 'staged' concept of development, focused on the cognitive development of young children, and emphasised the fact that children need to be active and constructive in order to develop their understanding of the world. He also described the increasing ability of the child to acknowledge the separateness of others and to take into account the perspective of others, which becomes a precursor for the development of social reciprocity and 'social thinking' that Piaget argued was very dependent on interactions with other children (Piaget, 1971). These ideas hold particular relevance for peer-based approaches which seek to capitalise on these types of interaction.

Working Socially And Culturally

While historical research had focused on children as being capable of an understanding of, and interaction with, their social environment from a very young age, Bruner and Vygotsky brought this thinking to the next level, by emphasising the role of the environment not only in providing stimulation and learning, but specifically, the importance of instruction.

Bruner's staged model involved children as active learners, constructing their own knowledge rather than being passive receivers of stimuli (Bruner, 1960). Bruner opposed Piaget's notion of 'readiness', believing that a child (of any age) is capable of understanding complex information, and that 'any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development' (Bruner, 1960, p. 33, cited in McLeod, 2008). Bruner felt that this had implications for the role of adults and indeed, institutions in children's development, and for him, the purpose of education was to facilitate a child's thinking and problem solving skills, rather than to simply impart knowledge. For Bruner, then, the educational environment itself (and the adults within it) had a dynamic role in actively facilitating learning and development.

Following research with others (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1974), the term arguably most associated with Bruner, 'scaffolding', first came to prominence. This involved structured interaction between an adult and a child with the aim of the adult helping the child achieve a specific goal. As Bruner himself put it:

'[Scaffolding] refers to the steps taken to reduce the degrees of freedom in carrying out some task so that the child can concentrate on the difficult skill she is in the process of acquiring.'

(Bruner, 1978, p. 19, quoted in McLeod, 2008)

Again, this has relevance for considerations regarding the dynamic between adult and child within the learning relationship, and the value of the support provided by the adult to the child; these ideas encourage us as adults to take seriously our role in this respect.

Like Bruner, Vygotsky was interested in the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; 1986). He was also interested in the significant part the community play in this development, and specifically in helping children derive meaning from the things going on around them. Developing his theories at around the same time as Piaget, there were points of convergence as well as difference between the two theorists. Like Piaget, Vygotsky worked from the understanding of young children as active participants on their learning environments; however, where Piaget emphasised self-initiated discovery, Vygotsky, like Bruner, placed much more emphasis on social contributions to the process of development. He developed a 'sociocultural' approach to cognitive development where he saw cognitive functions, even those carried out alone, as affected by the beliefs, values and tools of intellectual adaptation of the culture in which a person develops. And like Bruner, Vygotsky (1934) emphasised that important learning by the child occurs through social interaction with a skilful tutor. He described the way a tutor (a 'more knowledgeable other') might support learning through verbal instruction or modelling, in very similar terms to the concept of 'scaffolding', encapsulating this thinking within the term, the 'zone of proximal development' which referred to the 'gap' that exists for an individual between what he or she is able to do alone and what they can do with the support of a helper. Significantly, this emphasises that a child's current level of performance must be distinguished from their aptitude to learn with further instruction:

'The psychologist, must not limit his analysis to functions which have matured. He must consider those that are in the process of maturing. If he is to fully evaluate the state of the child's development, the psychologist must consider not only the actual level of development, but the zone of proximal development.'

(Vygotsky, 1987, pp.208-9, cited in Newman and Holzman, 1993, p. 56)

Thus, it seems clear that Vygotsky is much more concerned with the child's potential for learning, as well as with the significance of how that learning can be facilitated by an all-important skilled supporter or helper, who in either formal or less formal contexts can utilise instruction to facilitate the cultural transmission of knowledge.

Critics of Vygotsky's work have challenged the assumption of cultural universality (Rogoff, 1990, cited in McLeod, 2007), but it seems clear that he in particular seemed to be engaged in a process of trying to develop a new way of conceptualising human development. Vygotsky understood the human experience as a dynamic process, and these are philosophically optimistic ideas relating to learning potential which have been taken up more recently within a framework of 'mediated learning' and 'dynamic assessment' (Feuerstein et al, 1979; Deutsch and Reynolds, 2000; Deutsch, 2003), and which also connect to a belief in the critical value to human development of an enabling and supportive social and cultural environment. These ideas will be returned to later, when this thesis considers the cultural role of peers (and supportive adults) in facilitating social and emotional development for young people.

Working Politically

While a particular Russian ideology may be credited as having influenced Vygotsky, the political context around which learning, education and educational practice is organised is seen as no less significant for those that consider education as 'intrinsically political' (Freire, 1970, 1994, 1998; hooks, 1994). For these thinkers, education has the potential to provide new and different possibilities for both teacher and taught, once the systems and

perspectives which can serve to reinforce (or even deny) disadvantage are openly acknowledged. Freire in particular, felt that this placed certain responsibilities on those in positions of power within the institutions of education, particularly in terms of key areas of their practice, asserting that:

'It is precisely the political nature of educational practice, its helplessness to be 'neutral', that requires of the educator his or her ethicalness...'

(Freire, 1994, p. 77)

Freire was someone much exercised by what he saw as the world of injustice and inequality, and the inadequate conception of the relationship between the teacher and the student that prevailed within educational systems and practices. His was an intensely political agenda, concerned not only with the economic poverty of disadvantaged groups in the rural communities of his native Brazil, but the development of 'cultural freedom' and the full participation of all inhabitants in every aspect of public life; he saw this participation as reflecting a 'humanized society' (Freire, 1994). This perspective sought to acknowledge and highlight the inequalities that exist in society, whilst also hinting at the inevitability of the presence of structures which serve to reinforce these inequalities. Nagel (1979) also sought to highlight some of the complexities which exist within inequality, and identified distinctions between political, social and legal equality, arguing that these were extremely difficult to guarantee, and that 'real equality of every kind is sensitive to economic factors' (Nagel 1979, p. 106). Nagel had further concerns about the possibility of morality and altruism being able to triumph amidst the 'powerful interests' of government, public policy and society at large:

'When powerful interests are involved it is very difficult to change anything by arguments, however cogent, which appeal to decency, humanity, compassion, or fairness. These considerations also have to compete with the more primitive moral sentiments of honor and retribution and respect for strength. The importance of these in our time makes it unwise in a political argument to condemn aggression and urge altruism or humanity...'

(Nagel. 1979, p. 106)

In this instance, while Nagel is pessimistic about the usefulness of ethical theory as a form of 'public service', Freire, is much more hopeful about the possibilities of taking an ethical and moral stance in these areas, to influence the 'political' through his own personal and professional responses:

'My concern is not to deny the political and directive nature of education – a denial that, for that matter, it would be impossible to reduce to act – but to accept that this is its nature, and to live a life of full consistency between my democratic option and my educational practice, which is likewise democratic...My ethical duty as one of the subjects, one of the agents, of a practice that can never be neutral – the educational – is to express my respect for differences in ideas and positions. I must respect every position opposed to my own...'
(Freire, 1994, p. 79)

In this sense, Freire also challenged the idea of 'teacher-as-expert', and as transmitter of a formalised kind of 'received' knowledge, and instead had respect for what he saw as the wisdom of 'popular knowledge' and 'living experience':

.. *'To underestimate the wisdom that necessarily results from socio-cultural experience is at one and the same time a scientific error, and the unequivocal expression of the presence of an elitist ideology...'*
(Freire, 1994, p. 84)

This he felt was the 'ethical' undertaking, and required teachers and those in positions of influence within education to see teaching as truly valid only when also concerned with teaching pupils *'the reason-for, the 'why' of the object or content'*. This 'ethical' stance has much resonance with the work of Japanese Nichiren Buddhist and educationalist, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871 -1944), himself influenced by the work of John Dewey, but also by the competitive and status-driven nature of Japanese education, which he felt was doing a great disservice to its students. Makiguchi's approach centred on the 'creation of value', and his educational and religious convictions constituted a critique of the period of Japanese militaristic nationalism prior to and including World War Two (Gebert and Joffe, 2007). Makiguchi, like Freire, felt that the needs and experiences of the students' long-term development was of primary concern, and believed that the main role of education, rather than formulaic

instruction, was to equip young learners with the tools they needed to initiate and facilitate their own inquiry:

The aim of education is not to transfer knowledge; it is to guide the learning process, to equip the learner with the methods of research. It is not the piecemeal merchandizing of information; it is to enable the acquisition of the methods for learning on one's own; it is the provision of keys to unlock the vault of knowledge. Rather than encouraging students to appropriate the intellectual treasures uncovered by others, we should enable them to undertake on their own the process of discovery and invention.'

(Makiguchi, 1939, p. 285, in Bethel, 1989, p. 168)

The intention of the tutor is thus central, and similarly, Freire acknowledged the dynamic nature of teacher-pupil interaction, and saw education as taking place:

'...when there are two learners who occupy somewhat different spaces in an ongoing dialogue. But both participants bring knowledge to the relationship, and one of the objects of the pedagogic process is to explore what each knows and what they can teach each other. A second object is to foster reflection on the self as actor in the world in consequence of knowing.'

(Aronowitz, 1998 (Introduction) in Freire, 1998, p. 8)

Therefore, having humility and respect for what the student knows and their place in that knowledge; accepting that knowledge cannot be understood apart from its 'historico-social, cultural and political framework'; and establishing a connection between knowledge within the school curriculum and 'knowledge that is the fruit of the lived experience of these students as individuals' (Freire, 1998, p. 36) was what Freire felt was required from 'progressive educators'. He thus chose to be inspired by what the students brought to the learning experience, rather than seeing it as inferior, secondary or incidental; in Freire's understanding, the teacher has something to learn from the pupil.

Many of Freire's ideas converge with those of bell hooks, writing from an anti-colonialist, critical, feminist and multicultural perspective, and for whom the possibilities for a politicized and radicalised pedagogy are vast. In reference to her formative experiences of education in her all-black primary school, she describes the teaching, by nearly all-female black teachers, as an enactment

of 'a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance that was profoundly anti-colonial' (hooks, 1994, p.2), representing a conscious determination to inspire and nurture the intellect of African-American children. She saw the educational space within a classroom as offering empowerment, with possibilities for teaching to serve as a catalyst that called for everyone to be more engaged; to become active participants in learning: 'There must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes' (hooks, 1994, p.8) Thus, like Freire, hooks saw that student and teacher alike, needed to be active participants, rather than passive consumers within the classroom, and she looked for the creation of participatory spaces for the sharing of knowledge.

Citing Freire, she states that 'Freire's work affirmed that education can only be liberatory when everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all labour' (hooks, 1994, p.14). In particular, hooks saw critical thinking and 'engaged pedagogy' - to educate as the practice of freedom - as key, and also like Freire, believed teaching not merely to be about the sharing of information, but about sharing 'in the intellectual and spiritual growth' of students. For hooks, this ultimately entailed not only responding to students as unique beings, but also the professional taking responsibility for their own activity within the dynamic, and taking this responsibility seriously.

hooks goes on to make links with Thich Nhat Hanh's philosophy of 'engaged Buddhism' (the notion of spiritual practice in order to have an effect on the social and political world), and with Freire's emphasis on 'praxis' – action and reflection upon the world in order to change it. hooks does, however, view this 'engagement' as a path which requires some emotional labour on the part of the practitioner:

'Progressive, holistic education, 'engaged pedagogy' is more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy. For unlike these two teaching practices, it emphasises well-being. That means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students.'

(hooks, 1994, p.15)

This self-actualization and self-reflection, with echoes of that discussed earlier in this thesis, involved for hooks, being prepared to live out an idea of the

professional as a 'whole' being, with mind, body and soul integrated, rather than being compartmentalised – a notion hooks acknowledges as rarely talked about in American academia of the time . She again cites Thich Nhat Hanh as saying that the practice of professionals working with people in the realm of support and education should be directed towards his or herself first. For hooks, as for Freire, this means turning the gaze inwards and striving towards a personal and professional integrity. It also means being willing to make yourself vulnerable, and not to expect any student to take any risk within the professional relationship that you yourself would not be prepared to take:

'When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks.'

(hooks, 1994, p. 21)

With regard to promoting 'holistic' models for pedagogical practice, the intersection between spirituality and the aims of social justice are specifically emphasised within the framework proposed by Pigza and Welch (2010); that of 'spiritually engaged pedagogy'. Just as hooks connects to the ideas of Thich Nhat Hanh and 'engaged Buddhism' within her own pedagogical approach, 'spiritually engaged pedagogy' seeks to integrate the concepts of engaged spirituality, engaged pedagogy and social justice. It draws on a broad conceptualisation of spirituality as involving development of the sense of the authentic self, of involving ongoing construction of meaning and knowledge, and as emphasising relationship and interconnectedness (English, 2000; Tisdell, 2003). Specifically, it connects these conceptions of spirituality to social justice education through an idea of 'engagement with otherness' (Pigza and Welch, 2010), and in this respect, spirituality is viewed as a gateway to constructing both meaning and a meaningful life (Pigza and Welch, 2010) in a way which resonates with the Buddhist ideas discussed earlier.

Working Critically

While these ideas as espoused by Freire and hooks are now twenty years old and more, they remain of great significance. As adults operating within these contexts today, there exists a clear responsibility towards appreciating the impact not only of our own histories and past experiences, but of our own part in creating new experiences and narratives as our professional lives intersect with these young people's stories. It becomes important to view individuals, including ourselves, as 'non-unitary' entities, with multiple and contradictory subjectivities' (Hollway, 1994) which reflect and to some extent are a response to the complexities that we face as human beings in the world. Embracing this complexity and seeing it as part and parcel of who we are (Mercieca, 2011) may be a key element in any move towards 'self-actualisation', and more effective and authentic practice.

Therefore, while within our societal systems, power imbalances exist which can mean that the rights and needs of children are subjugated against those of the more powerful adults, it seems clear that professionals need to be alive to the negative as well as positive consequences of their work with children. A central and related question that faces any professional charged with the responsibility of working with children, in whatever context, is how this work might best be done. The question, of course, is anything but a simple one, involving, as mentioned, all the complexity that one might expect from endeavour which relates to human exchange and human experience. Nevertheless, such a question is at the heart of a professional 'scrutiny' that seeks to be mindful that work with children does not do a disservice to the needs of that child (for example, it should offer some value to the child as well as to the situation at hand) while at the same time, allowing that personal and professional integrity be upheld. Billington (2006) discusses the various ways that our work with children can invariably 'maintain power relationships between children and adults and support oppressive forms of governmentality, for example by invoking yet again the processes of marginalization and exclusion' (Billington, 2006, p. 95.) In reflecting on some of his own lessons learned during his transition into becoming a professional psychologist, regarding practices built on the power held by adults inherent in these relationships, he attests:

'... . More difficult still was the possibility of being seduced into professional practices which again invariably seemed constructed in ways which served the needs of adults, rather than addressing boldly the needs of the young person with whom I could be working.'

(Billington, 2006, p. 25)

In order to combat this danger of 'seduction', it becomes incumbent on practising professionals to reflect on exactly how and why we do what we do - 'how we perform our work, the ideas and theories that we employ, the ideas upon which we base our advice and interventions; the evidence base for our theories or chosen intervention' (Billington, 2006, p.7). Billington encourages us to reflect on our practice through reflecting on five question themes:

- *'How do we speak of children;*
- *How do we speak with children;*
- *How do we write of children;*
- *How do we listen to children;*
- *How do we listen to ourselves (when working with children)?'*

(Billington, 2006, p. 8).

In asserting that it is the quality of our professional approach and interactions which really matter, Billington suggests that these questions can form the bases for 'developing those reflexive and critical faculties which enable us to understand more of what we are doing and to open our eyes to the effects of our actions, for good or ill' (Billington, 2006, p. 8). Again, the idea that our professional interactions and interventions with particular children constitute a relationship with that child, is important. The dynamic nature of these interactions is often underplayed, but is nevertheless fundamental. While the adult, by virtue of their professional position, holds most power within the relationship and is, to a great extent, the one controlling and directing proceedings, the child should not be viewed as passive or incidental, but at least as equally involved and implicated; their interests as central.

Critical pedagogies and practices involve educationalists and practitioners being motivated to undertake an examination of 'the social and political factors that produce dominant educational knowledge and practices, and to

ask whose interests they serve' (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 9). This necessitates an interest in the way that particular discourses and narratives around children and young people influence our thinking with regard to them, processes which, as has been mentioned, can be seen as being embedded within a historical and cultural context.

As advocated by Freire and others, an idea of 'authentic' practice would include an awareness and focus on resisting systems and processes which may serve to reinforce disadvantage, social exclusion and marginalisation of young people. While perhaps not simple to enact on a practical level, such 'resistance' is explored through the lens of critical and 'community psychology' by Prilleltensky and Nelson (1997). They describe a set of particular values for community psychology - 'the expression of caring and compassion', 'health', 'individual self-determination and participation', 'respect for human diversity' and 'social justice' - and also some guiding principles of practice which should follow on from these values on a practical level (Prilleltensky and Nelson, 1997, p. 168). Within these guiding principles, they advocate for an acknowledgement of the fact that some values, such as 'social justice' have been put to the background and need to be brought to the foreground, as well as for an expansion of the implementation of values from 'micro' and 'meso' social contexts to the 'macro' level. A significant principle for action which they also refer to is the need for connection between the 'personal and the political', and between 'constituents' who are affected by social change (Prilleltensky and Nelson, 1997, p. 178). They suggest that this would lead, for example, to greater attention to subjectivity and personal experience, and to more emancipatory research; all ways in which a social justice aspiration could have direct influence on practice and also on research.

This aspiration for an impact on individual and social realities lies close to the heart of critical psychology practice. Critical psychology as an approach attempts to resist and challenge assumptions about the ability to uncover truths about the general, with a focus on the multiple realities which pertain to individuals, within a social, cultural and political context (Hare-Mustin and Marecek, 1997).

Its historical roots lie in critical theory which emerged from the neo-Marxist, anti-positivist, 'Frankfurt School' of social theory which was concerned with the conditions which allow for social change. In its contemporary form, critical psychology was a pivotal component of the radical psychology of the 1960's, and concerns itself with societal issues as much as psychological ones (minimising a distinction between the two), as well as with a specific quest for social justice and human welfare (Prilleltensky and Fox ,1997).

Just as there has been a call within educational psychology, for example, to acknowledge the moral and social responsibilities which are faced in its work, and specifically to see that it cannot separate itself from the factors which affect those that the work is done with (Wolfendale, 1992), so critical psychology emphasises psychology practice as a social and ethical endeavour. According to Prilleltensky (1999), the critical psychology movement is premised on four assumptions:

'....(a) that the societal status quo contributes to the oppression of large segments of the population, (b) that psychology upholds the societal status quo, (c) that society can be transformed to promote meaningful lives and social justice, and (d) that psychology can contribute to the creation of more just and meaningful ways of living. If we accept these premises, we are not only critical psychologists but, most importantly, critical citizens.'

(Prilleltensky, 1999, p. 101)

If we can be good citizens, we can be good practitioners, and critical psychology opens up opportunities in this respect. Specifically, it emphasises the potential of psychological practice to challenge the mainstream and the status quo where necessary; to acknowledge the social and political context within which our practice is intertwined, and which cannot be separated from our experiences. As a result, there is the opportunity to do practice differently from that which has become reactionary and part of an 'establishment' based on disputed ideas of scientific knowledge (this to be discussed further), and to unashamedly focus on the pursuit of greater social equality and individual flourishing.

Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1997) describe critical psychology as being less about mastering a body of knowledge, than as existing as a set of practices which reflect a 'critical and sceptical attitude', which resists attending to deficit and disorder to the exclusion of human resilience or a belief in an individual's ability to cope. Similarly, it asks whether deficiencies or qualities described as individual characteristics might better be understood as behaviours emerging out of a particular situation or context. In this sense, 'criticality' involves looking for the gaps in common narratives, what may have been missed out for reasons which perhaps suit the status quo, and looking for how the well-being of all of society can be achieved (Hare-Mustin and Marecek, 1997, p. 119).

Some of these broader questions are explored within the context of societal narratives around a particular cohort of young people, within the next section.

SCENE THREE. BOUND EXCLUSIVELY TO SOCIAL EXCLUSION, DEFICIT AND DISORDER?: ENCOUNTERS WITHIN AND AROUND 'BESD'

When you plant lettuce, if it does not grow well, you don't blame the lettuce. You look for reasons it is not doing well. It may need fertilizer, or more water, or less sun. You never blame the lettuce.

(Thich Nhat Hanh)

Children are mirrors that reflect adult society. When adults are ailing and their vision clouded, children will also suffer...

(Daisaku Ikeda, 2006, p.174)

The Behaviour 'Problem': Some Statistics...

In England, there are 158,000 pupils in mainstream state-funded primary, secondary and special schools with a primary Special Educational Need (SEN) of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) (DfE, 2011a) In recent years there has been a rise in what are termed BESD , from 1.7% of all pupils in 2004 to 2.1% in 2011 (DfES, 2004; DfE, 2011a). Of pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs, those with BESD were most likely to be: boys; older pupils (aged 11-15); in receipt of free school meals (FSM); and looked after children. At School Action Plus, Black and mixed race pupils were more likely to have BESD as their primary SEN type of need (DfE, 2011a).

The Behaviour 'Problem': The Tyranny Of Categorisation

The statistics tell a particular tale: of a rise in numbers of those children identified as having a 'special educational need' (SEN) in relation to difficulties which manifest, in one way or another, in behaviour which becomes difficult to manage within the school setting; of a disproportionate prevalence of boys, of children-looked-after by the local authority, of children from lower socio-economic groups and of children from ethnic minority backgrounds, within this group. The statistics appear to reflect the impact of a number of largely social factors, which no doubt interact with other significant factors to do with individual and familial circumstances, as well as structural factors among other things, but which in any case, point to the vulnerability of this group of young people in terms of their life chances and future outcomes. With this in mind, it is clearly important how we perceive, relate to and seek to understand this group, particularly within a historical professional context which has failed to fully acknowledge the significance of these factors (Billington and Williams, 2014).

The complexity surrounding definitions and constructions of children identified as presenting with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties mirrors the complexity of the behaviours themselves. Despite a focus over four decades -

which has seen a transition from a 'medical-model' conceptualisation of 'maladjustment' towards a more contextual and 'interactionist' conceptualisation with 'EBD' (emotional and behavioural difficulties) as the preferred term (Warnock Report, 1978), and then to current descriptions of 'SEBD' or 'BESD' which acknowledge a 'social' component (the new SEN Code of Practice (2014) has now recently included a 'mental health' component) - there has been little consensus with regard to the precise nature of what is being defined (Rees et al, 2003; Wigelsworth et al, 2010). The often 'ubiquitous' use of terminology such as 'EBD' serves to belie the lack of agreement and clarity that exists (Rees et al, 2003) and at the same time can also allow for the 'bracketing' by policy-makers and practitioners, of children and young people who require specialist provision (Jones, 2003); this despite the conclusion by Warnock even then, as highlighted by Swinson et al (2003), that 'children with emotional and behavioural disorders have few common distinguishing features' (Warnock Report, 1978, p.221). This highlights the need for professionals to take seriously the issue of the labels attached to children, and, as Swinson et al (2003) further put it, to acknowledge that 'the time has come to unravel the term EBD and make much more explicit our descriptions of such children, in terms of their emotional needs and their behavioural needs, in order to enable a more effective focus for intervention (Swinson et al, 2003, p. 74).

The issue of labelling and categorisation in this arena can therefore be seen as a contentious one. There exists, for example, the argument that the stigma which the Warnock Report hoped to avoid in its reclassification, has simply led to a different, but equally pernicious, type of stigma for those young people given the 'EBD' or 'BESD' label. In this respect, any focus on categorisation should be viewed with caution, as reductionist, and as potentially hugely problematic in terms of how children and young people are subsequently positioned and responded to, particularly in relation to practices which have implications for social exclusion as well as stigma (Billington, 2006; Billington and Williams, 2015; Thomas, 2005). On this matter, and turning the spotlight onto some of the internal tensions which can come into

play in the work of professionals as a result of the work they do and the roles they assume within this context, Billington (2006) points out:

'Categorisation of 'behavioural difficulties' can present as a euphemism; designed to massage professional anxieties and responsibilities, not only as a means of defence against the perceived pain of the young person, for example, but also as a guard against the feelings provoked by self-knowing participation in an act of social exclusion.'

(Billington, 2006, p. 36)

Thomas (2005), for his part, takes issue with the seemingly benign, and now largely universal, emphasis on 'need' (originating from the 1981 Education Act's focus on Special Educational Needs). He describes it as referring most usually to the school's need – for calm and order – and as having a 'powerful sub-text' that the real cause of difficulty is in deficit and deviance in the child, with the difficulty itself as something 'dispositional', residing within the child, and requiring individual treatment:

'..The relatively recent concept of 'need' has come to reinforce concepts of deficit and disadvantage. Intended to be helpful, to place emphasis on a child's difficulties rather than simply naming supposed category of problems, the notion of need has instead come to point as emphatically as before at the child. It has allowed to remain in place many of the exclusionary practices associated with special education.'

(Thomas, 2005, p.60)

Similarly, he problematizes the use of terms such as 'EBD', around which children with behavioural difficulties are grouped, seeing the term as having little real legitimacy or validity despite wide and 'unquestioning' use in the UK:

'In its use is an insidious blurring of motives and knowledges which imputes problems to children that in reality are rarely theirs....(it) perpetuates a mind-set about behaviour which distracts attention from what the school can do to make itself a more humane, inclusive place.'

(Thomas, 2005, pp.76-77).

Others, while acknowledging the imprecise nature of such categorisations, nevertheless concede a 'professional usefulness' to these terms (Visser, 2005). Notwithstanding this apparent 'stand-off' in positions, as Jones (2003)

comments: 'it is widely recognised that the language used to describe behaviour problems shapes not only beliefs about the manifest problem, but also the perceptions of what could be done about it and whose responsibility it is to do it...' (Jones, 2003, p.150). Jones, herself, challenges the use of the 'EBD-as-SEN' idea, but for different reasons, critiquing what she sees as the politicized juxtaposition of the medical model versus the interactionist, 'eco-systemic' framing of problem behaviour as championed, among others, in the work of Cooper and Upton (1990, cited in Jones, 2003). Jones accuses the 'educational model' of demonstrating a complacency as well as an 'insularity' in this regard. She critiques and deconstructs the rejection of the medical model thus:

'In the educational context, 'ecological' thinking became implicitly polarised into an either/or assumption. This divides people into 'us' who know that behavioural problems originate within the school environment, and 'them' who falsely believe that the problems originate within the child. The schism becomes a lens through which ideas are judged as supporting a particular position...the anti-medical discourse indeed drew attention to the importance of classroom relationships and communication patterns...however it promoted the sentiment that teachers who claim that a pupil 'has' a problem ought to question their own expectations. Such sentiments deny school realities as some teachers and EPs experience them: namely that some pupils are troubled, not merely troublesome, and could benefit from help that schools and the local education authority cannot provide by mere environmental or attitudinal manipulations.'

(Jones, 2003, p.152)

And while in seeking to 'redress the rejection of the medical model', Jones claims not to advocate the 'blind acceptance of the latter', she does call for a re-thinking of educational responses to 'EBD', arguing that there is a lack of a coherent framework of responses to go alongside the opposition to the medical model.

These arguments go to the heart of how we seek to understand problematic behaviours in children and young people, and are not easily resolved. Meanwhile, legislation in the UK has been clear that the identification and management of the psychological well-being of children and young people,

rather than solely the remit of health, is now 'everybody's business' (DfEE, 2001). However, there is renewed acknowledgment that variations in terms (such as the use of 'social-emotional-behavioural difficulties' within Education, as opposed to 'conduct disorder' or 'mental health problems' within Health, to describe similar behaviours) further adds to the potential difficulties of stigma and attributions of causality. Here, the problem is located solely at an individual level rather than looking at things more systemically, and acknowledging the role of wider issues such as poverty or social and educational structures and systems (Rait et al, 2010; Thomas, 2005).

On an individual level, teachers' (and others') attitudes and attributions of causality as being located 'within-child', for example, have a significant influence on the subsequent perceptions of those children and young people who are deemed to require more specialist provision and those who are not (Burton et al, 2009; Miller 2003). In this sense, perceptions of the nature and origins of the difficult and troubling behaviours attributed to these young people can be seen to affect and influence the adult constructions and discourses which subsequently come into play.

Macleod (2006) discusses this in terms of the classifications of troubled young people as either 'bad', 'mad' or 'sad' where, respectively, 'punitive' discourses blaming individual deficits, the medicalisation of troubling behaviour which removes blame but emphasises disorder, and the effects of structural inequalities which can serve to invoke discourses of 'victimhood', are put forward as perspectives on difficult behaviour which ultimately affect the stance taken in response to the difficulties themselves (Macleod, 2006). Macleod makes a distinction between the historical polarisation between a 'punitive' as opposed to a 'welfarist' approach, the latter chiming with the interactionist model as described earlier, and which acknowledges wider social causes of troubling behaviour. Macleod argues, however, that it is necessary to go further and to also acknowledge the individual agency of these young people:

'Theoretical arguments about false consciousness aside, it is important to respond to young people who say they choose to behave in the way

they do in their terms. A young person who has made a choice to behave in a particular way has already acknowledged that an alternative course of action was available to them. There is then the starting point for a discussion about how different choices might be made in the future.'

(Macleod, 2006, p.163)

Other perspectives have also been offered which put the spotlight on the ways that perceptions of children's difficulties can be seen in the wider context. Yoeli (2009) puts forward the notion of 'childhood distress' as a way of framing the manifestation of children's difficult behaviours, positing that a child's story is often expressed through their behaviour (which immediately forms a relationship, or 'in-between'); thus he highlights the influence of the interaction and relationship between adult and child on these behaviours:.

'There are two ways to look at distress in children. The first one puts it inside the child, physiologically and/or psychologically, and sees all behaviour and disturbance as emanating from within. The second approaches the interpersonal sphere and understands manifestations of distress as anchored in the in-between...they are understood to truly engage in a learning curve, in which they observe, sense, and pick up the signals, feelings, and vulnerabilities of others. That being the case, children end up acting out (behaving) a combination of their own insecurity, other people's confusion about them, and the difficulties embedded in their interactions with others.'

(Yoeli, 2009, p. 6)

Further, Yoeli brings to attention the interplay between the adult as orchestrator and ultimate voyeur, as the behaviours which are manifested through 'distress' are played out in dramatic form:

'As the drama of distress in the child is acted out in front of us, we find ourselves captivated, enthralled and compelled to engage with it in the same way an audience is captured by the ups and downs of drama on stage. We then cease to be innocent bystanders and become involved, despite ourselves, in the events unfolding in front of our eyes. Thus, distress takes two or more to tango and can only thrive on attention, reaction, and fascination by others.'

(Yoeli, 2009, p. 15)

He sees it as a complicated dance with a great deal going on beneath the surface. Again he emphasises a relational component, pointing out that adults

in the systems around the child not only need to take responsibility (as Thomas, 2005, suggests) but that they are in fact implicit and inextricably linked to the 'distress' itself. In this sense, the complexities involved in adult relationships with, and responses to, children are highlighted.

Navigating 'Inclusion'

Notwithstanding issues of adult 'culpability', recent history gives examples of attempts to enable the needs of pupils to have more of a central focus. The policy of inclusive education, with its roots in the international and later national UK political context of the 1990's (Salamanca Statement, UNESCO 1994; *Excellence in Schools* White Paper, DfEE, 1997; *Excellence for all Children* Green Paper, DfEE, 1998), sought to recognise diversity, and had laudable ambitions to champion the rights of all children to be educated together in their local schools. However, for children defined as having behavioural difficulties, this idea of inclusion was, even then, perceived as decidedly more problematic (NASUWT, 1997, cited in Swinson et al, 2003; Swinson et al, 2003). And despite the requirement of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (DfEE, 2001) that children with a Statement of SEN attend a mainstream school unless 'incompatible with parental wishes or with the provision of efficient education for other children' (Section 324), today there remain a significant number of children for whom this has just not worked out. While the reconsidering and restructuring of curriculum organisation and provision, and allocation of resources to enhance equality of opportunity, may be seen as necessary processes as part of 'inclusive education' (Sebba and Sachdev, 1997) for some, this has not been deemed appropriate or possible. For these children, 'specialist' provision has been identified as the only appropriate place for their education – despite a lack of evidence that this affords them better or more appropriate support, or leads to greater academic or social progress than an appropriate mainstream curriculum (Gibb, et al, 2007; Swinson et al, 2003). Recent figures released in 2013, for example, reflect the fact that large numbers of pupils in alternative provision do not achieve meaningful qualifications, reporting that in the year 2011 to 2012, only 1.3% of pupils in alternative provisions achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grade A* to C, or equivalent, including English and Maths (DfE

2013). The most recent figures of GCSE achievement at grades A* to C, which include this group amongst those defined as 'disadvantaged' (alongside those looked after by the local authority or in receipt of free school meals) reveal an 'attainment gap' of 27.4 percentage points compared to all other pupils (DfE, 2014) .

For Thomas, the 'legacy of the thinking behind special education is a set of ideas which perpetuate exclusion' (Thomas, 2005, p. 73); something he sees as exposing a fallacy in terms of the responses from some schools. Thomas directs his criticism at those organisations which, 'far from being designed to think creatively about how to change for the better, think rather about how to direct their 'clients' towards some existing professional specialism', where a view is encouraged that 'specialised sets of professional knowledge exist to deal with the misbehaviour' (Thomas, 2005, p. 73).

If defining this group has shown itself to be problematic and an idea of 'inclusion' less than straightforward, what of more formalised responses? Sadly, findings have seemed to indicate a similar lack of clarity and inconsistency within government policy with respect to this group, in particular, throwing up significant ideological tensions between the 'inclusion' agenda and the 'performance' agenda, with its strong focus on targets and academic achievement (Burton et al, 2009; Wakefield, 2004).

Following the release in 2011 of school exclusion figures for 2009/10 (DfE, 2011b), which described an estimated 5,740 permanent exclusions from primary, secondary and all special schools, with rates for boys four times higher than for girls, the government minister's response made it clear where it was felt that the problem lay:

'With thousands of pupils being excluded for persistent disruption and violent or abusive behaviour we remain concerned that weak discipline remains a significant problem in too many of our schools and classrooms. Tackling poor behaviour and raising academic standards are key priorities for the Coalition Government. We will back head teachers in excluding persistently disruptive pupils, which is why we are removing barriers which limit their authority...'

(Nick Gibb MP, Schools Minister, Press Report, 2011)

The government statement reflects a standpoint which mirrors something of a 'punitive' perspective (Macleod, 2006), where 'weak discipline' and other challenges to teacher authority are blamed for poor pupil behaviour, and where the implicit message is that pupils need simply to be reminded 'who is boss' in order to behave better. What is not evident in the minister's statement, however, is any acknowledgement of wider, educational or socio-economic factors which might also be implicated, despite the fact that the statistics released that same year also showed that pupils with statements for SEN were around eight times more likely to be permanently excluded than those pupils with no SEN, and that children who were eligible for free school meals were around four times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion and three times more likely to receive a fixed period exclusion, than those not eligible (DfE, 2011b).

In addition, the potential tension for schools between the push for improved academic achievement in schools against the 'disciplinarian' agenda espoused as a key government priority, goes equally unacknowledged.

Quite apart from the compelling evidence relating to poor educational outcomes as previously discussed, students with the 'BESD' label are likely to have greater involvement in the criminal justice, mental health, welfare and public health systems than other special needs groups (Groom and Rose, 2005). In this respect, notwithstanding any of the rhetoric and debate around issues of categorisation and inclusion, that this is a group whose long-term outcomes we need to mind about, is surely not in dispute.

This section has attempted to highlight some of the complexity which exists in the area of 'BESD'; in particular, the prevalence of various categorisation and classification sub-types – which unfortunately as yet seem neither to have yielded a coherence in professional constructions of this group, nor any decrease in the numbers of pupils who are placed away from their local mainstream schools. Generalisations about this group of children which the use of terms such as 'BESD' can encourage, is seen as problematic at the very least - a 'confused collection of ideas (which) rests on an unsteady foundation' (Thomas, 2005, p. 47).

Perhaps the question of who or what is served by the use of such categorisation, needs to be posed. While it may be possible to argue that categorisation simply speaks to a human need for order in the face of complexity, the argument that some of the negative consequences of categorisation can be a stigmatising of difference to the point of social exclusion, where 'manufactured categories' can 'suddenly assume the power of timeless, universal, essentialist truth' (Billington, 2006, p.43) seems a more persuasive one.

If we accept, as Jones (2003) and others do, that language shapes both our beliefs about the nature of difficulties, and what it is possible to do about them, it is clear that professionals working in this area need to use language with others and with themselves which is not reductionist, and which reflects the possibility, the expectation, of positive change. Similarly, there is a need for open, objective scrutiny, and acknowledgement of the internal and external processes, within us and within our social systems, which can become enmeshed with the vulnerabilities of individual children, in the drama of 'challenging behaviour'. Finally, professionals need to think broadly and creatively regarding work which can support pupils with the 'BESD' label; work which allows for individual agency, and for the unique qualities, narratives and potential of these pupils to take precedence over the label (and the Stories which can follow these labels), in the way they are perceived and understood.

SCENE FOUR. MOVING BEYOND THE PROBLEM: SUPPORTING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH (HELPING) RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS IN SCHOOL

...When one holds up a lantern to light the way for another, one's own path is illuminated...

- Buddhist saying

'Qui docet discit'

'Who teaches learns'

▪ Comenius

When youth are awakened to a sense of mission, their power is limitless. Ultimately, we have to entrust our hopes and visions for the future to the youth. This is a golden rule...The fundamental spirit of a leader must be to reach out to such young people, work with them and bring out their capabilities and direct their youthful energies in a positive direction....

(Daisaku Ikeda, 1999, p. 126)

Developing effective interventions to support pupils who present with challenging behaviour has shown itself to be less than straightforward; both in terms of the 'when' as well as the 'what' of particular strategies or actions. While early screening and intervention, for example, has been considered important for later positive outcomes for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (e.g. Rushton, 1995; Cross, 2004; Ziegenhein, 2004; Tyler-Merrick and Church, 2013) this can be difficult to evaluate effectively, not least because of the disparity between what research suggests and what often actually happens in early years settings (Tyler-Merrick and Church, 2013). Tyler-Merrick and Church themselves acknowledge that questions still abound as to whether universal screening of young children for 'anti-social development' should be undertaken at all, on the grounds that they 'may do more harm than good' (Tyler-Merrick and Church, 2013, p. 84) as a result, for example, of the negative labelling of those young people that may occur as a consequence. (A further caution might also exist within cultural and political questions of who decides what can be termed 'antisocial' or 'problematic' behaviour.)

In addition, despite the aspiration that effective early identification can lead to more effective intervention and subsequent outcomes simply by virtue of being able to get in early, there would also seem to be a danger of an over-emphasis on individual factors and an assumption about what actually influences outcomes, when the complex interplay between individual characteristics and environmental factors is still far from fully understood.

Resilience In The School Context

Regardless of whether early identification has any bearing on longer term outcomes for this group, notions of risk and the push towards prediction of outcomes loom large and carry heavy currency in a social and political context where the focus is increasingly on the monetary and societal implications of these difficulties. In a child's life context, adverse or 'risk' factors are those events and circumstances that combine to threaten or challenge healthy development. On the other side, 'protective' factors are seen as those which can act as a 'buffer' to the effects of adverse experiences.

Both protective and risk factors are influential in the development of a child or young person, yet, as Dent and Cameron (2003) suggest, the traditional focus of much of the published research has been on the investigation of risk factors; on vulnerability and the likelihood of individuals to succumb to the negative outcomes in life (see for example, Bloom, 1996; Utting, 1997, both cited in Dent and Cameron, 2003).

More recently, then, risk factors have been acknowledged as not the only predictor of outcomes for children, and this has led to an increasing and more optimistic interest in protective factors and resilience - described as the 'flexibility that allows certain children and young people who appear to be at risk, to bounce back from adversity, to cope with and manage major difficulties and disadvantages in life, and even to thrive in the face of what appear to be overwhelming odds' (Dent and Cameron, 2003, p.5).

Thus, while discussions of resilience are typically framed around reference to vulnerability and protective factors, it is now recognised that it is the complex interplay of these factors over time which determines children's outcomes (NCH, 2007). This dynamic view of resilience, as a process rather than a particular character trait, further offers the idea that resilience is not simply about being able to cope with difficulties, but also about the resources available to individuals which allow for progress and positive outcomes in the face of challenging experiences.

This seems particularly pertinent for those children and young people who, by virtue of their life experiences of one kind or another, find themselves placed

and positioned within the category of 'BESD', where optimism in relation to their future possibilities and potential may be hard to come by.

While the 'resilient individual' has been described as having a sense of self-esteem and confidence, a repertoire of social problem-solving approaches, as well as a sense of self-efficacy (Rutter, 1985), research has identified other significant factors. In a seminal work, Fonagy et al (1994) outlined three categories of factors as predictors of resilience: 'within-child' factors, such as high levels of cognitive abilities, a positive self-perception and social competence; 'within-home' factors, e.g. socio-economic status of parents/carers, education levels within the family and parenting styles; and 'outside-home' factors, for example, neighbourhood and peer influences, and school aspects (Fonagy et al, 1994).. While external agencies may have limited control over 'within-home' factors, the school environment does offer the opportunity for influencing the ways that cognitive and social competence can be developed and supported, and the type and level of support which is available.

White (2011) saw school as the 'primary environment in which the majority of children must negotiate and function', and suggested that a socio-cultural approach to understanding pro-social development can be seen as helpful in the development of school-based interventions which emphasise the positive behaviours within the social context (White, 2011, p. 16). These school factors are now seen as being of significance in relation to better outcomes for vulnerable children, in particular, the influence of the school context as a 'formative living and learning environment that has the potential to exert a major influence on the personal and social (as well as academic) development of a pupil' (Dent and Cameron, 2003, p. 11).

Gilligan (1998) captured some of the complexity of this matrix of within-school experiences when she argued that school life offers vulnerable children a wide range of other opportunities to boost resilience, including through acting as a complementary secure base, providing many opportunities for developing self-esteem and self-efficacy, as well as opportunities for constructive contact with peers and supportive adults (Gilligan 1998, p.11). If,

as inferred by Gilligan (1998), we accept that school can be viewed as a 'therapeutic environment' for supporting children's emotional and other needs (Rait et al, 2010), not least because it is well-placed to recognise difficulties, to intervene in good time, and is also a place where children often have good relationships established, it is clear that for children and young people who struggle with the social and emotional aspects of functioning, much good work can be possible through utilising the social spaces for learning that schools provide.

Enabling The Social Animal

Human beings seem set up from the start of life, to interact in a social way. The central importance of social interaction on an individual's self-concept has been emphasised in early research and writing (Mead, 1934; Rogers, 1951), and was followed by the work of theorists who saw social interaction as the specific medium through which learning takes place. Vygotsky, in particular, as previously discussed, saw learning as a joint process in a responsive social context. In going further than both Piaget and Bruner, Vygotsky (1978) argued that the capacity to learn through instruction is itself a fundamental feature of human intelligence, and the development of knowledge and ability is fostered through this process when an adult helps a child to accomplish things which they are unable to do alone.

This perspective emphasises a child's potential for learning as it is revealed and realised in interactions with more knowledgeable others. Increasingly, as previously discussed, the child may be understood, rather than as passive, but as actively constructing their knowledge of the world; as an active part of its social context.

Peer support is one method which seeks to harness this 'active' participation of both parties involved in the learning process – supporter and supported.

Supporting Peers: Exploring Motivations

The use of peer support programmes in schools is thus firmly based on the Vygotskian principles that individuals are able to learn and develop through social and cultural mediation and support; but rather than adult instruction, children engage with one another.

Many would agree that children interact with other children in different ways than they do with adults. One reason for this difference may be that children are sensitive to age and competency differences between themselves and adults which cast them into a status position which is subordinate by definition (Hatch, 1987, cited in Chilokoa, 2001)). In contrast, while also inevitably involving issues of power and status, children's interactions with other children offer special opportunities for practising social skills, and for developing a wide range of interactive competencies with relative equals. As Hatch (1987) puts it, 'status is renegotiated at each encounter' in peer interaction (Hatch, 1987, p. 65, cited in Chilokoa, 2001 p. 6).

The concept of peer support also works on the assumption that children are able to be affirming of one another, and willing to come together in cooperative and supportive networks which interface with the cultural context they are in (Cowie and Sharp, 1996). Similarly, theories of child development which emphasise the sense of 'self' as something which develops from a responsiveness to the feelings and behaviours of others (Dunn, 1988, cited in Chilokoa, 2001) have also contributed to an understanding of what motivates children as helpers. Certainly, as mentioned, social interactionists and others argue that babies are born with a natural propensity for social interaction, primarily as a means of survival, and these skills are further developed in order for the baby to learn and communicate within social contexts. As Cowie and Sharp (1996) assert:

'Children learn about how to act towards others by engaging in shared activities, and the meanings which they develop arise out of their search for sense and order in a community of people working and living together.'

(Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p. 8, cited in Chilokoa, 2001, p. 12)

Ideas from evolutionary psychology and neuropsychology, which emphasise the evolutionary origins of altruistic behaviour, and argue that human beings have an in-built motivation to form cooperative, supportive relationships and to engage in actions, such as benevolence, which connect us to others (Hanson, 2012; Keltner, 2009) also have relevance here. These actions are described

by Hanson as fulfilling three fundamental needs (to avoid harms, approach rewards, and attach to others) and when these needs are met, the human brain shifts into what is termed its 'responsive' mode, in which the body repairs and refuels itself, and an individual feels peaceful, happy, and loving (Hanson, 2012).

Ground-breaking ideas of the time put forward by Darwin (1859) that emotions are selected and serve a functional purpose in the same way as physical attributes, also suggest that emotions have an evolutionary function in that they become 'protectors' of these social concerns (Keltner, 2009).

Nagel (1970) had specific ideas relating to the emotions and motivations related to altruism, the act of giving without expecting anything in return. He saw altruism not as 'abject self-sacrifice, but merely a willingness to act in consideration of the interests of other persons, without the need of ulterior motives.' (Nagel, 1970, p. 79). He wondered in fact, how such concerns should motivate us at all, and argued that there was a rational requirement (which he termed 'rational altruism') rather than just a desire to do good for others because of others' perceived need. It was thus not a simplistic equation.

Other opposing schools of thought have taken issue with the idea of the primacy of altruism, positing instead the primacy of selfishness as the overriding virtue, and 'rational self-interest' as both the guiding moral principle, and the natural, practical response for the needs of the individual (Rand, 1964). Equally, psychoanalytic theorists might suggest alternative drives, such as the resolution of complex inner feelings, as motivating the behaviours of young children and adults, (see Klein, 1959).

In some respects, for evolutionary biologists, the idea of altruism constitutes something of a puzzle, because in doing for others at a cost to oneself, one could technically write oneself out of existence (Wilson, 2015). However, in response to the argument that in evolutionary terms selfishness 'beats' altruism (e.g. Dawkins, 1976), the idea is put forward that the key to understanding altruism, rather than focusing at the individual 'organism' level, is understanding the role it plays in the social organisation of groups, and that the functionally organised group system is what is necessary to make altruism evolve (Wilson, 2015).

Meanwhile, notwithstanding these range of views, research within the domain of 'Positive Psychology' has sought to highlight the benefits to individual well-being of altruistic actions (Seligman, 2002; Seligman et al, 2005) and of the human connection that is subsequently engendered, while research from neuropsychology has suggested that compassionate intent, as demonstrated in altruistic behaviour, can impact on our physiology and activate neural circuits (Hanson, 2012).

Adding to this popular discourse, recent research published by the British 'think-tank', the New Economics Foundation (NEF), highlights the 'five ways to well-being' as involving the motivation to 'connect, be active, take notice, keep learning and give' (Aked et al. NEF, 2008). Although these suggestions might be aimed mainly at the adult population, the concept of well-being certainly transcends age, and the notion of 'learning', 'giving' and 'connecting' as providing positive benefits can be seen as very salient in the context of peer support. In addition, one of the significant features of peer support, as mentioned, is its potential to capitalise on what many would see as natural tendencies for cooperative interaction, thus peer support structures can act as mobilisers and facilitators for individual children's potential for responsible, caring, empathic behaviour. As Foot, Morgan and Shute assert:

'We are only just beginning to appreciate the richness of ways in which children might be capable of providing sources of practical assistance and emotional support as well as exerting powerful influences upon each others' cognitive and social development.'

(Foot, Morgan and Shute, 1990, p. 6, cited in Chilokoa, 2001, p. 7)

Supporting Peers Within The School Context

While for adults, helping behaviour might often take place in formal professional contexts, in the case of children, almost all help-giving tends to be informal and impromptu. This of course has its own value, but in an educational setting, this 'helping' behaviour can be further supported and facilitated by adults in a number of formalised ways.

'Peer support' may be seen as an umbrella term for activities in which young people act as assistants in the development of their peers. It covers a wide range of helping activities, including peer counselling, befriending, peer mediation and peer tutoring. The use of peer support systems within the school context may usefully be divided into two main focus areas: the development of cognitive and academic skills (sometimes referred to as 'peer tutoring'), and the sharing and development of pastoral and social skills, including the resolution of problems and conflict.

The first formalised use of peer tutoring was pioneered in the late 18th and early 19th Century by Andrew Bell (1753-1832) and Joseph Lancaster (1778-1838), who separately developed so-called 'mutual' educational approaches in which more able children were enlisted to teach other children under the direction of an adult. It has as its premise, the idea of learning as a two-way process, whereby children take responsibility for learning in a mutually supportive way. Goodlad and Hirst (1989) describe its potential thus:

'...Peer tutoring can also transform learning from a private to a social activity. By involving learners in responsibility for their own, and more importantly, other people's education, it increases social interaction within an educating situation...making the process of learning, as well as its end-product, more rewarding.'

(Goodlad and Hirst, 1989, p. 16, cited in Chilokoa, 2001, p. 8)

'Peer' can refer to both same-age and cross-age tutoring relationships between children, and describes situations where instructional assistance is provided by another, who guides and manages the efforts of a peer in mastering a task (Topping, 1987). One such example is found in paired reading, a specific structured approach involving reading to a more competent partner, where mistakes are pointed out in a clear fashion, and praise is given for reading success. In most cases, the process is planned and directed by a teacher. Although peer tutoring assumes a relationship where one child takes the role of the 'expert', while the other is the 'novice', in many ways the absence of a formal 'authority relationship' between the participants could be

seen as serving to equalise status in a way that would not be possible between adult teacher and child.

While much of the early research on the effectiveness of peer tutoring focused on academic gains and benefits to the tutees (such as extra instruction, practice and clarification, and the fact that peer tutoring seemed to represent a less stressful way of learning, particularly for those children who were self-conscious when reading to the teacher (Topping, 1987)), these also tended to relate to outcomes for 'mainstream' children. More recent research has highlighted particular benefits of peer support (and also other programmes based on developing social competences) for children within the 'BESD' population and those in alternative provision (Cooper and Jacobs, 2011; Wilhite and Bullock, 2012). Attention has also since focused on the benefits to tutors, where it is suggested that tutors can make gains at least as great as those they tutor (Foot, Morgan and Shute, 1990; Medcalf et al, 2004). While Vygotsky saw instruction as at the heart of development, these interactions can be understood as truly reciprocal, whereby the act of instruction can also offer valuable and important benefits for the instructor. These gains have been shown to be both academic – through having to systematically review for the purposes of tutoring subjects they have recently studied (Goodlad and Hirst (1989) – and (of particular interest with regard to children from the 'BESD' population) also pastoral and social. In this respect, peer tutoring is seen as enabling those who act as tutors to have the opportunity to learn how to care for other people, and to receive secondary benefits such as reciprocity from those they have helped, enhanced reputation within the social group and increased self-esteem. As Goodlad and Hirst acknowledge:

'A widely reported feature of peer tutoring is the immense personal satisfaction enjoyed by tutors, who feel that they are needed. This experience of being wanted can contribute to personal growth. Peer tutoring is, therefore, attractive as a relatively simple way in which learners of practically any age and academic competence can be given responsibility.'

(Goodlad and Hirst, 1989, p. 16, cited in Chilokoa, 2001, p. 10)

To some extent, the use of peer support challenges a major assumption of contemporary education: that adults have the monopoly on knowledge and wisdom, which has to be imparted to children as novice, inexperienced members of society. This assumption is discussed by Connolly (1990):

'The model of an adult transferring knowledge to the child in an almost passive manner has given way to a view of knowledge as a negotiated commodity and the importance of the interpersonal dimension in tutoring is widely recognised...learning [is] a communal activity in which a culture is shared and transmitted, and much of this learning is informal.'

(Connolly, 1990, p. xi, in Foot, Morgan and Shute, 1990, cited in Chilokoa, 2001, p. 6))

These ideas have resonance with Freire's notion of valuing knowledge which does not come from established, traditional and so-called 'received' sources of wisdom, and with Vygotsky's ideas of learning as a shared cultural activity. The importance of peer relationships also figures significantly within Piaget's concept of cognitive development (Piaget, 1928). Piaget highlighted what he saw as the symmetrical nature of these relationships, and felt that the presence of collaborating peers and the intellectual and social challenge they represented, provided the ideal setting for social development where peer interaction provides children with uniquely constructive feedback.

The power of the peer group in promoting positive social, emotional and behavioural outcomes has also been researched more recently (e.g. Cooper and Jacobs, 2011) and has shown, however, that things can work both ways, and that not all feedback can be constructive. It does seem clear, however, that children can develop an enhanced understanding of relationships and a willingness to be flexible, and that the peer group can be a powerful influence in reinforcing individual children's sense of worth and confidence (e.g. Sletta, Valas and Skaalvik, 1996; Cooper and Jacobs, 2011).

Returning To Notions Of 'Self', Efficacy and Relationship

As mentioned previously, the ability to form good relationships is seen as a protective factor in enhancing resilience. For pupils who particularly struggle

with relationships, peer support systems provide an opportunity to develop and practice social skills, where the focus on 'helping' may offset some of the intensity of the relationship context.

Developing narratives from neuroscience and neuropsychology have increasingly sought to highlight and offer ideas around what can be learned and enhanced through training, as a result of the neuroplasticity of the brain, and also into the workings of the brain when we are in a 'positive' state - namely increased engagement, creativity, resilience and productivity (Hanson, 2012; Action for Happiness Movement, 2010).

Equally, new understandings regarding the ongoing development of the social brain of adolescents (Blakemore, 2007) have significance in relation to early ideas put forward by Erikson (1968), who regarded adolescence as the key period for the development of personal identity and self-concept, and this could therefore be considered a useful period for the delivery of interventions which might have significant impact on young people experiencing trouble in school.

An important extra dimension which exists in the area of peer support is that of social responsibility, which can fulfil an important function in supporting perceptions of the reliability of young people, which then frequently lead to greater autonomy. Macleod (2006) somewhat sceptically notes that 'the practice of requiring that pupils 'prove' their responsibility through good behaviour and offering greater freedom as a reward is common in SEBD schools' (Macleod, 2006, p. 163).

A slightly more optimistic perspective suggests that by co-operating with others, children learn about what is considered morally right for that group and that schools have an important role to play in providing a community culture where socially responsible actions and responses can be learned within an environment where individuals, children and young people may learn the value of relationships and of social cooperation (Macready, 2009, p. 218). This also resonates with previously discussed ideas from Buddhist and 'positive psychology' perspectives which (while originating from different

contexts) assert that reaching out to others actually results in personal benefits to one's sense of self and sense of well-being.

Peer support schemes facilitate opportunities for children and young people to positively participate in their school communities, participation which emphasises self-development, self-fulfilment, self-determination and autonomy. The effects of such participatory activity hold interest for occupational theory, concerned with the meaning and purpose that people place on occupation and activities, and which is based on the understanding that as humans, we are 'occupational beings'. As such, the theory proposes that we have an inherent need and desire for a level of autonomy, to engage in occupational behaviour ('doing') and to participate in activities that occupy our time and give meaning to our lives.

In particular, the 'model of human occupation' (MOHO) within contemporary occupational therapy practice, proposes that through occupation, we gain a sense of identity, experience a sense of our own potential, learn how effective we can be, learn to be with people, and ultimately construct a potential image of who we might become in the future (Kielhofner, 2002). This has been referred to in terms of 'doing, being, and becoming' (Wilcock, 1998). Research in this field has long identified feelings of competence and self-efficacy as being important protective factors for young people, especially with regard to predicting good long-term outcomes (Bandura, 1986), and for those young people who may have experienced a great deal of failure in their school lives, feelings of competence and self-efficacy can be expected to be of particular significance.

In research by Mainwaring and Hallam (2010), for example, students attending a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) were found to be less likely than mainstream students to generate a positive 'possible self', had fewer strategic plans for attaining their positive possible selves and had no alternative options; in addition, they had more negative and 'impossible selves' (Mainwaring and Hallam, 2010).

In contrast, research by Kramer (2008) around measuring children's perceptions of their own competence in terms of things they were able to do, found that for children with disabilities, competence was supported when the

environment and activities matched their needs and abilities, needs and was able to facilitate problem-solving as a means of engaging with challenges. Competence was found not to be limited by impairment; rather children were able to gain competence through practice and problem-solving in relation to impairment-related challenges or environmental barriers. In other words, children's competence can be seen as enhanced by social environments that facilitate problem-solving and enable children to engage in activities with support (Kramer, 2008).

Carey and Martin (2007) suggest that there are key principles which need to be taken into account in seeking to develop interventions which specifically help pupils within the 'BESD' population to develop positive ideas of their 'future selves and competencies: these include helping students to develop vivid, compelling visions of their 'hoped-for possible selves' (Carey and Martin, 2007).

If, as the 'MOHO' model would suggest, 'doing' shapes who we are, and experiences shape our thinking about who we can become, it would seem to make sense to argue that by combining approaches such as 'peer support' which allow students to think more positively of themselves through the development of positive relationships based on support, with learning systems which enable positive achievement and social responsibility, the educational context can contribute greatly to better outcomes for those young people who struggle in terms of their social and emotional functioning.

**PROLOGUE TO ACT III:
LINKING IN WITH THEORY AND METHODOLOGY**

Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.

(William Bruce Cameron, 1963)

This study has thus far explored (within the review of literature) the following themes: the notion of ‘human flourishing’ and humanistic ideas of human potential; some of the narratives and discourses which prevail around ‘behavioural difficulties’, and which subsequently serve to construct the young people connected to them in less than helpful ways; the scope, purpose and role of education and educational practices in supporting a ‘flourishing’ of young people while acknowledging the influence and importance of the social and political context; and some of the critical, philosophical, and practical approaches and perspectives which might best facilitate the important aims of meaningful psychological practice and engagement with young people.

It has introduced the idea that there are different types of knowledge which can be seen to have value; and also how it might indeed be possible for professionals to address their work using their ‘whole selves’, while being prepared, if necessary, to make themselves vulnerable in the process of acknowledging their own influences and biases.

This next section will focus on the epistemological and ontological assumptions underpinning this research, and the methodological choices made therein.

ACT III – FINDING MY POSITION WITHIN THIS RESEARCH

SCENE ONE. COUNT ME IN

In the context of the research process as a whole, the overriding research question (set out below) which emerged from the study can be read as ‘how best can the researcher/practitioner explore and enable ‘human flourishing’ in work with a cohort of young people from a vulnerable population – while acknowledging and including herself in that process’. Obviously, I am that researcher, and I am relaying my own narrative of my experience of research. Although the inclusion of the first person, and the use within academic papers of ‘first person accounts’ which focus strongly on the perspective of the researcher, have historically carried with them some controversy (see Ribbens, 1993; Wall, 2006), there is increasingly, within ‘post-modern’ research practice, an acceptance of this style of writing within narrative and autoethnographic research. This acceptance comes with the argument that autoethnography brings the reader closer to the experience of the writer (Gergen and Gergen, 1986) and allows for writing in a highly personalised style, which draws on one’s own experience to extend understanding about a phenomena (Wall, 2006, p. 146).

Although the reader will not know me personally, they will also gain insight into who I am, and on my perspectives in relation to my research focus, through the texts I create and choose to include, and the style in which I express what I want to be known (or indeed, not known).

Social, cultural and political contexts set up particular ways of being and doing – both within professional practice and within research. Parker (1994) suggests that just as Capitalist Western society emphasises and creates a separation of the individual from their resources, so research can serve to separate individuals either from their social or cultural contexts (their ‘embeddedness’) or their voice. During this research process, ultimately part

of the aim was to try and resist this 'separating', for myself and for my participants, by keeping these personal, social and cultural contexts in the foreground, rather than consigned to the background. Equally, just as Freire, 1970, 1994, 1998) posited that education is not a neutral system of practice, so research can be understood as consciously and unconsciously reflecting a range of contextual influences which need to be acknowledged if the research is to have integrity.

In terms of the 'self', Parker takes a critical stance towards the use of self and reflexivity in research, calling for an understanding of the 'self' as constructed and crystallised from historical and institutional structures (Parker, 1994, p. 29). Simply using the 'first person' to imply a degree of insight is not enough; Parker encourages me to consider - notwithstanding my hard-fought sense of my own personal agency - the things that lead me to think as I do, and how my individual subjectivity has come to be, through institutional relationships, and how my way of doing things may have been influenced by certain practices which have become privileged over others (Parker, 2005).

It is therefore clear that using 'self' in research should not just be for its own sake (which would rightly justify criticisms of self-indulgence - see Coffey, 1999 and Delamont, 2007), but be clear of its purpose and also its limitations in terms of what it reveals and does not allow to be revealed (Delamont, 2007). Again, a degree of criticality is required; thus, I have used autoethnography as a methodological vehicle for this study to 'reflexively and critically investigate and reveal my own conditions as a researcher and practitioner' (McIlveen, 2007, p. 299) in order to explore and interrogate the notion of personal self, history and experience within professional practice and research. Layered onto this, I have used narrative as a means of making the link between the way that lived experience becomes storied in its unfolding, 'the narrative account as exemplifying...dialogical self at work: I multiply positioned, reflexively bringing that theory to a life, and moreover, to a practice of the profession' (McIlveen, 2007, p. 306).

SCENE TWO. SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

As part of the central message and purpose of this research, I have sought to bring to the forefront an acknowledgement of the history (personal and professional) that brought me to the point of research in the first place, as well as the world view that has informed my professional thinking and actions. As Crotty (1998) points out, the research journey of inquiry into human experience:

'...arises out of an awareness on our part that, at every point in our research – in our observing, our interpreting, our reporting and everything else we do as researchers – we inject a host of assumptions. These are assumptions about human knowledge and assumptions shape for us the meaning of research questions, the purposiveness of research methodologies, and the interpretability of research findings...'

(Crotty, 1998, p. 16)

These have to be unpacked and examined in order that we can be clear about the nature of the research and what it is trying to say. The research question seeks to identify a process or entity that I as the researcher am hoping to investigate, pointing me in a direction without predicting what I may find (Willig, 2001, p. 19). In my case, I am seeking to get closer to my experience of the research itself, and it is clear that the research question also has to reflect what, in relation to my subsequently chosen methodology - and through this, my ontological and epistemological standpoint - it is congruent to ask (Willig, 2001) and indeed, possible to know.

Engaging With The Emerging Research Questions

My initial research question started as a nagging 'fuzzy' embryonic thought, which became more persistent as the research process unfolded, taking on many different forms as I sought to become clearer about what I was actually doing, and what experience I was trying to get closer to. It finally emerged - like an infant after several months of necessary gestation - as the following:

What have I learned in the process of trying to be an educational psychologist doing research with young people (which has value and meaning for both)?

While this became the overriding focus for the study, a subsidiary question was also relevant, relating more specifically to my original focus involving the peer support work with my research participants:

What have I learned from the process of developing a peer support project, in relation to the engagement and development of my research participants?

The subsidiary research question was positioned to help me connect and re-engage with some of the initial thoughts and aspirations that I had in relation to the study.

And while, within the primary research question, the aspects relating to ‘value and meaning’ are in brackets, these aspects are actually the heart of the matter. While seemingly broad in its scope, this question prompts other more specific questions relating to what knowledge (professional, personal, or even intuitive) enables practice which can both make a difference to lives, and result in practice which stays true to a sense of professional values and personal authenticity. It also ponders what this might mean for how we engage with the lives and views of the young people that we work with. But how to capture this: both what I have learned, and what can be seen as being of value. Cue research methodology.

Constructing A Methodology

I realised that in this research study, I was constructing something, charting a journey, describing a contextualised experience. Through the research question, rather than heralding a destination, I was highlighting and seeking to explore a complex process of learning, and it was clear that I would not easily be able to signal a neat resolution or a conclusive ‘result’ or end-point.

My choice of methodology therefore, informed by the aims of the research question, had a particular remit: to enable and represent an exploration of a lived experience of a research process (mine) undertaken at key points with others (my research participants in the ‘BESD’ provision).

To capture the scope of my study, I ultimately used what I will call a 'hybrid-methodology', which borrowed from a number of traditions to serve particular functions with regard to what I was interested in exploring.

Therefore, the use of an overarching narrative methodology enabled me to present the journey of my research over time, through the experiences within (and surrounding) the research process. It helped me to illuminate the 'social and theoretical contexts in which I positioned my inquiry' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 124), and also helped me understand how my professional and research knowledge could be 'narratively composed, embodied in a person and expressed in practice' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 124). This was experienced through a research journey of discovery and change, in my learning of how to 'do' professional practice.

Layered onto this, autoethnography (which might equally be termed 'reflexive-ethnography' or 'personal narrative' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000) is adopted as part of the narrative 'telling', where in parts, my experience as researcher is able to be described from an 'insider' perspective.

This required me to use as part of my 'source material', my own personal context (philosophical, social and cultural) - memories, musings, reflections, journal entries - and to expose my spiritual heart. This then helped to lend an additional 'phenomenological' flavour; in my trying to get close to the experience and nature of the learning I did in the process of the research. By implication, this necessarily leads to a highly subjective account, but perhaps as has been suggested, as a researcher, I can do no more than describe my personal experiences (Neuman, 1994, p. 74, cited in Wall, 2006, p. 147).

Having said this, my own 'subjectivity' in the context of this study can also be viewed in relational terms, where an idea of 'self' assumes and acknowledges the ever-present social, cultural, political – and therefore relational – context of that individual subjectivity. In this respect, the 'intersubjectivity' of 'self' can also be recognised; the 'self as relationship' where we understand ourselves 'as participants in a process...' (Gergen, 1999, p. 94-95).

It feels clear to me that no other approach to methodology would have allowed for exploration and understanding in this way. Neither did I want a methodology which would 'overtake' the experience by being too highly

structured or interpretive; I required something which could allow the experience to unfold in a way which was not artificial, but stayed faithful to the way that the life was lived.

Finally, a level of critical analysis allowed for a viewing of mine and my participants' perspectives, discourse and action, as significant in their 'embeddedness' within specific cultural, social and political contexts (Parker, 2005), acknowledging that not only do different perspectives or positions generate different insights, but also that the different ways of doing research can impact on what is experienced and ultimately uncovered.

A 'Nod' To Matters Epistemological, Ontological and Theoretical

This section, if nothing else, reflects something of the complexity of the world of knowing and being, and the ways this was manifested within the research positions espoused within this research.

As might be expected from the subjective focus on experience just highlighted, this research is informed by a largely ontologically 'relativist' view of the world as holding 'truths' that are not absolute, but rather which have relative, subjective value according to the perception and perspective of the individual. **Strictly speaking**, for relativism, there is no existence of a world outside a mind (Crotty, 1998).

Much of the critique of positivism has questioned both the apparent compulsion to apply theories of the natural sciences to human problems (see for example, Polkinghorne, 1988; Yoeli, 2009) and the assumption of a direct, uncomplicated relationship between what is observed or measured and an idea of 'truth' (Parker, 2005).

As we know, 'positivism' suggests that there is a straightforward relationship between what is in the world and our perception or understanding of it (Willig, 2001); that it is possible to describe what is 'out there' and for this to be an objective truth. Further to this, a positivist epistemology holds that the primary goal of research is the production of objective knowledge (Willig, 2001). This is an ontologically 'realist' perspective which contrasts with an idea, now generally accepted, that 'observation and description are necessarily selective, and that our perception and understanding of the world is therefore partial at best (Willig, 2001, p. 3). While it is not necessary to go any further into a cri-

tique of positivism here, it is perhaps suffice to say that such critique opens the way for considering methodologies which seek to acknowledge the relationship between objects and our representations of them. For example, as Parker (1994) attests, while 'quantification all too often fuels the fantasy of prediction and control', qualitative research 'takes as its starting point an awareness of the gap between an object of study and the way we represent it, and the way interpretation necessarily comes to fill that gap' (Parker, 1994 , p. 3). Similarly, Polkinghorne (1988) writes of how, in the world of meaning, boundaries will inevitably blur and overlap.

Ontologically speaking, therefore, this research comes largely from an understanding that there exists only subjective interpretations of truth. While ontology relates to a philosophical stance about the nature of 'being' and the structure of reality, it sits alongside this research's epistemological assumptions about the nature of knowledge as subjectivist/constructionist - and both these philosophical standpoints serve to inform the theoretical perspective of the research, for 'each theoretical perspective embodies a certain way of understanding *what is* (ontology) as well as a certain way of understanding *what it means to know* (epistemology)' (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). As such, this research embodies an interpretivist theoretical perspective, embodying the assumption that there is no objective, measurable truth with regard to knowledge but one constructed from our subjective meanings about the world - with the idea that the 'world of meaning becomes such only when meaning-making beings make sense of it' (Crotty, 1998, p. 10).

At this point, it is useful to highlight one key element within this research thesis which might appear to contradict this, or certainly, a social constructionist position: the idea of 'innate potential' as part of the 'core' of an individual which is inherent from the start, as opposed to something purely produced through social discourse. The idea of inherent potential may be thought of in terms of a spiritual or a 'humanistic' point of understanding, and if one chooses to believe in the spiritual, or in humanism, is an acceptable assumption. However, this perspective may itself be viewed as a construction – but no less 'real' for that – and one which is also still consistent with an idea

of 'multiple selves' constructed through interactions and discursive practices. Reality, after all, can be seen as shaped by social, cultural, political and other (spiritual, philosophical) values, and by changing or shifting these values, reality is also subject to change. In this sense, knowledge can be seen as affected by the way concepts and experiences are viewed through a prism of societal, political, or in this case, spiritual or philosophical values. With regard to a political or societal 'prism', an acknowledgement of the way that particular socially, culturally or historically-based practices or perspectives may serve to oppress, disadvantage or marginalise particular groups is certainly of importance to the aims of this study. In this regard, this research is interested in exploring ways of viewing the world which serve to open up the possibilities for these potentially marginalised groups.

Knowledge within this research was created through the learning (of both researcher and participant), therefore, attempts to capture and explore this 'knowledge' had to accommodate and privilege the construction of individuals' subjective interpretations of their own 'knowledges' and 'truths'. Hollway (1994) highlights the fact that, as with all research, the methods adopted will affect the knowledge that is produced (see also Parker 2005; Willig, 2001); specifically, for example, it would not be possible to explore experience narratively and seek to generate generaliseable themes. Similarly, autoethnography, which privileges the reflexive voice, starts with the personal life, paying attention to thoughts, feelings and emotions, and functions in direct opposition to a stance which emphasises a 'world of generaliseable abstractions' leading to 'limited knowledge'; a world which 'simplifies, categorises, slices and dices experience' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 130). This perspective, described as part of a post-modernist 'turn' towards narrative (Riessman, 2000; Andrews et al, 2004) emphasises many ways of knowing, where no one way should be privileged. In this sense, as Wall (2006) puts it, 'the goal of post-modernism is not to eliminate the traditional scientific method, but to question its dominance and to demonstrate that it is possible to gain and share knowledge in many ways' (Wall. 2006, p. 147). Therefore, understanding that an epistemological position sets out what we may think it is possible to know, led to central questions of how and what nar-

rative can help me to know in this research process, but also, how can it help me to best capture, reflect and represent my research experience.

SCENE THREE. NARRATIVELY STRUCTURING THE RESEARCH SPACE

Without histories, people disappear...

(Barbara Taylor, from 'The Last Asylum', final extract from five-part serialisation, BBC Radio 4, February 2014)

Exploring Experience Through Narrative Means

Narrative research begins from the premise that life is storied, and meanings in life are structured and created through story (Riessman, 2008; Ricoeur, 1984). This opens the way for modes of inquiry which place the exploration of narrative meaning at their centre.

Narrative inquiry starts with experience as lived and told in stories, as opposed to starting from theory (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), and encompasses a broad range of research activity, including aspects which link strongly to phenomenology which, in seeking to describe and analyse the 'life-world of individuals' (Quicke, 2000), is essentially the study of the way we experience phenomena (the world) from a subjective perspective, and the meanings we make of that experience.

Narrative meanings can be viewed as at once 'modern and post-modern', challenging the dualism between individual and societal social context, where 'the 'self' 'can be located as a psychosocial phenomenon, and subjectivities seen as discursively constructed yet still as active and effective' (Andrews et al, 2004, p. 1). Specifically, one of the results of the 'turn' towards post-modernist thinking was this burgeoning recognition that 'the forms in which experience is encoded, accounted for and represented help constitute that experience' (Andrews et al, 2004, p. 5) emphasising what was formerly taken for granted, namely the way that 'representations construct and form part of realities' (Andrews et al, 2004, p. 5).

There is an acknowledgement that we can become shaped by the scholarly discourses which prevail around us (Ellis and Bochner, 2000), and the use of the passive voice as the standard, as within traditional scientific and positivist research, has been highlighted as having the effect of erasing subjectivity and personal accountability (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Rather than seeking to provide an objective description of happenings in the world with ourselves as researchers positioned outside of these happenings, narrative analysis 'takes as its object of investigation the story itself' (Riessman, 1993, p. 1), and this includes the researcher as narrator. Narrative inquiry incorporates ethnographic and, as mentioned, phenomenological features, but specifically, it acknowledges (up close and personal) the subjectivity of the researcher.

In the context of research, narrative inquiry has begun to take up prominence, 'as realist assumptions from natural science methods prove limiting for understanding social life' and people increasingly turn to narrative as the 'organising principle for human action' (Riessman, 1993, p. 1). Riessman points out that storytelling is part of the practice of the research process, what we do with the research materials, and what our respondents do with us. In this respect, she asserts that 'interpretation is inevitable because narratives are representations' (Riessman, 1993, p. 2).

Just as we understand that individuals construct identities through storytelling (Parker, 2005; Riessman, 1993, 2008), narrative inquiry looks at how narrative, its performance and context, are intertwined (Wells, 2011, p. 8). It is interested in the question of how identities are constructed but also how they can be questioned (Parker, 2005). Parker sees narrative as the 'performance of oneself as a story of identity' (Parker, 2005, p. 71). These identities are seen as fluid, and narratives are understood as existing not in isolation, but as deriving from particular cultural locus 'without reference to which, they cannot be understood (Denzin, 1989, p. 73, cited in Andrews et al, 2004, p. 3).

Narrative analysts interrogate and are interested in the specifics of intention and language, for example:

'...how and why incidents are storied, not simply the content to which language refers. For whom was this story constructed, and for what purpose? Why is the succession of events configured that way? What cultural resources does the story draw on, or take for granted? What storehouse of plots does it call up? What does the story accomplish? Are there gaps and inconsistencies that might suggest preferred, alternative or counter-narratives.'

(Riessman, 2008, p. 11).

Narrative analysis can be concerned with aspects of discourse, content, structure, or interactional context, and there can often be a blurring of lines between some of the different forms of analysis (Wells, 2011).

This research study has been given a very deliberate narrative structure, and with regard to analysis, is concerned with narrative in a particular way - and this is because it tells the story of an experience. This telling of an experience can also be understood not as *the* story, but as *my* story; written with a particular purpose, coming from a particular socio-cultural context, complete with gaps and inconsistencies which reflect the untidy nature of life and subjective experience.

Understanding research narratively requires thinking about the experience in terms of the 'three-dimensional inquiry space' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000): that is, along temporal and personal-social dimensions, producing a representation that is able to look forward, backward, inward, outward and which situates the experience within place (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). As implied previously, these representations also need to be understood not as representing objective facts and events occurring across time that they may appear to be, but rather as 'fictions, creative means of exploring and describing realities (Andrews et al, 2004, p. 7). Indeed, narratives are frequently contradictory and fragmented, precisely because they are borne out of our social, cultural and perhaps unconscious imperatives (Andrews et al, 2004). And as we select particular parts of the past we conjure up, we sculpt a 'narrative identity' (Widdershoven, 1993, p.7, cited in Andrews et al, 2004, p. 77) for ourselves which 'gives a congruence to past, present and future selves' (Andrews et al, 2004, p. 77).

This links to questions of 'validity, which may be viewed from a number of perspectives, one's approach to which, according to Riessman (2008)

depends on one's epistemological or political commitments. Rather than 'validity', the concept of the 'truthfulness' of the narrator has been suggested as more meaningful. And further to this, drawing on Hammersley's (1992) framework, Wells (2011) puts forward 'trustworthiness' as a broader term in which validity may be considered. Wells suggests that the significant standards against which things should be judged are truth (validity) and relevance (use), the former relating to whether the narrative can be seen as representing the features of the phenomenon it is intending to describe and the latter, to whether the topic can be seen to be important and as making a contribution to knowledge (Wells, 2011). Wells also sees reflexivity as central to an assessment of the extent to which a narrative can be seen as trustworthy, for example, whether others can depend on the claims made by the investigator, referring to the ways in which an investigator's personal and historical context shape their engagement with the study. This attitude towards the influence of the personal context contrasts with the perception of this as 'bias' within the positivist tradition; here, this 'shaping' is seen as inevitable and, as pointed out by Wells (2011) 'the central question is not how to control for 'investigator bias' but rather how the investigator can use knowledge of him or herself to enhance understanding of the phenomena under study' (Wells, 2011, p. 119).

The methodological perspective of the study was based on the assumption that all knowledge is necessarily contextual, and depends on the standpoint of those concerned (Willig, 2001, p. 145). This involved a viewing of mine and my participants' discourse and action as being within specific cultural, social and political contexts, and acknowledges that different perspectives generate different insights (into the same phenomena); rather than accuracy of representations, 'completeness' is what is aimed for (Willig, 2001, p. 146). Here, reflexivity is the criteria which is called for in terms of evaluation, in order that the accounts (both mine and participants) can explicitly be seen to be grounded in the personal, social and cultural contexts in which they were produced.

In effect, this thesis constitutes a 'constructed' experience involving the specific selection of literature and theory which hold subjective significance for

me as researcher and have been chosen because they fit into my own sense of what feels important in relation to the research. I further select particular elements upon which to turn a reflexive narrative gaze in order to offer reflective interpretations of the experience of research as I look back in retrospect. These reflective, reflexive offerings, some of which also constitute 'data', will be represented through extracts from journal entries, stories, remembrances and reflections on processes undertaken at key parts of the research process.

As part of the process of analysis, I also experiment with imagined communication to my participants in letter-form, as a means of enacting and representing my personal reflections on the process of interviewing that was undertaken as part of the research.

Autoethnography And Reflexivity: Writing The Self

In this study, I have used autoethnography as a method, to represent specific aspects of myself and my experience within this study. Autoethnographic writing has been described as highly personalised accounts (Holt, 2003) which offer 'a way of giving voice to personal experience to advance sociological understanding' (Wall, 2013, p. 277). As well as offering a unique vantage point and vehicle for exploring some of the personal questions relating to the choices we make in the lives we lead, Wall points out that this type of writing gives rise to some complexity, and certainly a level of vulnerability (Wall, 2013). In particular, autoethnography highlights issues and tensions with regard to representation of oneself, and the lack of control over how what one writes of oneself or one's life is subsequently interpreted by the reader.

While some consider autoethnography to be synonymous with what might be called personal or reflexive narrative, reflexive ethnography, or autobiographical ethnography among a range of other terms and forms (Ellis and Bochner, 2000), others distinguish particular features of autoethnography as unique to its own craft, and further, seek to emphasise its analytical value (Anderson, 2013) or to explicitly link concepts from the literature to the personal experience as narrated (Sparkes, 1996; Holt, 2003; Wall, 2013).

The term 'autoethnography' is described as an autobiographical genre of writing connecting the personal to the cultural (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 133); a means of telling stories which invites connection rather than (or perhaps as well as – see Anderson, 2013) analysis (Wall, 2013). Autoethnography may vary in its emphasis on 'auto-' (self), '-ethno-' (culture) and '-graphy' (the research process) (Reed-Danahay, 2007, cited in Wall, 2013, p. 278), but in all cases, the 'self' is placed and written about within a social and cultural context which has meaning and significance for the researcher. Autoethnography extends this role through its analytical focus, and can be described as a way to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Although still not common in psychological research, it is nevertheless seen as offering 'considerable promise as a vehicle for sharing practices that are grounded in theory and the unique framework of an individual practitioner' (McIlveen, 2007, p. 307-308). And as a vehicle for supporting what might be termed in relation to my study 'authentic' practice, it 'offers practitioners a means of contributing to theory and practice while remaining genuine to their individual self and practice contexts' (McIlveen, 2007, p. 308).

In 'doing' autoethnography, researchers 'retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity (Ellis et al, 2011, p. 3). While the use of the self as the primary data source has received criticism, in challenging 'accepted views about silent authorship' (Holt, 2003, p. 19), commentators have sought to emphasise the imperative of looking at personal experience analytically. This has included an expression of the need to counter discomfiture about where autoethnography may fit in relation to traditional qualitative inquiry and the criteria used to judge that inquiry (Holt, 2003) and to deal with the validity, reliability and legitimation of autoethnography within the dominant research culture (Wall, 2013, p 280). There has also been an emphasis on using theoretical and methodological expertise in order to not just be telling any story, which could not justify being privileged over any other, but to instead contribute to a larger project:

'Autoethnographers must not only use their methodological tools and research literature to analyze experience, but also must consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies; they must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders.'

(Ellis et al, 2011, p. 3)

This links to an understanding of autoethnography as being able to contribute to socially transformative agendas (Sikes, 2013) through connecting the researcher's autobiographical storied experience to wider cultural, political and social meanings and understandings (Ellis and Bochner, 2000) while also having a moral and ethical imperative (Spry, 2011).

Within the postmodernist research context, it is clear that autoethnography as a method, privileges and allows different ways of knowing, and challenges rigid assumptions from (White, middle-class and male oriented) academia of what constitutes meaningful and useful research, by 'expanding and opening up a wider lens on the world' (Ellis et al, 2011, p. 2)

In my study, from my perspective as a woman of colour from a working-class background, I used autoethnography as a form of personal narrative in order to be able to explore (and represent) more fully, from the inside, as well as what is presented on the outside, the detail of this research experience, and how it singularly pertains to my own life experience.

As discussed, personal narratives not only describe experience but give shape to them, and the relationship between living and telling is a dynamic one (Andrews et al, 2004, p. 77). Similarly, the relationship between the self and the narrative is also dynamic; '...the self is a story which is forever being re-written' (Bruner, 1994, p.53 quoted in Andrews, 2004, p.78) in that we become who we are through telling stories of our lives, and living the stories we tell (Andrews, 2004, p. 78). And as McAdams (1993) asserts:

'If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know myself, to gain insight into the meaning of my own life, then I too must come to know my own story.'

(McAdams, 1993, p. 11, quoted in Langdridge, 2007, p. 130)

Within my research, the reader can come to know me through my story and the texts and literature I choose to represent myself and my story – and I begin to further know myself through the process of that selection and exploration.

Richardson (2013) describes writing as a method of inquiry' whereby:

'..Writing is also a way of 'knowing' – a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable.'

(Richardson, 2013, p. 173)

Autoethnography is interested in what people do and know, and how they describe their worlds; an ethnographer as someone who 'observes and participates actively, consciously, mindfully – attempting to probe and interpret deeper meanings of human experience' (Poulos, 2012, p. 324). For Poulos (2012), the 'call of the ethnographer is 'to look deeply, to search for pattern and meaning and significance and story...'' (Poulos, 2012, p. 331).

Significantly, he turns this 'conscious, probing' gaze onto himself, using autoethnographical writing to illuminate, through a series of passages, the deeper meanings and interpretations within his own life, and to show how significant moments of crisis and discomfort can form the 'rupture' which in fact becomes the catalyst for deeper self-knowing, awareness of greater possibilities and ultimately of spiritual growth (Poulos, 2012). As I do, Poulos constructs a narrative of his experiences using his autoethnographic account, and the links between the two forms are highlighted within Bruner's description of 'autobiography' (which shares many of the same features of autoethnography) as 'an account of what one thinks one did in what settings in what ways for what felt reasons' (Bruner, 1990, p. 119). In this sense, the form used is as revealing as its content or substance. Bruner writes of autobiography as an account given by a narrator:

'...in the here and now about events and a protagonist bearing his name, who existed in the there and then, with the story terminating in the present when the protagonist fuses with the narrator...The Self as narrator not only recounts but justifies. And the Self as protagonist is always looking to the future.'

(Bruner, 1990, p. 121)

Bruner highlights 'the Self as a storyteller, which includes a 'delineation of Self as part of the story' (Bruner, 1990, p. 111). Further, he highlights the complex relationship between the 'self' and the telling or revealing of the 'self', referring to Schafer's idea of how a story can become enclosed within another story – 'doubly narrative' (Bruner, 1990, p. 113) – in the telling of stories about ourselves, to ourselves as well as to others:

'This is the story that there is a self to tell something to, a someone else serving as audience who is one-self or one's self. When we say for example 'I am not master of myself,' we are again enclosing one story within another. On this view, the self is a telling. From time to time and from person to person this telling varies in the degree to which it is unified, stable, and acceptable to informed observers as reliable and valid. '

(Schafer, 1981, quoted in Bruner, 1990, p. 113)

In this respect, it can be seen that autoethnography acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality and the researcher's influence on the research (Ellis et al, 2011, p. 2), and the concept of what has been termed 'analytic reflexivity' (Anderson, 2013) is of relevance here.

As is clear, the use of reflexivity through autobiographical or autoethnographic writing seeks explicitly to bring the personal wholly into the research process - something which is hard to deny when both researcher and researched are 'living, experiencing human beings' (Shaw, 2010, p. 233).

If a primary role of the qualitative researcher is to engage with people's stories; their language and their experience, and to try and make sense of these stories in a meaningful way (Shaw, 2010), then to do this reflexively is to add oneself to the story of the research, and to be prepared to engage in one's own experience as part of the experience of the people one is researching with.

As Shaw points out, using reflexivity as a research process also allows for an acceptance and acknowledgement of 'the messiness of human relationships, history, and culture from which it simply cannot escape. Hence, reflexivity offers a 'mechanism for identifying and managing issues arising from the

fusion of horizons we encounter as people researching people' (Shaw, 2010, p. 240).

As discussed previously, rather than seeing the researcher perspective as a potential 'contaminant' within the research environment, interpretivist research, focuses on the 'intersubjective realm; that is, what happens in the interactions between us and our world, the context in which we come into contact with objects (reality) and the way in which our descriptions (representations) of them are bound by time and place' (Shaw, 2011, p. 234). In this sense, reality is fluid, and the relationship between the world and those who live in that world is not separate.

In seeking to define 'reflexivity', Shaw cites Woolgar's (1988) idea of a continuum ranging from 'benign introspection' or reflection through to 'radical constitutive reflexivity': at one end, we have an idea which maintains a positivist distinction between object and representation, with the aim of providing an accurate presentation of accounts, believing that this is achievable, while at the other end, we have the 'post-modern' assumption that reality is constructed contemporaneously, where no account, whether researcher's or participants, should be valued over another. In this context, while reflection aims to achieve the positivist goal of 'accuracy', reflexivity is described as 'an explicit evaluation of the self' where one looks again, reflects one's thinking back to the self, and involves a process of 'turning the gaze to the self'(Shaw, 2010, p. 234). As Shaw states it, this represents 'an interpretivist ontology which construes people and the world as interrelated and engaged in a dialogic relationship that constructs (multiple versions of) reality' (Shaw, 2010, p. 234).

For us as social beings, reflexivity honours the need to understand our experiences (and the way we make sense of our experiences) within the context in which they happen; acknowledging, as Bruner (1990) postulates, meaning and meaning making, as at the centre of our human psychology. This relates well to Finlay's (2003) framing of reflexivity in terms of hermeneutic reflection. This emphasizes proactive self-reflection, and the way that new experiences and encounters affect our 'fore-understandings':

reflexive research as involving ‘continually reflecting upon our interpretations of both our experience and the phenomena being studied so as to move beyond the partiality of our previous understandings and our investment in particular research outcomes (Finlay, 2003, cited in Shaw, 2010, p. 240). Within this study, a key element was my own looking back (and ‘proactively self-reflecting’) on previous understandings, and layering these onto new interpretations of my experience, as part of the life-learning through this research journey.

PROLOGUE TO ACT IV ‘TURNING INWARD, WATCHING OUTWARD’

The following two sections, Acts Four and Five, will recount the ‘outward’ actions and events which took place as part of the method, and subsequent analysis, of this research project, and also give an account of my inner experience as I struggled in my search for meaning during the journey of the research process.

Act Four will, as well as presenting the steps taken, spend some time on considerations of the methods and research processes used. The length of the section (and the introductory section to Act Five) reflects the thinking and consternation that was involved prior to ultimately navigating the tricky terrain of the analysis and interpretation of my data.

These reflections on my experience of the experience ‘help maintain a sense of moving in and out of the experience’ (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 87) during the process of the research.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note that for practitioners in any field, this can help to ‘maintain an educative sense of critique and growth’ about experience through reflecting on it (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 87). Thus this section will seek to capture both some of my shifting professional

perspectives as well as the personal development which was resulting from these shifts and the tensions this necessarily created; I am both ‘turning inward and watching outward’ (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 86).

In Act Five, part of the analysis undertaken will include reflections on tensions between aspects of my professional life, and my experience of being a new researcher, and this will be explored using historical research journal entries. Analysis in the rest of the section will be undertaken through consideration of original reflections on the peer support training sessions written at the time, and finally, using imagined letters as responses to the transcripts of the research interviews conducted with three participants.

Hollway (1994) also acknowledges the circular relationship between methodology and theory, and how the method adopted affects the knowledge produced. The ‘knowledge’ derived from this study ultimately reflects the fact that my method involved talking and interacting with others (my participants) in the group sessions and during interview, as well as talking (reflecting) with myself.

A ‘narrative’ approach will continue to structure and inform the thesis, as we move into ‘inquiry’, utilising in particular, Clandinin and Connelly (2000)’s idea of the ‘three-dimensional inquiry space, where the temporal, spatial and personal/social facets of the study (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) are made explicit.

As in Acts One, Two and Three, each scene will offer a window into various parts of the research process and the ideas and preoccupations underpinning it – theoretical and personal.

ACT IV – DOING, LEARNING AND BECOMING: REFLEXIVE REFLECTIONS ON METHODS AND ACTION

'Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better

- Samuel Beckett (from 'Westward Ho')

*The creation of the world did not take place once and for all time, but
takes place every day...*

- Samuel Beckett (from 'Proust')

SCENE ONE. BACKGROUND AND METHOD OF THE STUDY

School Context

The study was based in a specialist 'BESD' setting for pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs (where the 'primary need' had been identified as 'social, emotional and behavioural' in nature) and for which I was the educational psychologist (EP).

As the EP for the setting, I was involved, at the beginning of each term, in discussing with the settings their priorities in terms of EP involvement; the germ of the idea for the study came about through a conversation with the Centre manager during one such planning meeting. The school, while principally a Key Stage 2 provision for primary school-aged pupils, had, it transpired, evolved over recent years, a small Key Stage 3 cohort of pupils, all boys, whose needs it had been felt at their Year 6 Annual Reviews, did not quite fit the profile of those who would subsequently go on to transfer to the 'BESD' high school setting. It was felt, for example, that these pupils' needs were more 'social and emotional' rather than purely 'behavioural' (if such a distinction can usefully be made) in origin, and while I had not been involved in any of these placement decisions, it had been described to me that the needs of this group required something different from that which was currently on offer within the BESD high school provision.

The school were interested in ideas for working with this Key Stage 3 cohort which could support their emotional and social needs, and ultimately impact positively on their behaviour in school. For some of these boys, the hope was that they could eventually be transferred back into a mainstream setting, but all were continuing to struggle with various aspects of school life, particularly peer-group relationships, with managing their emotional responses and with conforming to behavioural expectations within school. My sense at the time was that the school were looking for something that might support more positive outcomes for this group of boys; a group that they felt, with a bit of luck, had the potential to do much better than they were currently demonstrating. The fact was also, that there was not much else on offer for these pupils in terms of appropriate alternative provision.

Having previously worked with students in mainstream settings on peer support programmes, the idea of using 'peer support' with children who struggled with aspects of their social and emotional lives, with potentially the same benefits for both supporter and supported that have been identified in mainstream cohorts, held much promise. Following my initial conversations with the school, I went away to think about how a peer support programme could be adapted and used within this setting, before returning with, effectively, a research proposal which I hoped that the school would also think promising. Happily, they engaged whole-heartedly with the idea, quickly assigning a member of staff, who had a 'Learning Mentor' role in school, as the school 'link', who would support the project.

While initially, the idea had been the use of 'peer support' in a general sense in school, including the boys possibly offering support around behavioural and pastoral issues, after discussion it was decided that the best starting point for the pupils would be involvement in a concrete task with clear parameters, and something which would be relatively easy to deliver training around. Thus, the project ultimately focused on peer reading support, as something which would be relatively easy for the school to administer, and which could be easily matched for, in terms of supporter and supported.

The original study took place over three school terms, and involved working, initially, with a group of five boys (Ryan, Cain, Kyle, Liam and Brandon) on 'social skills' training which would support and facilitate later work as peer supporters. The peer support work was to involve the boys listening to, and supporting the reading of a selected peer, on a twice-weekly basis as part of a planned schedule over a school term, to be organised by school.

Selection Of Participants

The selection of the pupil participants was left to the school, who duly identified five Year 8 pupils from the Key Stage 3 group. The pupils, all boys as mentioned, were those the school felt would both benefit from the role, in terms of developing their confidence and self-esteem, and be ready and able to manage working in a group with others, and to respond to the task in hand.

In the first instance, the boys were spoken to individually by Bea, the school Learning Mentor, and asked if they would be interested in being part of the project. They were given a booklet (see Appendix 1) which I had developed to provide information about being a peer supporter, and what would be involved in the project.

All five expressed an interest in being involved - although school were aware that one pupil, Liam, was slightly unsure about some aspects, and while it was decided to proceed, it was kept in mind that Liam might struggle with some aspects of the group.

Once agreement from pupils had been secured at this first stage, an information letter for parents (see Appendix 2) was sent home, and parental permission requested. It was made clear that no decision was 'binding', and that pupils were at liberty to change their mind at any time, as it was important that pupils were happy to continue with the process. Parents were also given my contact details should they wish to talk to me or ask about any specific aspects of the project.

Work With Pupils: Focus Group Discussion

Once the participants had been selected, and prior to the start of the group-work, a focus group discussion was carried out to gather initial views. I led the discussion, which was also attended by Bea, the Learning Mentor. The main purposes of the meeting were to introduce myself to the group in a relaxed, open forum, to formally introduce the idea of the study to the boys as a group, and get some preliminary thoughts from them about the concept of 'peer support' in their school context.

This discussion generated data which supported my understanding both of the boys and of the school context and culture. (See Appendix 3 for copy of focus group questions, and brief points from the discussion.)

Plan Of Project Work In School

Autumn Term 2011 – Planning and Selection of participants

Spring Term 2012 – Launch and Social Skills/Peer Support sessions 1-6

Summer Term 2012 – Peer Support mentoring sessions 1-6 and Research Interviews.

(See Appendix 4 for brief chronology and outline of project work in school)

Work With Pupils: Group-Work

The group-work itself consisted of an introductory session, followed by six further group-work sessions spread over the Spring term. The first set of sessions focused on the development of 'social interaction' and cooperation skills, where my intention was to use a relatively formalised structure loosely based on a format that I had used previously in group work to develop peer mediation skills. These were subsequently followed, in the Summer term, by sessions more specifically to support the development and practise of skills as 'reading mentors'. (See Appendix 5 for a sample of the group-work sessions in the Spring and Summer terms.)

Each group-work session lasted approximately 40-45 minutes, and each was co-led by Bea and myself, where I had the 'facilitator' role (welcoming and initiating a 'warm-up' exercise; reiterating the Ground Rules which had been negotiated and agreed by the group; introducing the topic focus; facilitating

discussion; closing the session) while Bea took a 'supportive' role (supporting management of behaviour, reinforcing learning points; helping to focus and re-focus attention).

After each session, a short 'debrief' meeting took place between Bea and myself, which gave us the opportunity for quick immediate reflections on how the group session had gone, what seemed to be working well, what not so well, and therefore what might need to be adapted or modified for the next session. It was also an opportunity for Bea to speak with me about any specific matters relating to individual pupils that might be current: changes in home-life, particular difficulties in school, and so on.

Of the initial five boys who started the process of group-work training, two eventually left the process: one, Liam, left after two sessions, due to a pending change of setting instigated by his parents; the second, Ryan, left after five sessions, because of difficulties in his personal circumstances which were proving very unsettling to him on a personal level, and making his presence in the group equally unsettling; this resulted in a mutual decision for Ryan to leave the process at that time (although he expressed some interest in returning at a later date)..

The group continued with the remaining three participants.

Endings of the project were marked in a number of ways: a school assembly following the initial training, where the peer supporters were highlighted and congratulated in front of the whole school, just before commencing their weekly programme of mentoring; meeting with each peer supporter individually and also as a group, at the end of the block of training and mentoring sessions; finally, meeting with them shortly after this again as a group of four (Liam having left the school), to get feedback on their thoughts about the process and how they had found the experience as a whole.

Work With Pupils: 'End-Of-Research' Interviews

Two pupils, Brandon and Cain, and Bea, the Learning Mentor, took part in the research interviews. The interviews had been explicitly described as

voluntary, and the third pupil participant, Kyle, declined to be interviewed. (This was not altogether surprising, as Kyle had been relatively shy within the group, and it was made known to me that, like Ryan earlier in the process, he was going through an unsettled period in school, which may or may not have contributed to his decision.)

The interviews took the form of semi-structured interview questions, where each participant was asked the same series of fairly open questions, with prompts used at times to extend any initial responses. (See Appendix 6 for semi-structured interview schedule.)

SCENE TWO. REFLECTIONS ON THE GROUP WORK

I know I cannot teach anyone anything. I can only provide an environment in which he (sic) can learn

-Carl Rogers, 1969, from 'Freedom to Learn', accessed from Panarchy-org.

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Working With Discomfort

The group-work training sessions constituted a time of great learning in the context of the research as a whole, and more than a little discomfort.

I did not audio record the group work sessions because at the time I already had a sense that I was not intending to use them as a focus for later examination; I was not at all sure what 'reality' they would be capturing, and was not convinced of their relevance to the key aspects of what I was interested in studying.

I was also experiencing a significant amount of doubt and anxiety in relation to the group-work, and taping would have necessitated a level of exposure which I was not ready for. I knew this on some level at the time, but this was not a comfortable feeling, so I insulated myself against this emotional discomfort by cognitively rationalising that I was not so much interested in capturing a recorded representation of the sessions themselves, as in the

impact of the training and the perception of the boys at the end of the process. In this sense, I thought of the sessions as a means to an end, rather than an opportunity to examine the interplay within the group.

As it turned out, the pupil (and quite possibly adult) dynamics did exert a significant impact on the experiences within the group, and although analysing this impact would not necessarily have added to the study in relation to the research focus, these dynamics were nevertheless of interest when it came to analysing the interview responses regarding how the participants had felt the group had worked together.

Bion (1961) talks of the powerful emotional forces at play within groups, and describes some of the ambivalence that can come from being part of a group:

'It is clear that when a group forms the individuals forming it hope to achieve some satisfaction from it. It is also clear that the first thing they are aware of is a sense of frustration produced by the presence of the group of which they are members. It may be argued that a group must satisfy some desires and frustrate others...'

(Bion, 1961, p. 53)

While certainly discomfiting at times, my own discomfort was tempered by the ability to acknowledge ultimately that while one or two of the boys felt the need to leave at times, most remained and were prepared to keep going despite disruption; and those that did leave, always returned to the group. In this way, I allowed myself some small comfort.

The Group As A 'Community Of Acknowledgement'

Narrative approaches are interested in the narrative means by which identities are shaped within social and relational contexts, and the idea that the 'stories and accounts that we tell, and are told about us, shape not only how we think about ourselves and others but our actions and living practices' (Walther and Fox, 2012, p. 10). For those pupils considered 'problematic', or as having 'problematic' issues, such as those in my peer support group, it is certainly the case that particular narratives often prevail, and can exert an influence on a sense of 'self' or personal identity for those young people.

As the group process progressed, one aspect of narrative therapy appeared to have a significant function in this regard: that of 'outsider witness practice'. This is where alternative, 'preferred' personal narratives of people's lives can

be acknowledged and responded to so that an individual is able to experience that story as 'authentic and credible, which in turn enables it to be influential in shaping their lives' (Walther and Fox, 2012, p. 11).

This noticing and honouring by a group is significant, particularly if we understand identity as social, and week by week, it was possible to see how we as the group were able to serve the function of validation, authentication, reinforcement and encouragement regarding more positive narratives of selfhood, during the learning the pupil participants underwent as part of the group, and later as they took up their roles as peer supporters.

SCENE THREE. REFLECTIONS ON THE INTERVIEWS

One of the primary questions for me during the research process was how to capture experience: mine as the researcher, and that of my participants. This relates to the two overarching questions that Hollway and Jefferson (2000) identify as key in any research: '*what is the object of enquiry?*' and '*how can it be enquired into?*' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 7).

Deciding on either was not initially so simple, as the research focus developed and changed, and it became less clear what phenomenon was actually under investigation. During an initial dalliance with an idea of capturing the development of the peer supporters using pre and post measures, I quickly floundered on questions of the validity and meaningfulness of such measures. My focus then centred on the participants' thoughts on the process of group work and of being peer supporters (rather than in their 'lived experience' of it). The interview method was the tool that I then chose, to try to capture aspects of the research experience, even while acknowledging that any 'truth' captured could only be partial.

Hollway and Jefferson (2000) in challenging the idea of a 'reality' captured in Interview, put it very well, highlighting the complexity involved in seemingly just asking interview questions, and the interpretations that then follow:

'Will you believe everything you are told? If not, how will you distinguish between truth and untruth? Even if you believe everything you are told, will you be satisfied that you have been told everything that is relevant? How would you define this, and how would you know? What do you assume about the effect of people's motivations and memory on what

they tell you? What will you assume about your effect as an interviewer on the answers given? Does your sex, race, age and so on make a difference?’

(Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 2)

The type and use of questioning is also of significance, and because my perspective was initially one which ‘took for granted’ a straightforward relationship between what was asked and what was replied, including the assumption that the words used by me as the interviewer meant the same to the respondents (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000), I can reflect that the style and use of my questions inadvertently limited the responses by virtue of how they were framed, and probably served to ‘delimit a horizon of thought’ (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p 8).

In talking about this issue, Wells (2011) quotes Patton (2002) with reference to the use of ‘truly open-ended questions’, where the interviewee is able to answer the questions in their own words, rather than in response to questions constructed, and ones ‘in which the categories of response are implied or are specified in advance (Wells, 2011, p. 24).

Bruner (1990) has a similar perspective, noting that we expect and encourage, through our structuring of the interview experience, particular types of answer within interviews, rather than narratives of natural conversation, adding the observation that:

‘As interviewers, we typically interrupt our respondents when they break into stories, or in any case we do not code the stories: they do not fit our conventional categories. So the human Selves that emerge from our interviews become artificialized by our interviewing method.

(Bruner, 1990, p. 115)

‘Interview’ As Co-Construction

Willig (2007) comments that as a social constructionist, she knows it is impossible to approach something without giving it meaning, and that to talk about something is to place it within an existing network of discursive structures (Willig, 2007, p. 214). Therefore it becomes clear that in interviewing, one is constructing the phenomena, not just encountering it. In

this respect, Willig concurs with phenomenological researchers, that it becomes impossible to encounter something without one's own intentionality and personal involvement (Willig 2007, p. 214). She refers to Collaizzi (1978), who recommends that instead of simply accepting that a researcher's subjectivity shapes the research, one should make one's assumptions and presuppositions explicit from the outset (Willig, 2007, p. 214, citing Collaizzi 1978). Riessman (2008) also comments on the way that the interviewer's identities and preconceptions can come into play, particular across the divide of religion, gender, class or race.

Narrative inquiry understands interviews as jointly-constructed narratives; interviewing more as conversation, and as a 'discursive' endeavour (Riessman, 2008). Rather than the idea of an interviewer asking static questions and the respondent giving answers, we have the idea of two active participants jointly constructing narrative and meaning, where both interviewee and interviewer render events meaningful in a collaborative and dynamic way (Riessman, 2008, p. 23).

The relationship between the two parties is constructed in a particular way: here, the researcher 'does not 'find' narratives, but participates in their creation' (Riessman, 2008, p. 24), with the interviewee as a storyteller, rather than a respondent (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 53).

For narrative inquirers, the goal is to generate rich, detailed accounts rather than brief statements, and while I know this now, I know also that this is not what I did and that my questions did not really allow for extended narratives to emerge, nor for an exploration of the qualities and meanings associated with the participants' experience.

Engaging in this collaboration requires from the interviewer that they relinquish some of the control within the situation and especially within the fixed-interview format. Encouraging and allowing participants to speak in their own way can shift power in interviews, and although this can lead to greater uncertainty for the interviewer, the 'pay-off' is seen that 'genuine discoveries about a phenomenon can come from power-sharing' (Riessman, 2008, p. 24).

It is easy to see in retrospect the complex endeavour that is narrative inquiry, which requires courage and a certain trust in the process on the part of the researcher. Reflecting back, I know I was not at that place of trust, and therefore not able to relinquish that control, and in this respect, it can be seen that my participants' narratives were mediated by my interview process.

'Interview' As Performance

Riessman describes interviews as 'performance', and the task of analysis as showing that the 'single subject cannot be understood without connecting with the story of others - truth as a collective event' (Riessman, 2008, p. 83).

Looking at the process of the interviews through a narrative lens, with myself included as a necessary part of the 'collaboration', allowed me to examine what was said and how this interlinked with my own story (assumptions, values, hopes, fears, motivations). Thus, rather than produce a seemingly straightforward narrative of the boys' views, in analysing the interviews, my goal was to create a representation of the interview process itself, with its own integral meaning in relation to the study as a whole.

PROLOGUE TO ACT V NAVIGATING NARRATIVE ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The unexamined life is not worth living

- Socrates

The story of the research process now reaches the point of looking closely at and learning from what might be termed 'data', but which might equally and

most usefully be thought of as the textual representations at the heart of the research.

These representations embody experiences of researcher and participants over time, and at particular times, during the research process; at points of tension and even moments of relative crisis or 'rupture' (see Poulos, 2012) which ultimately contributed to the learning which took place. An example of challenge producing growth, as a Buddhist perspective might have it.

Thus, the following sections will emphasise the presentation of the research as a 'temporal text' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), charting what has been, and relating this to the present, and also to future hopes.

The 'data' is comprised of: reflections from research journal entries, made over a three-year period, from early on in the research journey; a series of notes and reflections made following and in relation to the peer support group-work sessions; and the original interview transcripts from the three interviews undertaken with research participants.

Because of the different types of data involved, analysis takes varied forms, depending on the data being considered, but always seeks to reflect the methodological focus on narrative and experience.

However, it is important to be clear that the use of narrative in this study served a specific function: to help construct and represent an experience of research, which involved including the perspective of my participants alongside my own.

With regard to analysis, therefore, I was less interested in a specific focus on the structure or content of the language of my reflections or of my participants' responses: this would have involved paying attention to specifics of narrative analysis which were not relevant to my research. Of more interest was the narrative as a 'performance' of events within a research experience, acknowledging the accounts given by individuals 'as always embedded in a context' (Parker, 2005, p. 73) and that 'we tell stories in culturally specific ways' (Parker, 2005, p. 73). Thus, while acknowledging the function of language as the mediator of what we can know in the world, my focus was

very much on the 'storying' of the experiences represented within the study. In this way, the narrative methodology provided an overarching framework, with a focus on illuminating my thoughts, methods and actions within the research, adopting an autoethnographical perspective to further facilitate this.

The structure thus allowed an 'insider perspective' on 'inward and outward experience' and phenomena (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), in my learning of how to 'do' professional practice, and in this respect, my motivations, thoughts and feelings as researcher are studied alongside the responses of my participants.

ACT V – ANALYSING AND RE-PRESENTING A RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

SCENE ONE. ISSUES RELATING TO ANALYSIS

Criteria And Context For Analysis

Parker (2005) broaches important questions to be considered within the research process. These include what counts as 'good' research (for example, that which corresponds to the norms of scientific study, or that which can be seen as improving the lives of those who participate), and what counts as 'analysis'. In doing so, he exposes some of the complexity with regard to the functions and purposes of research, and also proposes that what could and should be aimed for are methods and perspectives which contribute to the emergence of new, even surprising ideas, and which take the research forward in some way (Parker, 2005).

Referring back to these 'open questions about quality' (Parker, 2005, p. 140), a key question for me concerned the basis, form and structure of my analysis: did it need to utilise a particular, formal framework; should it involve something which could be empirically confirmed as 'true' or refuted as 'false'; could it involve the crafting of something totally new and even unexpected? (Parker, 2005, p. 140).

Yardley (2000), too, offers useful suggestions for what 'good' qualitative research should be judged by, and in so doing prioritises particular elements (sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, impact and importance) which go to the heart of what meaningful qualitative inquiry should be about. In particular, Yardley advocates for 'research-in-context' (Yardley, 2000, p. 224) which links closely with practice, and for research which is 'exploratory and empathic, which pays close attention to process and unique variation, ethical and interpersonal issues, meaning, context and culture' (Yardley, 2000, p. 215).

These ideas point towards analysis which is undertaken with both sensitivity and rigour, and which is in keeping with the focus of qualitative inquiry within the research itself.

Thus, my decisions regarding analysis, although not easy ones (not least because of some of the pressures characterised within the research itself) were nevertheless informed by these perspectives. In realising that not adhering to one specific theoretical framework was an option, it became clear that it was first necessary to be clear about the objectives of my analysis in relation to my research questions, in order to be able to find an appropriate way of interpreting my data (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000).

Objectives Of Analysis

I decided on the following objectives:

- To explore the voice and perspectives of the research participants (what they said about themselves and the research project) as represented through the research interview process, and to be able to interpret these meaningfully in the context of this research;
- To expose some of the personal, social and cultural processes and influences underlying my 'doing' of practice and research;
- To explore the development of my 'professional self' through my noted reflections during the research journey;
- For my mode of analysis to have congruence with a research study which is interested in the relational aspects of human learning, and in how subjectivity and experience, honestly explored, can contribute to meaningful practice and research with people.

Assumptions Relevant To The Data And To Analysis

Ultimately, therefore, while I did not attempt to pursue 'rigour' through the usual tradition of using a specific theoretical framework, my interpretive lens has been informed by social constructionist ideas of there being no objective knowledge, only ideas shaped by experience (and the wider social, cultural, historical and political context) (Gergen, 1999).

Therefore, while in my data, I am often expressing a highly personal narrative, I acknowledge that this perspective is as much influenced by prevailing discourses of professional practice, and historical developments which have affected how educational psychology is performed, as by my phenomenological experience. (Some of these considerations will be explored further, in Act Six.)

If one of the purposes of analysis is to set the text in context, and to thus enhance an understanding of the text, then highlighting the context becomes significant. For this reason, I have presented my interpretations within a narrative framework, making explicit the personal and professional tensions and motivations which have been undercurrent through the study, as well as referring to some of the wider discourses which have also constructed the study.

Just as feminist writing has played a significant part in challenging the perception and academic exclusion of personal experience as 'subjective and emotional' (Ribbens, 1993, p. 88), promoting the view of 'the personal' as 'political', it is possible to reject a polarised way of thinking of the personal in relation to the social. Instead it is possible to view society as reflected in our representations of ourselves, thus making the 'self' a valid unit of study. As Ribbens (1993) asserts: '...the key point is that 'society' can be seen to be not 'out there', but precisely located 'inside our heads', that is, in our socially located and structured understandings of 'my-self', 'my-life', 'me-as-a-person'...' (Ribbens, 1993, p. 88).

Therefore, my analysis is presented from the assumption of nothing other than a personal validity, with my interpretation existing as a 'personal narrative constructed within a wider social context' (Andrews, et al, 2004). This sits alongside a strong belief in the value that comes from my willingness to explore my experience and (conscious) motivations as honestly as I can. I thus take my experience to be a reflection of the social context, and also a way of constituting it.

Hollway and Jefferson (2000) remind us, from their psychodynamic perspective, that as researchers 'we cannot be detached but must examine our subjective involvement because it will help to shape the way in which we interpret the (interview) data' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 33). Therefore, they emphasise, self-scrutiny and reflexivity as crucial.

Thus, the 'rigour' within the analysis has come from attempting to examine the text closely, with a belief in my own knowledge as a kind of 'truth' within the social, cultural and historical backdrop of the study.

'Truth' And Process In Analysis

Wells (2011) highlights the challenge which exists in the 'search for a defensible interpretive framework' for narrative study (Wells, 2011, p. 43). The process of analysis which I have undertaken has been necessarily idiosyncratic, because of the different forms of data for analysis. This has involved at times constructing a 'meta-narrative' on events; in this sense, I have been subtly aware of a 'self', commenting on experience, while another 'wiser' self looks on knowingly, aware of the partiality of my impressions. A related consideration has been the acknowledgement that the telling of experiences are constructions and works of fiction, 'contextual reconstructions of events' (Clandinin and Connolly, 2000, p. 118), where memory is 'selective, shaped and retold in the continuum of one's experience' (Clandinin and Connolly, 2000, p. 142).

As part of my research method, I used both retrospective and immediate reflection, and for me, reflexivity was particularly important during the subsequent analysis because it allowed me to consider my reading of the account of my participants; what they brought up for me emotionally and what they represented in my research journey.

The use of writing inspired by memory within autoethnographic and other personal accounts holds an interesting, yet slightly uncomfortable position. Wall (2006) makes the very good point that, seemingly, unless accounts as 'data' of personal experience 'are collected and somehow transformed by another researcher, they fail to qualify as legitimate' (Wall, 2006, p. 285), referring to the different perceptions of memories of personal experience

accessed through recorded interview and subsequent transcription, compared to autoethnographic texts of the same set of memories.

And Owen et al (2008) make the point that memory can present its own dilemmas: that it can be partial and fleeting. They see truth in memory as both subjective and shifting, and state that 'holding memory accountable to historical truth is typically impossible and fatally flawed' (Owen et al, 2008, p. 112).

Many now challenge the uncritical presumption that narratives of personal experience 'speak for themselves' or represent the 'truth of experience' (Wells, 2011, p. 43). With regard to memory, perhaps as Owen et al (2008) assert, 'the goal of life research, however, may not be remembering the past accurately but to convey the essence of an experience' (Owen et al, 2008, p. 112).

Plummer (2001) reminds us that 'the narrative of a life is clearly not the life' (Plummer, 2001, p. 233, cited by Owen et al, 2008, p. 105), and that the narrative often has more to do with the practices of narrative writing than the true contours of life as lived.

In the same way, the personal accounts in this study stood for far more than was actually on the page, and retrospective reading of the accounts allowed me to reflect on my original intentions and emotions, as well as on my original internal narrative on the narratives.

As mentioned, because of the range of 'data sets' within this research, I required a nuanced and individualised way of analysing my data while also being sensitive to the important task of addressing my research questions. As part of my initial analysis, I used a personally adapted form of 'thematic analysis' as a method for 'identifying, analysing and reporting patterns' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79) within and also across 'data sets' (in the case of my interview data).

Additional interpretation was undertaken by narratively analysing and interpreting the data individually, as coherent 'wholes'.

(Reconsidering) Thematic Analysis

As part of my initial 'immersion' in the data, a thematic analysis was undertaken in order to 'get closer' to the accounts and texts that had been produced some time before. However, ultimately, these themes were not included or discussed specifically as part of my formal presentation of analyses.

Themes had been derived from reading through the texts of each data set a number of times, using something of an 'inductive' text-based (as opposed to theory-based) approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006) selecting from the texts, segments and direct quotes and anything of interest which seemed to constitute distinct 'units' which might later be read as having meaning in the context of the research. The intention was to stay close to what came from the text, without imposing my own or theory-based ideas at that stage, onto what was coded. (There was, of course, the understanding that even while trying to be 'open' in my coding, there would be inevitable bias being brought into the process.) These distinct 'units' were termed 'initial codes'.

For the interviews, these were then assembled into groupings which became 'final codes'. The 'final codes' from each individual participants' interview were then combined to form sub-themes, which were finally put together to form four final themes as present across the three interview texts. (See Appendix 10.)

For the journal entries and group-work reflections, these initial codes were directly organised into sub-themes, which were then organised to form constituents of the final themes - the themes as hopefully capturing 'something important about the data in relation to the research question', and representing 'some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82). (See Appendices 8 and 9 for the research journal and group-work analyses respectively.)

In the end, these sub-themes and ultimate themes were not included for specific interpretation because I did not feel that they contributed to or illuminated new ideas in relation to the research questions, other than reinforcing what might already have been suspected or indeed referred to through the study. The process did, however, allow me to become very

familiar with the texts and to expose patterns and themes within the texts and transcripts, and these will be described within the 'discussion and interpretation of analysis' section.

Contextual Narrative Analysis

In taking stories as its primary source of data, narrative analysis 'examines the content, structure, performance, or context of such narratives considered as a whole' (Wells, 2011, p. 7). As Wells points out, for this reason, narrative relies on extended accounts treated analytically as units, rather than fragmented into thematic categories (Riessman, 2008; Wells, 2011).

The apparently 'realist' stance of this part of the analysis, where the meaning from the text is taken as standing in its own right, applies only partially, rather than assuming that the texts 'speak for themselves'.

In my study, analysis is supplemented by a 'meta-narrative' of the texts as a coherent whole, in order to provide a contextual perspective where meaning and experience can more clearly be seen as 'socially produced' within the particular social and cultural context of the research process.

For the interview data, this contextual perspective took the form of imaginary letters to the interview respondents, while for the research journal entries and group-work reflection data, the texts were considered as 'wholes' and interpreted for themes and narrative threads.

Interpretation for all sets of data was informed by 'four core questions' associated with analysing qualitative data, as highlighted by Hollway and Jefferson (2000): 'what do we notice?' 'Why do we notice what we notice?' 'How can we interpret what we notice?' 'How can we know that our interpretation is the right one?' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 55).

These questions allowed for an engagement with the texts with curiosity and openness in terms of what was ultimately interpreted, as well as some caution in understanding the texts as being able to 'tell it like it is' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 10) rather than as constructions which have been dynamically produced and influenced by social, cultural and other contextual factors.

In the same way, Perakyla and Ruusuvuori (2011) refer to the fact that interviews can be analysed as 'specimens of interaction and reasoning practices rather than as representations of facts' (Perakyla and Ruusuvuori, 2011, p. 529).

SCENE TWO. LOOKING BACK AT RESEARCH JOURNALS: CONFESSIONS OF THE NOVICE RESEARCHER

A person is a fluid process, not a fixed and static entity; a flowing river of change, not a block of solid material; a continually changing constellation of potentialities, not a fixed quantity of traits.

(Carl R. Rogers from 'On becoming A Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy' accessed from goodreads.com)

The journal entries date from the time at the very start of my doctoral research journey – before I had decided on a particular focus. While limited in number, they are explored in their entirety, as they were written, across a three-year period. They can be considered as discrete but connected pieces, exploring a narrative of developing confidence, from an initial starting point of anxiety and uncertainty.

Hollway and Jefferson (2000) warning against unnecessary fragmentation of data (such as through the 'code and retrieve' method) to the detriment of an appreciation of the 'form' of the data, advocate a Gestalt approach to analysis (Wertheimer, 1912) which suggests that understanding the 'whole' is not possible by starting with the ingredient parts, the 'whole' being required to understand the parts (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000).

With this in mind, although the themes which were identified through the thematic analysis are briefly referred to at the beginning (for the sake of completion), my priority was to allow the story of experience and change to

play out in a naturalistic way, while considering the themes in a complementary and not artificial way. For this reason, general themes and ideas are discussed within the body of the discussion of the following eight journal entries. These relate to: personal and professional anxiety; aspirations for a 'professional self'; a search for meaning; and developing a professional standpoint and identity. These will be explored as part of the following sections.

Overcoming 'Fear And Loathing'

By the time I had arrived at the idea of peer support with the cohort of pupils in the setting, my thinking around the research project had come a long way. It had in fact been far from an easy process. Although I broadly knew I wished to look at issues regarding pupils with 'challenging behaviour', for a long time, I had no clear focus, and lacked confidence in my ability to find one. My research journal entries from the start of the process reveal real misgivings about my ability to see the doctoral process through. (These entries were made sporadically, rather than routinely, which partly reflects the turbulence I was experiencing as a newly qualified EP):

17th August, 2003

'...I am frustrated by a feeling of 'ineeloquence' and 'inarticulateness' that dogs me. I think I've got a lot to say...but seem unable to say it (to people, in discussions) very well. I end up feeling foolish, irrelevant, blustering and naïve – when I wish to feel learned and articulate and knowledgeable and wise....oh well...! On the plus side, I've started this reflective log – a charting of my academic, spiritual and personal journey of where my life is at (what my life is about) and what my ultimate aims and goals for my professional life are. I hope for a balanced and open mind, able to remain focused on what is important, and yet able to take on board with vigour and optimism, new opportunities and experiences and the potential they hold.'

28th August, 2003

'...have been thinking – and slightly panicking – about what I have taken on with this doctorate...did I truly think it through...am I doing it for the right reasons...how will I cope during those dark evenings/weekends and am really tired and only want to sleep...how on earth do I fit it in amongst all my other work which I barely cope with now...yes, panic!' However had a nice, timely phone--call from Jane last night, where she made it feel possible, and emphasised that we are only really doing this for ourselves. And I suppose that as time goes on, I will become more and more aware of why I need to do this, or why I am doing this. Going back to work...really, really want to feel partway organised for the start of term. I've got Friday to make a good stab at it. And then the weekend. And then Monday. I'll set my targets tonight.'

From these first two entries, it appears clear that I am grappling with many anxieties and pressures, having started a new challenge that I am not entirely sure about. Although I am apparently only 'slightly' panicking, I am trying to find reassurance that I am doing the right thing and that it will be okay; that I will be able to manage, to 'cope'.

The first entry talks of personal and professional frustration - of desperately wanting to be 'knowledgeable', to do the 'right thing', and to be viewed as a good, competent professional - a theme of a struggle with uncertainty about my abilities that is picked up in the second entry, and is a theme which recurs through the whole process of the research. To be 'competent' is obviously not to be 'blustering' or 'naïve', but seems to embody a 'slickness' of speech and sureness of manner that I feel I am lacking. Despite the frustration of not 'knowing', there are signs of optimism in both entries: aspirations for

developing a meaningful, even dynamic, personal and professional life; to take decisive action in starting a 'log, setting 'targets' and getting 'organised' in order to make progress on a practical work-level. Just as I seek (and get) reassurance from a friend that I am doing the 'right thing', these plans and aspirations are a way of bolstering my resolve that everything is possible.

The next entry demonstrates the ongoing struggle (that would continue for some years) to find direction and meaning within the research process:

18th August, 2003

'...Still trying to figure out why I am doing this doctorate – and put it into terms that are real for me. Inside myself, I know, but somehow it feels feeble and lacking when articulated to others. Perhaps that is the point – it's for me...Confidence, confidence, confidence! Conviction, conviction, conviction! Courage, courage, courage!' ...'

The call to myself for 'courage, confidence and conviction' echoes a Nichiren Buddhist sentiment often referred to in times of struggle and challenge. In the world of the 'doctorate in educational psychology', I certainly felt challenged and that I was struggling, and this frustration was only exacerbated by the fact that I was surrounded by colleagues who seemed clear and definite about their objects of study; who had neat and discrete paths related to 'autism' or 'self-esteem' or 'disaffection'. While articulating that somehow I sense that the answer is inside myself, it is nevertheless seemingly difficult not to feel 'feeble' in the face of people who seemed to know the way to do things: to be definite and clear, and to be able to just get on. It seemed that they knew where they were going, whereas I did not, while desperately trying to find out.

The next two entries demonstrate how some of the anxiety is starting to play on my subconscious, and stress is starting to become evident, in relation to being able to get what I need to get done, done:

1st September, 2003

'Quite a restless night. Thinking about what to do, and for first time fairly seriously stressing about the doctorate I have just undertaken. It gave me opportunity to do some thinking, though, so that is good. More to do...'

19th September, 2003

'Need to leave space for doctoral reading...not doing this. Recently have lost a degree of momentum. Need also to boost my confidence with regard to my skills and my knowledge...no short-cuts other than reading and preparation. So far, have not managed this as planned...'

Here, the journal entries reflect the fact that things are not going to plan, and momentum (such as it might have been) has been lost. There is a slight air of desperation in the entries, and a real sense of juggling of priorities. This resonates with the tension often felt by professionals between pursuing what feels closer to what one wants to be doing, and doing what is felt to be expected professionally, or indeed most pressing. In addition, from the date of the entry, I know that I am barely two years into life as a newly qualified EP, and there is doubtless the issue of trying to manage the workload in a busy metropolitan EP service against a nagging doubt about my ability to know enough, to do the job. Again, this theme of uncertainty and a lack of confidence connects me to feelings around professional 'inadequacy' which may often be felt, but are rarely expressed. In my case, in the face of these feelings, I decide that I just need to organise myself better, 'read' and 'prepare', in order to do better in this position that I am in. The end of the second entry suggests a dissatisfaction with myself, with my lack of doing well

enough (at whatever that is), and there is a large element of self-judgement - hence the 'fear and loathing'.

Finding Focus, Finding Meaning

There is a gap of eighteen months or so before the next entry is made (in this period, I have been on maternity leave, and my eye-problem has been formally diagnosed), and the entry reflects the fact that some things have moved on, others not:

3rd May, 2005

'Have felt for ages, a lack of inspiration and much confusion about what to focus on. However during last supervision session with Tom he did help to bring some clarity by introducing ideas about why I might want to do this research (eg something always wanted to do; something to tie in with local authority priorities; something for own CPD). Tom said might hit all or only one of these, and this not necessarily important. It gave me something to think about – linked in with idea that will need a meaningful reason/incentive in order to keep the enthusiasm needed to sustain me through the work...want to 'create value' here...'

A sense of a lack of focus and direction are still present (perhaps not surprisingly given the intervening period), however, there are glimmers of hope, the start of a 'route map' in finding a way through. Notwithstanding the acknowledgement of my ongoing 'confusion', the entry does demonstrate insight into the understanding that whatever I do will need to be something which can keep me 'enthused' and also inspired. Here, I begin to talk in terms of 'creating value' and finding meaning through my research focus. The first part of the next entry reflects a similar level of developing insight, and also of confidence in exploring something which feels meaningful, and of which I feel I have some knowledge and understanding:

13th May, 2005

'Having dithered for a year and a half, I think I have a place to start. I think I have lacked confidence that I had anything valid to talk about, or that I would be able to say it with any authority or eloquence. Re the former, I feel that there has to be something to say in this area that I can bring to debate; issues as I see them. And re the latter, only by having a go will I be able to develop a style that I can gradually hone...'

It seems clear from this entry and the entries thus far that this research project was always an undertaking that represented much more than 'doing research for the sake of it' - although I was not consciously aware of this at the time. At the time, it felt to me that I was 'dithering', when perhaps in reality, I was simply trying to find a professional 'self' I felt comfortable with, but wasn't sure how to get to, or even what it looked like in practice. At the same time, I was finding a way through the fog of being a still newly qualified psychologist (with the professional confusion that goes with that) trying to juggle family commitments and other health concerns.

As the fog begins to clear, as demonstrated through this next text, insights (since forgotten but which reappear later in my research journey) begin to emerge. Although the topic I am referring to is 'race', and is obviously not what I ultimately focus on in my research, it is clear that there is a developing professional confidence burgeoning:

13th May 2005

'...Of further interest to me, as I go through, will be developing a reflexive 'ethnographical' style whereby I include my own feelings, perceptions, constructs and meanings and expose them openly. I feel that an issue such as race, which has the capacity to bring out such powerful emotions in people, deserves to be discussed via research which does not ignore the meanings and perspectives of the researcher...'

Here, the entry suggests the beginnings of a clear research 'position', and there is also a sense of becoming energised by something 'big', which feels to have importance and meaning in terms of both personal and wider, social concerns. (It is interesting, however, that by the time I am ready to embark on the research proper, some years later, this clarity of position has somehow dissipated - before being reignited as the process develops.)

Developing New Perspectives, Developing A Professional Identity

With regard to my lack of focus in the search for the 'right' topic, what had probably not helped was the fact that the scope of my thinking was very broad. Discarded notes from that time show ideas ranging from looking at the mental health needs of children in high school to issues for looked-after children; from attachment and resilience to supporting children in PRU; social exclusion to (as described) issues of race and inequality. At this time, my thinking was also becoming influenced by humanistic psychology and its links with Buddhism, which was now a part of my personal practice.

The common thread throughout, however, remained an idea of relationships as fundamental to human experience, and as an important aspect to be considered in terms of models for support and practice. I had a sense that there was a 'trick' being missed somewhere, and I was interested in finding a new perspective on ways of looking at facilitating supportive mechanisms for young people. Ideas around supporting the mental health of young people evolved into more of a focus on emotional well-being (which subsequently evolved into an idea of 'human flourishing'). Supervision sessions supported my realisation that this agenda needed to be informed not just by clinical perspectives but also by social and educational ones.

Alongside these thoughts around finding a focus for my research, my professional learning as an EP was also gathering pace. This journal reflection on an incident with a parent, demonstrates how my own ideas for a personal/professional practice that was meaningful to me, were beginning to come together, and is recreated here as I wrote it:

15th February 2006:

(Finding my way with 'non-positivist' practice)

..Asked by a parent of a child for whom there seemed primarily to be emotional/behavioural concerns, to do a 'comprehensive' assessment on her child, I was in the situation of having to explain my standpoint on assessment in general. (I was therefore forced to examine exactly what my personal and professional leanings are – and whether they may be influenced by my own fears or ignorance!) I tried to explain to the parent that in this instance, I did not feel my useful job was to 'label' a particular deficit (as she may have wanted) but rather to try and identify particular needs, and, most importantly, to try and look at the ways that the system could be adapted to better support those needs. I know that I have my own prejudices re. for example, cognitive tests, and I did not want to be steering her away from anything because of my own shortcomings or preferences. Rather, I wanted to be making a sound professional judgement based on a genuinely-held philosophical and professional standpoint. Examining myself in this way feels good, in that I am trying to be reflective in pursuit of rigour... I think cognitive testing has its place – but in most cases what is needed is sound knowledge (my own) on alternative which can be just as – if not more – illuminating, and which do not hold at their core, a narrow reductive way of looking at individuals... 'this number means they are functioning thus...' These tests may give us a snapshot of something, but they tell only part of a story, and their results are less than useless unless their results can inform what needs to change in the system to help the child. Reflecting in this way, and applying these perspectives to a particular child makes me see three things: I have a real view on these issues; I need to explore and become more competent in real alternatives, and finally, that good EP-ing for me is about being able to integrate core beliefs (of whatever kind) into my professional practice, and feeling able to justify my standpoint.

I need to develop my own clear understanding of what are core, stable elements of human-ness, what can be effectively measured, what I

believe in, and how I feel the human experience can best be described/understood in terms of assessment....

This entry demonstrates a clear shift as I start to acknowledge my own developing professional 'standpoint'; in this case, around 'positivist' assumptions within the use of cognitive testing in EP practice. In describing this particular incident, what comes through is a development of a confidence in expressing a professional view. In my examination of my own conscious (and also subconscious) motivations and judgements, there is also a sense of a confidence in acknowledgement that I don't have everything sorted, but no matter. (My use of quote-marks for the words 'comprehensive' and 'label', is interesting, and I am not sure if they signify self-consciousness, or liberation.) What does matter is the integrating of personal perspectives with professional ones, and the text demonstrates a new willingness to state things as I see them, and to feel alright about this; to put out there what (I think) I know, with an expectation of being taken seriously. I am beginning to take myself seriously.

Finally, thoughts around using peer support as a vehicle for studying social and emotional issues came about through a combination of work experiences and discussions which solidified my understanding that although education systems often seem to gravitate towards measurement, what really makes the difference in supportive work with individuals, especially those in vulnerable situations, is the nature of the relationships which are made possible. It felt important to pursue a Buddhist idea of finding and creating the 'value' in everyday life, never forgetting personal stories. With this notion of 'relationship' as central, I knew that my interest could be sustained over a length of time, (something previously identified as important) and decided that my thesis could be an examination of this hypothesis. But how to measure and capture this, and come to understand what 'data' can inform these questions? Some of these questions were explored during the process of group work undertaken in peer support skills, which will be considered next.

SCENE THREE. LEARNING FROM AN EXPERIENCE OF GROUP-WORK: THE 'UNPROFESSIONAL' PROFESSIONAL?

No ray of sunshine is ever lost, but the green which it awakens into existence needs time to sprout, and it is not always granted for the sower to see the harvest. All work that is worth anything is done in faith.

(Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965), accessed www.forbes.com)

As with the research journal entries, these notes and reflections are considered sequentially and chronologically, and presented as discrete but connected pieces. There is a gap of some five years between the last research journal entries and these reflections, which relate to the start of the peer support group-work sessions in the school. The gap is partly due to the continued working through of the search for a meaningful topic (as explored in the preceding section), and partly due to 'leave of absence' periods, following my diagnosis of a form of 'macular degeneration', which significantly impacted on my ability to study for long periods. In this sense, life 'got in the way'.

The first three entries represent thoughts and considerations, some practical, some philosophical, regarding the structure and content of the work to be covered with the participants.

The second set of entries represent feedback notes made with Bea, my co-facilitator in the group, usually done immediately or shortly following the weekly group session itself. As such, they relate to largely practical concerns regarding the sessions and the participants involved in the sessions.

Their inclusion here acts as a means of providing some insight into my feelings and thoughts around running and planning the group, and the focus and structure of the sessions, while also offering an opportunity to explore some of the subtle developments which took place during the group process.

As in the previous section, themes were initially identified using a thematic analysis, and these related to the following: anxiety and uncertainty; doing things the 'right' way; embracing flexibility; and peer support as facilitating growth and personal development. These will be covered as part of the discussion of the texts which follow.

Anxious Beginnings: Doing The 'Right' Thing

As with the research journals some years earlier, a narrative of uncertainty and anxiety to get things 'right' is prominent within the first two entries. There is also a keen sense of time pressure in the face of procrastination on my part:

11th April 2011

'Feeling anxious about the format for the training and getting a 'precise and perfect' entity which would be watertight and valid in terms of what I am trying to impart in the sessions. I have avoided getting down to things for a couple of weeks – largely because of work pressures, but also because I felt unsure of what the sessions should include, and basically wasn't secure in my ability to produce something which could be seen as 'expert' enough. After speaking with Tom B, I feel a bit more reassured that what I might hope to produce will work out: basically, a structure which provides space for delivering a few key principles while what emerges is monitored and recorded. Therefore, the process can be creative, fluid and even evolving, in a way which takes pressure off having to produce a definitive piece of perfection.'

8th December 2011

'Have stalled again since my last reflections. Have lost some momentum, and am still struggling to protect time to prepare for the sessions. Need to do more reading around this, and formulate a plan of action.'

While I refer, in the first text, to feeling reassured about the opportunity for some flexibility in the sessions, there is nevertheless a sense of an expectation that there is a 'right' way to do things, and further, there is an expressed desire to be 'expert'. On my part, this could reflect a perceived pressure that the group-work needed to conform to a particular type of 'structured' format (that could be 'monitored and recorded'), and the belief that I as 'leader', should be in control of things in this regard. The 'stalling', which the second entry subsequently refers to a few months later, is no real surprise, as perhaps I was not as reassured as I had thought I was. I return to feeling the need to implement a 'plan of action' in order to restore a feeling of security.

Resolving Tensions: Responding To Obstacles

The final text in the set, written a few days later, reflects on the source of some of the barriers to getting on, and refers to the recurring theme of other priorities getting in the way of planning and preparation around the research:

12th December, 2011

'What has happened has been that I have continued to think about the general focus of the study, and to try and work out what could work best for the group and for the purpose of the doctorate as well as for the school (usefulness, fulfilling promise to the pupils etc). But what has happened is what has happened so frequently in the past, and that is that other work pressures and commitments have taken over, taken precedence, and has left no space to really develop and build on the work done so far... I now feel more able to consolidate and crystallise some of those musings (however vague) into something more concrete, and I have a deadline for after Christmas by which I need to be planned and focused.'

The text reflects the previously documented desire for organisation and 'focus', and a resigned acknowledgement of the difficulties in finding and

protecting space to develop ideas. These again are professional tensions which impact on research done as practitioner research, which has to be fitted in around work and home life. However, towards the end of the entry, it appeared that space had somehow been found in order that important digestion and development of ideas could take place.

Resolving Tensions: Responding To The Group

The second set of texts are notes taken in discussion with Bea, reflecting to a large degree her perspective which she is feeding back to me. They look more closely at practical considerations relating to the group and its members, which come to the fore once the group has started:

22nd February, 2012

'Feel that the group at the moment quite 'adult-directed'. Good responses from story – they got it. Will be good to try and keep game short and sweet; keep focus sharp and clear.

Group recovered well from Cain leaving the group – didn't disrupt the group, or cause a fuss. Cain having some issues with Brandon. Brandon can struggle with his own social skills in the group – sometimes he doesn't realise the impact his behaviour (usually butting in and 'winding up') has on others – he always reacts.

Riley still not in right place – school nurse now involved – his attendance is poor – not sleeping at right time, staying up late – queries re depression?

Kyle – was impressed that stayed in as long as he did. Is having bit of bad time – staying in class at playtimes

Group – Keep warm-up games – Bea feels need to keep the challenge (games) to help them grow

For Kyle – Bea feels all part of self-esteem issues and confidence; he doesn't like getting things wrong – is part of the learning he needs to do

Cain needs to learn how to deal with people who annoy him, but also acknowledge when he is irritated by Brandon – Got 'get-out' and can come back into group

Brandon butting in constantly – can try holding the frog – only person holding it can speak

Consider additional/new Ground Rules.'

These notes reflect the many issues and challenges that the boys in the group were facing at the time. That this consequently impacted on their ability to relate positively to each other in the group, was in many respects one of the potential difficulties any group-work in this educational context was always going to encounter. What was important was having the opportunity to discuss and consider these aspects, and respond accordingly, for example to the fact that the group were becoming more distractible, and therefore required modifications in the content. For example:

1st March, 2012

'Decide need to get more practical-based. Get through stuff much quicker than with traditional model in mainstream – in order to keep interest, need be patient.

Cain very emotional at the moment – floods of tears – called Kyle 'selfish bastard' because he was disrupting group. I tried to mentor – feel torn in terms of his expectations of me – feel in dual role...'

This second text makes a reference to the tension I felt at times in terms of how to respond to upset within the group: as friend, as teacher, or as psychologist who might have worked with the pupils on other school-based work. This tension was probably emphasised by the fact that I had made the very deliberate decision at the start of the process to be known by my first name (as opposed to a title, as other teachers/assistants in the school were). On my part, this was purposely to signal a different kind of relationship being enacted between adult and pupil within the group. Intuitively, this had felt

more in keeping with the social 'function' of the group, and in addition, I had shared pieces of my home life: referring to a daughter of about the same age as them; bringing in something that she had made which could be shared with the group. For me, this was an important part of my making sense of what exactly my professional role was – whether or not it constituted what might be viewed as 'standard' practice. What felt important was staying true to a principle which reflected the philosophical roots of the research: the importance of relationships. However, this did not come without its own complexity in the context of the playing out of roles within the group – especially at times of stress or difficulty between the participants.

Researching within a 'practitioner-research' model also necessarily brought a different angle to proceedings, and began to hold particular significance here, where fluidity and flexibility of approach is found to be necessary. Dadds and Hart (2001) refer to this in their reflections on their 'practitioner-research' studies, where they say: '...This then is the way we invented our methodological way through the project, designing the route to suit what we wanted to do ...' (Dadds and Hart, 2001, p. 6). The next entry reflects further on this:

Changing Tack: Embracing Flexibility

9th March, 2012

'Was originally very anxious to get the 'right' focus for the sessions – using an amalgamation of stuff from the Bristol Mediation pack and other 'social skills' groups. However, as things are progressing, in reality very little of the work covered seems to be 'sticking' like it did with the mainstream pupils. Also, opportunities for reinforcement practice in the group seem less possible because of behaviour, nor at home, because homework generally tends not to get done.

It is becoming less about the 'what' and more about the 'how' and the process. My focus for the group is beginning to change. Am thinking

about Vygotsky and Feuerstein stuff – perhaps incorporating principles of mediated learning to do the ‘how’. This seems critical to the end-result; to think of the group less as a vehicle for ‘delivering skills’; and of peer support in something of a ‘mechanistic’ way; but instead to think how best to enable the pupils to get the maximum out of the process that the group offers in developing their learning. To learn: about themselves as peer supporters; to practice social skills, some explicitly taught, others not; to tolerate being in a group, and to get something from being in a group; to develop different views of themselves. Not necessarily need lots of time and reinforcement, but can achieve good results through focused bursts of activity – as long as targeted, based on sound principles. For pupils, to begin to extend this learning into interactions, change way positioned, tapping into potential... ‘

This entry demonstrates one of the shifts in my professional perspective that is taking place. While my initial thoughts, going back to my initial entries, had indeed been to conduct an orderly, logically-sequenced study, with a clearly defined beginning, middle and end, using a well-structured format within which to explore different social relational skills, the group work did not turn out like this. It soon became clear that what had worked well with a mainstream cohort was not as appropriate for this group. My thinking had to change, and this brings to mind Dewey’s idea of thinking and learning as beginning at the fork of a road; where at first one does not know which fork to take, but on thinking about the situation, one develops an idea. The realisation that meaningful work with the group necessitated a different recourse than my original plan of action represented this particular ‘fork’, and while it took some time to know which road to subsequently take, this evolved – both as part of my own thinking, and through observations of the group and discussions with Bea during our ‘debrief’ meetings.

I had realised, for example, that not only did the boys work through the worksheets much more quickly than their mainstream peers (because they were less able to focus for as long on specific learning points), but they were

in many ways functioning at a developmentally younger level than for their chronological years. In this respect, the boys were responding best to story and practical or play-based tasks, and less well to abstract concepts and word-based tasks; I realised that in order to keep their interest and motivation, key elements needed to be in place. And while a certain amount of the right kind of structure was required to keep the space emotionally 'contained' for them, I realised that the boys required a learning environment which, rather than focusing on specific aspects or tasks, allowed and enabled them to function socially in a way which itself formed the central part of their learning. In this, I borrowed from Rogers' concept of 'non-directive teaching, which seeks to encourage independence and autonomy through what is termed 'student-centred learning.' Rogers' method is described by Tenenbaum (1959) as 'free and floating and open and permissive' (Tenenbaum, 1959, p. 301). In his description of how traditional student-teacher roles become realigned, Tenenbaum talks of how 'the group becomes more important than the instructor, whose role is very much facilitator, but actually becomes very much merged with the group'. And of one group in particular, how '...as part of the process, they shared, they took exception, they agreed, they disagreed. At any rate, their persons, their deepest selves were involved; and from this situation, this special unique group, this new creation was born' (Tenenbaum, 1959, p. 299). The teacher facilitates rather than controls the student's learning, and the nature of the 'learning environment' thus becomes central. The knowledge of the facilitator remains important, but their use of it is clearly related to a view which sees that the teaching is the servant of learning, and not vice-versa (Tenenbaum, 1959).

Thus, I came to understand that my role, rather than 'provider of group tasks', was to facilitate and enable something to coalesce and come together within the group which could have meaning for them. If we take seriously Dewey's (1938) explanation of education as the reconstruction of experience, it could be argued that there are few better ways to learn than by becoming involved with your whole self, your drives, emotions, attitudes and values, and so I began to take seriously the potential for this happening within the social context provided by the group – both for the pupils and for myself as

researcher. No set of decontextualized 'learning objectives' or 'facts' formally put together by me, no-matter how logical or well-organised, could come close to this. While this didn't mean that there should not be any conceptual or intellectual content included in the work, it did mean that this work would only serve any useful purpose to the group if it was meaningful and important for the individuals within the group. For me, as the researcher/leader in the group, as Tenenbaum points out, this does, and did, involve some threat and discomfort, because '...for the authoritarian person who puts his faith in neatly piled up facts, this method I believe can be threatening, for here he gets no reassurance, only an openness, a flowing, no closure' (Tenenbaum, 1959, p. 301).

'Flourishing' With, And Through, Peer Support

'I see your true colours shining through..

*....So don't be afraid to let them show; your true colours, your true colours
Are beautiful like a rainbow...*

– 'True Colours', sung by Cyndi Lauper, 1986

The final three entries again focus on the pupils, this time on their progress in their roles as peer mentors, and provide an opportunity to witness the skills the group are developing, and particularly, their interactions with those they are supporting:

9th May, 2012

Kyle and Maisie

'Kyle kind and calm with Maisie ('try it again' – smiled a lot – body language open and good eye-contact – used finger to point to each word – gave good prompts).

Kyle visibly blossomed in front of my eyes – he became confident, in charge of someone younger - directive, assertive, but also kind and gentle, knowing that Maisie can be very sensitive. He seemed to enjoy

being able to impart something to Maisie – he corrected her gently but was very clear (‘no- try it again’). Kyle doing really well.

*Said to each at end of task that they need to know they doing something good and to give themselves recognition
Maybe next step is peer support they can offer each other as supporters – observe and offer suggestions.*

Feel getting to very essence of the original core of the study – that doing this PS can help the boys ‘unleash their magic’.

Interesting thing been that not necessarily what covered in group - and in Kyle’s case, he not necessarily engage in way would have wanted during the group itself – but group represented essential forum for essential work, growth, development – which not necessarily apparent until real PS interaction takes place? Need right circumstances, structures, scaffolding to enable the manifestation of that latent – potential.

Think group provides: some attention to social functioning (changing emphasis?); modelling of perseverance with difficulty; positive relationships; expectations of ability; helping boys look more at own feelings, share these with others; start an endeavour and work towards something; tolerate each other and keep going (expectation of this).’

25th May, 2012

‘Checking-in regularly with mentors important because of ‘keeping in mind’ - Also supports other areas of need for the boys – eg Cain feeling very angry at the moment.

Bea says feedback sessions sometimes difficult – sometimes kids not feel like - Keeping sessions at 1x week for now

Next week – go through booklet.

Following week – boys to practice with mentees individually.’

14th June, 2012

Brandon and Sam

'Talked to Sam first - Sam said found it helpful.

Brandon supporting really well: showing good rapport ('slow down so I can hear you, mate'), sometimes correcting by saying the word..

Prompts: Encouraged Brandon to pre-empt using initial sound in first instance.

Cain and Habib

Talked to Cain first – said Habib doing good. Asked if there particular things Habib struggling with – identified that if he not know a word, Habib tends to skip over it. Asked how he tries to help him – said he breaks longer words down. Habib quite good reader and trying to segment words. Watching Cain – he silently breaking down words with Habib while watching him – quite absorbed in task – Cain very encouraging and helping with more difficult words – encouraged Habib to say with him ('tri-umph-ant-ly').

Prompts: Encouraged Cain to ask Habib things about the story.

Bea feels Cain and Brandon can be increased to twice-weekly peer supporting.'

The texts demonstrate very subtly, the at once 'ordinariness' and extraordinariness of what the boys are achieving. They present the qualities (patience, gentleness, kindness) and skills of facilitating support which are rarely seen or spoken of in relation to groups of children like them. The texts, very ordinary in themselves, nevertheless have the capacity to evoke emotion through descriptions of, for example, Kyle 'blossoming'; the same Kyle who at the first group gathering, sat as far away from me as he possibly could, and found it difficult to maintain eye-contact, who moved closer week by week, until by the end was rushing over at the end of the final session to reach

across to touch a pendant around my neck, and ask who had given it to me. Despite their difficulties and struggles (such as with feeling anger in Cain's case), the boys are fully demonstrating their potential for all to see. The entries are simple but powerful testimonies of what is possible, of the 'magic' that can be 'unleashed', the qualities that can be demonstrated, under the right circumstances.

SCENE FOUR. ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS: RE-PRESENTING AND RE-AUTHORING A NARRATIVE OF A RESEARCH INTERVIEW EXPERIENCE

This section understands interviews as jointly constructed narratives which reflect a story about an experience.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to interview texts as 'contextual reconstructions of events' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 118). This also highlights the interplay between interviewer and interviewee which cannot be ignored, but is not explicitly obvious; the way in which the interviewer helps to shape the interviewee's talk not only through the questions asked, but also in the way that responses are acknowledged, both verbally and non-verbally (Wells, 2011)..

As such, in these texts, the questions are included as a necessary part of the story, and each interview is interpreted in terms of what is asked, what is said in response to what is asked (and also not asked or extended upon by the researcher) and what this may represent in the context of the research experience.

Letters To My Participants: Honouring And Re-Engaging With Research Interview Transcripts

Hollway and Jefferson (2000) propose a useful approach to engaging with interviews and their participants in terms of the concept of the 'defended subject', where individuals (and participants) are understood as 'simultaneously 'psychic' and social', engaging in meanings which are 'both common and unique, social and biographical, discursive and defended' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 19). This broadens the context for

understanding the responses given, and offers a means of interpretation that allows for an engagement with some of the complexity that we take for granted in human life. While I do not claim to come from the same psychodynamic perspective as Hollway and Jefferson, I am interested in this complexity.

I conceived the idea of letters to my participant as a means of re-visiting and re-engaging with the experience of the interviews. Letters are a device often used within narrative approaches (see for example White and Epston, 1990) to support new engagement with a difficulty or challenge, and to emphasise hope and resourcefulness in the face of the difficulty in order to be able to subvert and reposition its influence on individuals' lives. In my case, writing imagined letters to each participant allowed for a repositioning and re-working of what I had found to be a challenging experience at the time. It gave me the opportunity to voice some of the feelings I had had about the process and my experience of it, and to belatedly honour the contribution of my participants in the process of the peer support study.

The letters may be thought of as 'mutual constructions' (Rose, 1997), where the narratives are collaboratively constructed accounts which reflect the interaction between myself and my participants.

I had found the interviews difficult for a number of reasons: largely, I felt ill-prepared and extremely novice, and was very apprehensive (as I had been about the group-work) of being taped, as if somehow my professional 'self' would be exposed and found wanting. Alongside this feeling of vulnerability was the thought that I needed, in the thirty minutes or so of the interview, to capture important knowledge and insights about the process; that I had one shot at this, and although it was in reality no different from talking sessions I carry out every day of my working life, somehow the fact that the interviews were attached to 'research', elevated their sense of importance, and increased the 'felt' pressure.

Re-visiting the interviews in this way gave me the opportunity of some 'closure', and almost making peace with the researcher I was back then, who

in some ways felt she had let the participants down in the way she had structured and enacted the interviews themselves.

As previously, while 'combing through' the interview transcripts highlighted particular themes, the letters allow for a more 'holistic' consideration of the transcripts as a narrative of an experience. It also provides an honest (if one-sided) re-appraisal (re-authoring) of events as seen from the perspective of a researcher who is attempting to slightly subvert a wholly realist interpretation of interview talk, by including a perspective which would not otherwise be seen, and which acknowledges an influence on the responses generated.

Just as Hollway and Jefferson (2000) highlight the importance of acknowledging assumptions often taken for granted in 'question-and answer' dialogues - that respondents share the meaning of questions with the researcher, that the respondents are knowledgeable about and able to capture and articulate them in response to particular questions, that they are motivated to tell the truth (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 11) - in this respect, the letters allowed for what I felt was a more respectful way of doing interpretation. It also recognises the idea that children rarely have an 'authorial voice', and consequently have little or no opportunity to contest adult accounts' (Hendrick, 2000, p. 43).

In being explicit about the fact that this is my account, my own feelings, thoughts, motivations and also shortcomings are allowed air. This is in contrast to a researcher-position which might make pronouncements regarding supposed 'truths' about what participants mean by what they say, without exposing the social and cultural context, motivations and perspective which influence their own 'truths'.

In this way, these letters also represent an attempt to be aware of the power imbalances which exist in such research situations. They include direct quotes (these are italicised within the letters for clarity) so that the reader can have a sense of what was actually said, not just inferred, and the letters thus try to stay as true as possible to the original words of the participants. (For this reason, some of the letters are quite lengthy in duration.)

Joint Letter To Brandon, Cain and Bea

Dear Brandon, Cain and Bea,

I would like to share with you some of my thoughts to do with the peer support project which you all (including Kyle, Ryan and Liam who were there at the beginning) have been such a big part of.

It is almost certain that much of what was going on in my head was not very apparent to you at the time – and probably, just as well. Considering what is too much, too little and just enough sharing – that has been a significant part of my learning during this process.

I certainly knew our personal connection was important - as we developed a special kind of relationship with each other where I was 'Mary' and not 'Miss'; when I brought in things to show you from home, and talked about my daughter, also a teenager.

I know I was wishing to communicate a 'normality' to you; that although I was there as a kind of teacher, in other ways, I was an ordinary person much like you. By letting you into a small part of my own life, I wanted you to know that you, and the work we were doing together on peer support, mattered.

Brandon and Cain, I know that aspects of the group-work were difficult, but despite this, I want to let you know that I remain totally impressed by your perseverance in the group – and by your hard work and commitment as peer mentors. You should be very proud of yourselves. You showed fantastic qualities as helpers and supporters, and I hope this experience has helped you see better within yourselves, the talents and skills you have been able to show to others in school. I hope it has shown you that you can make a difference to someone else through helping them, and that this is worthwhile.

All best wishes,

Mary

Letter To Bea

Dear Bea,

I can tell you that I was so relieved at the start of the interview when you said that you felt that the peer mentoring had worked positively in school. You talked specifically of the fact that you felt that it had given an opportunity that '*our boys*' would not have got in mainstream, because of their behaviour, and I think that I agree with you there; it is in fact one of the reasons I proposed the topic in the first place, and I felt reassured that we had similar thoughts in this respect. You also had lots to say in response to that first question, and for me that was reassuring again, because I was not needing to prompt very much, and it therefore appeared like you were feeling free to say what you thought. Of course, we had also worked together quite closely for a couple of terms at this point, so perhaps this was also a measure of our relationship. Or maybe you were just being nice and saying what you thought I might want to hear!

As you mentioned later on in the interview, we can both acknowledge that there were a few 'bumpy rides' along the way, not least during the training group sessions, so I recall when I asked this question, I asked it in a general, not very specific way, and this was probably a reflection of this knowledge - that it had not all been smooth.

It felt clear throughout our interview how attached and fond you were of the boys – again, '*our boys*' as you referred to them - and you affirmed that you felt it had been '*a really good step forward*' for them, and I took that to mean that it had helped them to move forward, and to make progress in some way. You talked particularly of Cain in this respect, and I know that you had become particularly attached to him, and were proud on his behalf of what he was able to achieve (you referred to this a bit later on). You said that you felt he had '*risen to it fantastically well*' and developed '*that little bit more pride in himself*', which also made me think of the progress I had seen, and it felt gratifying to hear this view reinforced by you here. What really comes out is a sense of the 'opportunity' (which you referred to a few times) that you felt the

peer mentoring provided, to show what the boys could do, that they would not usually have, because of their '*behavioural difficulties*'; you obviously feel that it is an important part of what you do or need to do in school, as you say, '*we are all about giving them that opportunity...*' I know that your role, unlike some of the other teachers in school, involves a lot of one-to-one work with the pupils, and that you get to know them as individuals, which probably gives you a particular perspective on their needs and what might help. Having said that, it is clear also that your role and working with these boys, who have much trouble in their lives, in school and at home, must have been challenging work for you, and I would not be surprised if it brought with it its own sense of ambivalence and internal struggle where you had to contain an awful lot, and still keep calm and smiling.

You went on to talk about the sessions, which you said were good, and you also mentioned the '*trial-and-error*' element of the way that we worked; you are quite right in intimating that we had to work on what worked, and learn, for example, that sitting for long periods just didn't suit the boys' learning styles! Although this seems obvious now.

I was interested in how you said you thought Cain and Brandon's relationship had been affected in that they became '*a bit more understanding about each other*', and through being in the group together, they now have something in common. It seemed like you felt that something from the group was transferring outside into relationships in school. I was really aware that the dynamics in the group were tricky at times, and I note that you felt that Riley in particular could be an unsettling influence on how others related to Brandon – because he could get very irritated by Brandon. It was very difficult to know what to do for the best, because I felt it was so important to try and stick with the boys and this for me meant allowing quite a bit of leeway in terms of behaviour. Perhaps it was too much leeway: later in one of the ending groups, I noticed that someone mentioned only giving one chance regarding behaviour, which is interesting. It was definitely something to work through – and as you put it, the boys, in a sense, stuck with us ('*put up with us*') as we worked this out, and we somehow came out the other side. I loved the idea, as you put it, that they in fact helped us with *our* learning (about them), as we

were trying to help them with their learning, when you said, '*...so they've helped us to understand them a little bit better as well*'. This was something significant for me, because I can acknowledge to you now that I was very unsure about running the group: how to best manage it, and how to structure the work. I was very keen for it to work for the sake of the boys, but it did feel, particularly in the early weeks, that there was a lot of disruption which then got in the way of learning. However, as you say, we '*dealt with*' some of those '*hiccups*', and ultimately you said you felt '*a lot better for doing it*', which sounded like you felt you had gained something from being part of the group. You also said that you thought that Brandon and Cain had enjoyed it and looked forward to their peer mentoring (which felt gratifying given my initial worries about how well things were going), and you mentioned in particular how well you thought they were both doing in their roles, in different ways: Cain was working well in helping Habib, and Brandon who you felt had '*the potential to do it*', was beginning to show this when working with the younger ones, who he was '*really, good*' with..

The use of the word 'potential' also felt significant to me, because a big thrust of the study was about believing in the boys' potential, and it felt important to acknowledge what could be done in the right circumstances. This linked in with how you described Kyle working with Maisie; you felt it was '*fantastic what he did*', describing the skills he was able to use in helping her with tricky words, and praising her when needed. Knowing Kyle as we both do, and how he struggles with his own reading and with issues of self-esteem, I could understand your pride in how well he was doing. You later talked of watching how pleased Maisie had been working with an older peer, and hoping that Kyle could experience some of this same pleasure in his reading through helping Maisie. I also thought it interesting how you assessed the boys' own sense of what they might be able to offer others: '*...actually helping others, when these children would have thought they never help anybody, they are only out for looking out for themselves, or with their difficulties they would not be able to relate to other children, but they do...*' Although you seemed to be describing the children's ideas of what they could or couldn't do, it struck me that you could also be describing the outside world's view of their capabilities

for those very same reasons. Framing this within the notion of 'opportunity' again felt significant.

In the second question, although you had already spent time talking about your thoughts on the group-work, I somehow insisted on taking you back there. This was me being a bit inflexible, perhaps a bit affected by the process, and conscious that it was on my interview schedule, so therefore had to be used. You valiantly reiterated some of your thoughts about aspects of the group-work that had worked less well - perhaps because they were bored with a format sometimes used in school, and not getting to the actual business of peer mentoring quickly enough. You also reflected that some of the boys might have found working on a one-to-one better, and that working in a group required a lot, and was actually very challenging for all of them, with some needing, for example, to be in control, for their own needs (*'...I think some of our children like to be the boss too much, they like to take over and that upsets others in the group..'*). This was certainly played out in some of the conflicts between particular boys, but I am interested that you say that this was also something they needed to master or *'get used to'*, in order to be able *'to go back to mainstream'*.

The following question was also related to work in the group. Here, in asking what had worked well or particularly badly, as well as possibly seeking some reassurance about things we had somehow managed to get right, I was looking at getting pointers about what, if we were going to plan a further group, we could do more, or indeed, less of. That the games had worked well did not particularly surprise me, because the indirect feedback at the time from the boys was quite immediate. I was pleasantly surprised when you identified aspects of the group-work which had involved some reflection on the boys' part. I had not thought of this. You seemed to link this with aspects of the social learning they did while interacting with one another, where they were having to exercise *'give and take'* and to *'compromise'* in relation to others' perspective. You saw this as a particular 'social skill' that was a product of the games and perhaps other incidental learning that took place in the group, and which the group was able to facilitate.

In terms of what you felt made a 'good peer mentor', you said that you felt all had the potential to be mentors, but that being older and more mature was perhaps an advantage. In thinking about Cain, who you referred to as a 'perfect' peer mentor, you mentioned qualities such as empathy and having 'a good understanding of how children work'. You also mentioned encouragement, kindness and care, and you mentioned this in particular relationship to the 'difficulties' that you described Cain as having '*in his own life*'. Despite his own struggles, therefore, you described Cain as being able to show care and understanding towards another. My own poignant and striking memory of Cain was when, during one of the 'I went to the market and bought a...' games, on having to think of an item for 'n', he spontaneously came out with 'new son...because I think that is what my mum wants..'. I know he was having difficulties with relationships at home, particularly with his mum, and this brought home some of the emotional struggles the children are trying to make sense of every day. It also struck me that he chose to refer to it during the group, although he did not dwell on it, quickly moving on (after we as adults had offered some words of reassurance about his qualities). I do think that the group had a particular function (notwithstanding the difficulties with balancing group dynamics) as a space for beginning to explore difficult or complex things, and I think we were both striving to make that space as 'safe' as possible.

Brandon, a very different child, you saw quite differently. We know that Brandon was often the catalyst for some conflict, as he tended to be impulsive and found it hard not to shout out, which then annoyed others. However, Brandon's strengths, as you pointed out, were his enthusiasm – and ironically, his ability to not be too bothered or put off if someone said something negative to him. As we know, this 'social oblivion' was not always an advantage in the group. Nevertheless, unlike for Kyle, confidence was one useful quality that you saw both Brandon and Cain utilising to good effect in terms of their peer mentor roles.

Picking up from your comment about particular '*knock-ons*' you hoped for in relation to Kyle as a result of the peer mentoring project in school, I asked

about anything else that you thought was looking hopeful. To this question, you again reiterated that you thought that working together in a group had at least in part contributed towards the development of a relationship between Brandon and Cain that you thought '*would never have happened*'. As you spoke, it again occurred to me how influential the dynamics within the group had been, and you reminded me about something that you must have seen as significant, when you commented that '*...the dynamics were very difficult at first, until Ryan sort of moved out and I think that when Ryan's not in the dynamics, Cain and Brandon, I wouldn't say they are best friends but they actually speak to each other in a proper manner...When Ryan's around Cain seems to revert back to being horrible to Brandon, but I think deep down he has quite a bit of respect for Brandon in some ways...*' This emphasised for me the difficulties often felt as pupils struggle with pressure exerted within the peer group, and the effects that can be played out within individual interactions and in groups.

Your relationship with Cain was again emphasised as you talked about how you felt he had '*grown up*' through the responsibility of helping someone. You also described examples of '*knock-ons*' in school, where Cain was now showing kind, helping behaviours in class and elsewhere without being asked, which you felt were positive follow-on effects from his role as a peer mentor. For Brandon, the effects seemed to be more about his personal skills in relation to others, where you felt he was learning more of an understanding of himself in relation to others, and that '*it's not all about Brandon*'. You seemed to emphasise this as an important part of Brandon's necessary social development; '*to understand that there are other people around, it's not just you, you're helping someone else and understanding their difficulties as well as your own.*'

My final question again went back to the group-work. I am now not altogether sure what I was trying to ascertain from this question, because in some ways, it seems rather obvious and unnecessary now; however, on some level, I think I was interested in what distinction, if any, had been evident between our roles in the group, and whether this in fact mattered at all. Your answer told

me that it didn't really make a difference, and that our roles played out as a logical consequence of our respective relationships with the boys and the school, and our relationship to the research. That is, mine was necessarily the 'leader' role, as I was seen as 'in charge' of the research and the approaches used. I also probably held a different kind of status role by virtue of my role as school psychologist, while your influence was very much exerted in your support of the process through your relationship with the boys, your role in school, and your developing investment in the peer mentoring project. Your description of your assessment of how both our roles changed was very interesting: you seemed to be reflecting that over time it became less about adults working with children, and more about us, both adults and children, working as a team.

This to me feels extraordinary, because it reflects something of the main ideas of the research: about how we as adults working with children often maintain a role of whichever sort, without really questioning who or what it benefits to do so. In this case, from a rather innocuous question about 'roles', you ended up talking about how your own way of working and relating to the children subsequently changed – both in and out of the group – in a way which you enjoyed, and which somehow allowed you to relate to the children in a different way, and they to you. This 'different' way was something which you felt they ultimately appreciated, such as being treated as '*equals*', and you being '*somebody they can talk to and trust.*' You said that with Cain, with whom you worked closely, it had changed your relationship, which I think seems hugely significant.

You finished off the interview by reiterating lots of positives that you felt had come from working in the group and in the subsequent peer mentoring project. You mentioned enjoyment, helping the boys feel that '*they are worth something*', giving them something '*to aim for*', and it providing an opportunity and chance to show they can deal with the responsibility perhaps not previously offered them, to '*give back*' and show what they are ultimately capable of. (You also mentioned that you now also have the school council running in school, as another peer-led project, all of which sounded very

positive.) You are certainly right to say they are all worth something. You mentioned '*perseverance*' a lot in this final section: ultimately reflecting that our perseverance with the group had been mirrored by the boys' own perseverance with us and with the process. A good point well made.

Thank you again, and very best wishes,

Mary

(See Appendix 7 for transcript of interview with 'Bea'.)

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Letter To Brandon

Dear Brandon,

When I asked you about what made you decide to be a peer mentor, I was struck by how clear you were about the qualities you felt you already possessed, such as being '*good with little kids*'. You mentioned that your mum thought that you were, and that had made you decide that you might try and help pupils in school. You were very clear in what you felt they needed ('*someone to point them in the right direction, tell them what to do..*'), but although I thought at the time that this reflected the fact that you seemed to like to be in control, i.e. telling them what to do, I also thought it was a nice reflection on you that you thought that it should be done '*kindly*'.

Do you remember – when I asked you a little bit more about whether you thought you had the right qualities, you started telling me about a little girl who used to live with your family, who you used to enjoy looking after. I guess that was you telling me that you did feel you had the right qualities? Or perhaps, you weren't sure about answering the question. I can understand that sometimes it is hard to think about ourselves in terms of the good qualities we

have – especially if we are not used to thinking about ourselves in this way. Equally, you were emphatic with your reply of ‘*yep!*’ when I followed up with my response that you had used some of these ‘helping’ skills before. You were either being very clear again – or perhaps you just might have wanted me to move on? In any case, when we moved on to the next question, about how you had generally found doing the peer mentoring, your answer implied that you were fairly positive about it. A particular aspect which you commented on was the fact that Sam, the person you were supporting, needed to work on some parts of his reading, and particularly needed to listen to you more – and not get distracted. I was interested in this, as it was something that you mentioned quite a few times, and I wondered whether being listened to was something which was very important to you – as well as something that you felt he needed to do for his own benefit.

You said you thought that the group work had been ‘*not bad*’, and you had particularly liked having the ‘*chance to show that I can take care of people*’. You obviously took this ‘care’ very seriously, and you again mentioned wanting to point people in the right direction about how to work properly, which is admirable on many levels. You appeared very confident of your abilities, when I then asked if you had found any parts difficult, saying that you had ‘*done it all before*’, and later that you had found working in the group with the other boys ‘*good*’. There wasn’t a lot I could say to that then. I do wonder now if you had really felt that confident – or whether this just felt easier to say. And in relation to working in the group, like the rest of the boys, I think you did wonderfully well keeping going, even when things were difficult, and I do remember that there were some difficult confrontations in the group between you and Riley and some of the others. You described it as being ‘*brilliant*’ – but again, I know it is not always easy to say when we find things difficult – especially if it means a lot to us, for whatever reason, to feel that we are competent in a particular thing. You did talk to me about how you saw the issue of the initial misbehaviour: that it had been due to the fact that the boys thought they had been ‘*bad or something*’, but that once they got used to it, they then ‘*started getting on with the teachers*’. It was interesting to hear your perspective.

The things that you said you learned in the group seemed to be about working with your mentees; being kinder, and '*telling them nicely*' if they got words wrong, and allowing them to work things out for themselves. These aspects all seem to focus on the peer mentor support, and I wondered whether, on reflection, there was anything you felt you learned from being part of the group. But perhaps, this was not your primary focus, and you weren't thinking in terms of yourself and the group as a learning space, rather a 'task-focused' space. Perhaps, this is something that I could have made more explicit to you all, which might have helped you to see the whole thing as a learning experience both for you, and the people you were supporting'. This might have made a difference to you, but who knows?

When asked if there was anything in the group you particularly liked, I thought your answer was interesting; you started off by saying that you had actually enjoyed '*talking to the people*', but instead of expanding on this at this point, you then piped up with the addition that I had been '*bribing*' you with the biscuits and juice I brought along to the sessions. For me, this was a little unsettling; because it was unexpected, and because it felt like an accusation. While I genuinely at the time felt that the juice and biscuits helped to provide a more 'nurturing' aspect to the group, I had not thought that any of you might interpret it as a means of 'getting you on side', or a way of making you behave better. Did you perhaps take this as a sign of my vulnerability? Or perhaps this reflects the particular way that you see the world of 'adults and children' interactions as working. I admit I was a bit taken aback by your 'bribery' statement; although I was able to ask you to clarify, I did not ask you to expand – and perhaps I felt a little embarrassed. Perhaps you hit a nerve; thinking back, there may well have been an element on my part of using 'child-friendly' elements (like juice and biscuits) to position the idea of the group in a particular way – i.e not like work in a classroom. Having myself done lots of training which has advocated using copious amounts of chocolate to facilitate the group (and as someone whose stomach is a pretty sure-fire route to *my* heart) I guess my thinking was that 'treats' can go a long way in sending a positive message about one's intentions. You then surprised me

somewhat again, by then going on to volunteer that '*..the most enjoyable bit was actually when we were working with them and sharing different points of view and that...*'. Although you said '*working with them*', I assume you were referring to the other group members, although it is possible that you were meaning the peer 'mentees'. I think I was surprised because you hadn't seemed to exactly relish much of the group discussions at the time, and there had been quite a lot of vying for time and space to talk. I suppose I was gratified at the thought that you wanted to express something positive in this regard.

Your demeanour and response to questions during the interview thus far (not saying more than you wanted, feeling able to query what a question was getting at with a '*like what?*') had reassured me to an extent, with regard to the uneven power dynamic of 'child being questioned by adult' and the fact that you might feel compelled to say what you imagined I might want to hear. Obviously, if, as some say, power is everywhere, then that influence will invariably be omnipresent for both of us. Therefore, I felt more able to accept your positive statements as being what you thought, as much as one ever can, in the situation and context that we found ourselves in.

The next question was one about the roles of the adults in the group, and how you saw them. You had clear ideas about mine and Mrs Nuttall's respective roles (mine to teach peer mentoring 'skills', hers to watch, monitor and relay back to me). You made us sound like something of a 'tag-team', which perhaps is not so bad, as it certainly implied a complementary relationship between the two of us.

You proceeded then to talk about how you saw peer mentoring as linking in with other things in your school life: '*...so because I've done that now (working with little kids who aren't so good with their work), I'm going to Malvern (a local mainstream High school) soon, I'm going to Malvern on Thursdays and Fridays*'. You obviously relished this mainstream opportunity ('*..soon it's to be a whole week away, five whole days*'), and perhaps your participation in the peer support project was seen as a means of reinforcing your suitability to be given a chance to access this time within such a setting.

As I mentioned, you didn't seem to be holding back from saying what you really thought – and a prime example was when you referred to Sam, who you were mentoring, as a *'maungy little bugger who sometimes won't listen to me'*. I gathered from your response that you were perhaps finding some issues with supporting Sam, and we returned again to this theme of him *'not listening'*. You described some aspects of working with him as *'a bit challenging but he'll get through it...If he keeps listening to me.'* I thought your use of the word 'challenging' was interesting - a mature word to use - and I also wondered where you might have heard it used before. Perhaps in relation to yourself? It was interesting that you constructed that Sam would *'get through'* the challenge (not you) – as long as he kept listening to you. Again, a strong sense of you being in charge as a central part of how you saw your role, came through.

But your thinking about the other things he needed to improve on also came through, as you went on to refer to the fact that his classroom behaviour also had to improve: *'...if he actually listens to me and doesn't be so bad in class, he'll do okay.'* I then tried to follow up a bit more on what was particularly challenging, and as well as reiterating the problem of his lack of listening, you also said he got very distracted: *'...him being distracted by everything else in the room – why won't that boy listen?'* You sounded part-exasperated, part bemused, something you expressed again when you went on to say (in response to a follow-up about whether there was anything good about working with Sam): *'Hmmm...he is willing to listen but sometimes I just don't think he wants to listen because I think he just wants to get back to class and get on with his work because he seems distracted all the time.'* Here, I think we perhaps get a clue as to the nature of some of the 'challenge' you were feeling; that linked to Sam's lack of engagement with you. When asked what you were going to do about it (not really sure why I asked this question) along with replying that you were *'going to drill some sense into that head'* (your little joke!), you said that you would help him a bit more, and ask him not to *'just go off into his dream world'*. You intimated that you would carry on (if he listened and stopped *'being bad in class'*), but that if he continued not listening to you, you would consider asking *'to work with someone else'*. This implied to me that, despite the challenges with Sam, and even if you didn't continue to work

with him, you wanted to carry on with being a peer mentor, which I thought was very positive.

In the next question, I asked whether there was anything that you learned in the group which you felt was helping you with being a peer mentor. You paused a little before answering (*'Erm...yes..'*) before replying that you had *'got a bit more friendship for each other'* and learned better to *'listen to each other and not start going off on one for no reason.'* This tallied exactly with Mrs Nuttall's thoughts about the development of a friendship between yourself and Cain, that might not have happened otherwise, and also your learning something more about social 'give and take'. This sounded to me like important stuff, and although you didn't say much more, I got the sense that this was significant.

The last questions focused on peer mentoring itself, firstly asking what peer mentoring meant to you. Your response made me wonder if you were a bit confused by the question, because you started to tell me about the little girl that you used to look after, which didn't really seem to be answering the question. Because I didn't really understand your response, I'm afraid I cut you off, to ask more directly what you thought made a good peer mentor, perhaps hoping to be clearer. I'm sorry I wasn't able to pick up on what you were trying to say – perhaps something about what it felt like to be able to be helpful to others? In any case, your response about what you thought made a good mentor seemed very closely linked to what we had covered in the group – about good listening, being patient – which while reiterating some of the points covered in the group, didn't really tell me about your personal insights. But again, perhaps I could have spent longer on this question, or asked it in a different way.

The final question was whether you felt you had changed in any way since starting the project, and again I was impressed by your answer, as it gave more than I think I had been expecting. You talked in terms of the role of teaching someone to do better in class (*'be more polite and attentive in class'*) and the responsibility this incurred on you. You linked this explicitly to helping

them with a future life: *'..If he wants to get a job or something when he's older, he'll have to listen to me first, then listen to the teachers...'*

When pressed on how you felt you had changed in relation to this role, you talked about your own behavioural changes: *'I've got a bit more polite, I've stopped going out of class, well I haven't stopped going out of class, but not that much. I only go out when someone, like, pees me off and annoys me and all that.'* When asked what you felt these 'improvements' (my word) were down to, you referred back to some of the social aspects of the learning (*'actually working with people; anger management at home and that'*) that we had done, which again was gratifying – largely because at the time, it had not always felt like a lot of that kind of learning was going on. So it just goes to show, eh?

You make mention here of some of the on-going support you must have been getting at home. And although, in response to a supplementary question, you say you didn't think that peer mentoring had changed you by giving you skills you hadn't used before (as you *'used to do it before, actually, before I came to this school... I used to help kids and the teachers gave me rewards for doing it'*) and you obviously had a strong sense of your previous identity as a 'supporter', you did concede some change.

When asked if you wanted to add anything else about how you had found the experience of peer mentoring, you acknowledged that you had *'found it kind of rewarding'* because you were *'actually getting to help someone who is less better than you at work so that you can actually help so that when they are older they'll say 'he did that for me and I should thank him' and that'*. This gives a big clue as to some of your internal motivations as you express them here, and this is emphasised when, in answering my supplementary question of how this made you feel, you replied in what felt like a very genuine way (despite some of your earlier 'bluster'): *'..good, because I actually feel like I've done something that's actually nice, helping little kids and everything, that need help and they are not that up on their work all the time because they are a bit distracted, like I told you..'*

This was a good way to conclude the interview, and I was anxious not to take up too much time, as I knew that you yourself could become distracted if things went on too long. I reflect now that for pupils who, like you, perhaps

don't often have a chance to be 'better' than their peers, or to be rewarded for helping, being a peer mentor was one opportunity to feel 'good'.

It has been a great pleasure working with you and getting to know you a bit more. I wish you all the very best in the future,

Mary

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Letter To Cain

Dear Cain

My interview with you was the last, and the shortest, of the three. We had developed a close relationship through working on the project together, and also through previous work in school together. You nearly always greeted me with a hug (very unusual for kids in your school, and for your age), and you had always been very open, which was something I wished to reciprocate. I was aware that you had a lot going on for you at the time, at home and at school, and I was grateful that you had agreed to do the interview; I was keen not to take advantage of our positive relationship, and wanted to make things as easy and straightforward as possible for you.

We got straight down to things in the first question, when I asked what had helped you decide that you wanted to be a peer mentor. You had replied *'thinking about helping people to read, people that can't read as good as I can, helping them so that they can get up to the level that I am...stuff like that.'* This I thought was a good example of you showing a caring side (something that Mrs Nuttall had also referred to). My next question might have been a little confusing, as I asked you to tell me about how you had found the group work and also the actual peer mentoring – two questions in

one, which might have been hard to disentangle. However, you went on to explain very well how you had found the mentoring, and talked about how you had become more focused in your listening to reading than you had been before: *'I think differently now because before, when I was reading with someone like Kyle, I used to just listen but now I feel that when I listen to him (Habib) it sounds different, like you can hear every error they make and you, like, you want to make them not errors, make it correct, everything seems different when you are a peer mentor to when I was just normal'*. This juxtaposition between 'normal' life and 'peer mentoring' life, seems significant, as you are making a distinction between your skills before and after the training process.

The next question asked about the group-work and how you had found it. You said you thought it was good, and that it had *'taught me a lot, like what to do, like when someone gets stuck, like sound it out and stuff like that, it taught me stuff like that.'* Again, you are referring a lot to skills, and I had tried not to influence your answer, although I was really interested in whether you felt you had learned anything from working with the other boys in the group. You didn't want to go much further when asked whether there was anything else, simply saying, *'it just taught me, taught me, taught me'*, which kind of closed down that avenue, but also reinforced a sense of the learning that you felt had taken place?

The next two questions were my attempt at getting more of an idea about the group, but was also asking a number of different questions at once; in terms of what you thought had helped you learn better (or made a difference in terms of the types of things that we had done in the group). When I used 'games' as an example, you quickly replied that yes, you had liked the games: *'I liked the game when we passed the ball around, apple, banana...'*. When asked specifically how you had found working with the other boys in the group, you were a little more ambivalent: *'...Alright, some of them. Some of them, you could tell they didn't hardly want to be there and some of them were just not listening and not paying attention as much as I felt I was'*. Here, you had sounded almost disappointed at others' behaviour. Particularly: *'like Brandon, for instance, he never stopped shouting out, swearing...when you're*

a peer mentor if you are like that because you've got like, if you are going to deal with a kid a lot younger than you, if you're effing and blinding...'

It seemed clear at this point that you were quite annoyed at what you thought was unacceptable behaviour on Brandon's part, and this tallied with your previous stance during the group where you had demonstrated quite high principles with regard to others' behaviour, and life in general (albeit while struggling with your own issues). You said that it made you '*angry, really angry that people would do that in front of a little kid*', quite a principled view, which seemed to emphasise the seriousness with which you took your role.

In telling me how you found working as a mentor to Habib, and what you felt you had learned, you again focused on what you were now able to do to help him with aspects of his reading: '*...if he doesn't know a word, sometimes he'll jump it and I have to stop him and say 'start with three letters at a time , so if it's a big, massive word break it into pieces and then put them all together. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't, but it was good...*'

I thought you showed a maturity in acknowledging that these support strategies didn't always work, but you seemed energised and enthusiastic about what you were able to develop yourself in '*learning how to be a better peer mentor*'. You appeared less sure about what skills this demonstrated (joking, '*Ninja skills!*') but perhaps this question was not clear – you reiterated the things you were able to help him with, acknowledging your learning when you said, '*..I learned that I can do that (help with sounding out) now. I couldn't before.*', but did not identify any particular personal skills of your own in this regard.

When asked what you thought made a good peer mentor, you focused again on qualities one might expect from a role-model, such as '*somebody who doesn't swear in front of them*' and '*someone who respects the youngers, the little ones...like I respect Habib*'. Again you showed maturity in acknowledging that '*everybody gets stuff wrong, even I get stuff wrong*', in explaining why you would try to stay calm when dealing with a mentee. You started to explain further, but couldn't quite think of the word: '*it's like someone who can...what's the word...I can't think of it..*' and I am sorry that I moved you on

to the next question (probably in my haste to be finished in good time) rather than give you the time to think of your word.

I asked you then, whether you thought you had some of these same 'good peer mentor' qualities, and you replied that you thought you had '*some of them*', and I thought it was commendable when you replied that you were '*trying to have all of them, but not so far..*'. You had earlier seemed quite focused on swearing when talking about how 'good' peer mentors should behave ('*obviously you shouldn't be swearing anyway*') and you at this point again identified this as something you wanted to get better at yourself: '*The swearing in front of the peers... I don't do that but I need to stop swearing altogether because I do, you know, sometimes.*'

This came up again when asked whether you thought you had changed in any way since becoming a peer mentor, when you replied that you thought you had '*changed the tiniest bit and that's like because I can think to myself every now and then, every time I swear I think, 'how come I can do it when I'm with my peer but I can't when I'm not', and it's like, it's weird.*' This must have been a personal target for you at the time, but I found it interesting that you had realised that you were somehow able to exert that extra bit of self-control when you had the responsibility of being a peer mentor, while struggling a bit at other times.

The next question asked what you thought you got out of being a peer mentor, and as well as '*confidence*', you talked in terms of a sense of satisfaction in knowing you had helped someone (in a very similar way to Brandon before you): '*...happiness that I know that when Habib grows older he can read and I know that's because I taught him to.*'

Following on from this, you said that peer mentoring thus meant '*everything*' to you, and the '*most important thing*' was, again, '*helping people to read so I know that they can read in the future. When they're older they can read stuff and get a good job and I know I've helped them get that job because I helped them read, do you know what I mean?*'

Again, I thought these to be very commendable sentiments.

In the final question, I asked you to go back to the reference you had made about confidence being something you had got from being a peer mentor. I went back to this because I suppose I already saw you as quite a confident person, so was interested in exploring this further with you. You went on to clarify that it was *'confidence to know that I can actually do it, like I'm not just someone who sits here speaking about it, but then when I come to do it, I can't do it. I know with Habib that I have done it, so now I'm the person who sits there and talks about it and does it as well.'*

You expressed a lot of connection with your mentee all the way through the interview, and I thought this was a nice way to end. I think you came across as someone with high expectation of others, and also for yourself, which showed through in the great work you were obviously doing as peer mentor to Habib.

Well done you, Cain! It has been lovely getting to know you and to work with you.

Am wishing you the very best for your future,

Mary

.....

Further Reflections On My Letters To Participants:

The letters constitute largely descriptive pieces, which try to convey a stance of openness and curiosity on the part of the researcher.

As they are based on transcripts, and an attempt is made to be as faithful to the original transcripts as possible, they vary in length and in relation to the themes which are most prominent. However, all reflect the idea of the interview as 'performance', and I am keen, within them to check out meanings and interpretations, in order not to fall into the trap of misrepresentation or assumption.

My letter to Bea was the longest, but in many ways the easiest to write; as the adult, she perhaps not surprisingly had expressed the most within her interview, but my memories of the interview with her seem less emotionally charged, which made the letter-writing exercise easier. Within Bea's letter, I highlight themes such as her pride in the boys' work, of new skills learned, of connection and the development of new relationships, the display of positive qualities such as perseverance, and around her ideas of the peer support programme as an 'opportunity'.

My letter to Brandon was harder to write, as it required thinking back to exchanges in the interview which had brought up some vulnerability. In reality, I found Brandon a fascinating (and often quite comical) character. I was also very aware of what his exterior persona (of a loud, often insensitive lad, often needing to be centre of attention, often falling foul of peer group relationships) might say about his feelings and struggles inside. I suspect that Brandon would struggle to have this type of conversation with me at this time, but the letter offered the opportunity to broach thoughts that would be difficult to articulate, but which were very much of interest to me. Within Brandon's letter, I highlight themes around his motivations to help others as a peer supporter, and his understanding of the qualities needed, of relationship and connection with others, and of his own change and social development.

Within Cain's letter, I reflect back the themes which emerged from the transcript, of a wish to help and develop others, of personal change and development, of achievement and satisfaction in helping others, and of his thoughts about his own and others' behaviour in terms of fulfilling the role of peer supporter. I also use the letter to Cain to feed back praise at his work and care, as this type of feedback often feels to be missed out in interactions with children who may struggle with aspects of their behaviour. Finally, although within the conceit of the letters, I am imagining a real conversation with Cain (and Brandon), I chose to use some forms of language with both that I might not usually use with a young person because of their complexity. I felt it appropriate to use them here, as a match to Cain's own articulate

responses, and also to make explicit the actual context of the research analysis.

SCENE FIVE. DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF ANALYSIS

The study had started from the belief that all children can be supported to enact their best and most positive selves, given the right opportunities. With the understanding of humans as social beings, actively constructing knowledge of the world through social and cultural mediation, 'peer support' represented an 'opportunity' for a particular type of intervention, which could be tailored for work with children identified with particular social and behavioural difficulties, to learn about social engagement with others through shared activity, in a context where arguably it is most required.

One significant idea which emerged from the analysis and interpretation of the data, was the peer support project as providing opportunity for the development of many positive aspects: the exhibiting of 'pro-social' behaviours; supporting personal change as well as social development; facilitating connection with others; opportunity for engaging in and developing relationships, with peers and adults, despite the challenge that this might entail. In this last respect, unexpected alliances were formed in some instances, and previous relationships between pupil and adult helper in school for example, enhanced.

There were also examples of the peer support process as facilitating engagement in mature and positive behaviours, where particular 'virtues' were clearly on display, reflecting values and qualities, such as perseverance, empathy and altruism, not usually noted in relation to this group of children. In this respect, the peer support process seemed to provide an opportunity for the participants to display a different side of themselves, which for some reflected a developing in confidence, and for others, a flourishing of 'true colours' reinforced and facilitated by an enabling learning environment. As hooks (1994) would see it, the educational space supporting empowerment.

Thus, I learned that the 'doing' could be truly meaningful through engaging in work which keeps the value and significance of relationships at its centre.

In terms of the 'being', and the development of my professional identity, the learning has emerged as a result of the fact that this experience of research has involved a significant process of reflection and reflexion, and ultimately self-discovery, with different 'selves' explored as part of that journey.

I saw, at one stage, 'that it was possible to watch myself as the researcher, shape the events under study (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), and at that point, it became clear that I was studying not only the boys in the group, but also myself as I worked in the group alongside them. Thus, the process gave rise to insights and new self-understanding.

The reflections demonstrated how anxiety and uncertainty were a significant part of my experience at the beginning, while also being rationalised on some level, by a Gestalt idea of growth involving 'destruction' as well as 'construction' (Harris, 1998), together with the Buddhist sense of growth often necessitating struggle. Some of the negative emotions during the process were also tempered by such things as sympathetic supervision and some 'Buddhist-inspired' self-compassion. (Just as Rogers (1954) held that if a person feels acceptance which is total and non-judgemental, compassionate and sympathetic, they are able to develop the courage to get to grips with themselves and give up their defences and face their true selves, so compassion when turned in on oneself as self-compassion, can help individuals get beyond that which stops them feeling able to be fully themselves.) Returning to Gestalt ideas, this approach recognises that human beings are active co-creators of their own experiences through a wide range of learning processes:

Ultimately, all learning is 'experiential', deriving from human experience. We learn by awareness and action (and sometimes our action is retroflected into thinking); by interacting with the world in a variety of different ways; and the end result is that we change ourselves in the process. We think, behave, feel and act differently as a result of 'the learning process'; we acquire new patterns which we describe as knowledge, skills and attitudes.

(Harris, 1998, no page)

My new 'patterns' were motivated by a wish to engage in work which had meaning for me, acquired through experiential learning alongside the boys in the group, as I became shaped by my interactions with them, and an awareness of the learning they were undergoing.

Ultimately, my new 'knowledge' involved a change in understanding about what it meant to do 'good' work with the boys, and also how these understandings could be integrated and incorporated within a changing perception of, and aspiration for, my professional 'self'.

PROLOGUE TO ACT VI: 'DOING IT DIFFERENTLY'

What decides our real merit as human beings?

Ultimately, it comes down to the philosophy we uphold and the actions we take based on our convictions.

(Ikeda, Buddhism Day By Day, 2006, p. 196)

This study has explored the idea that there are different types of knowledge and 'terms of engagement' which can be seen to have value in work and research with young people.

With regard to this latter point, for me, this involved ultimately feeling more free and able to explicitly distance myself from an expectation of being a particular type of 'analytical' or 'objective' professional, when something else – more subjective, intuitive and 'authentic' to how I increasingly saw myself - seemed to be required.

These again are questions concerned with what informs practice and the way that 'professionalism' is performed within particular contexts.

The following section will extend some of these original themes and develop a number of other ideas: the nature and impact of the 'positivist' narratives which have become attached to professional psychology with regard to ways of practice and research; and how it may be possible to work productively with the space between the 'personal' and the 'professional' in meaningful modes of 'doing' professional research and practice – practice which is able to nurture and engage the 'human flourishing' of both client and practitioner.

ACT VI – BECOMING THROUGH THEORY AND PRACTICE

SCENE ONE. THE ‘SCIENCE’ DEBATE: SHIFTING THE FOCUS

There is an abyss between knowledge and experience that cannot be bridged scientifically

- Damasio, 2000, p. 307-308

It is often difficult to come to consensus of thought within any major discipline and this is certainly true of psychology. Even if consensus were possible, it could be argued that debate and difference of opinion, contradiction and even contention, add a richness of perspective that consensus would not bring, and highlight the complexities which exist within particular areas of thinking. Old (and new) debates around psychology’s credentials as a ‘science’ is a good case in point, and continue to generate much energy - and given psychology’s historical evolution through religion, philosophy and towards a developing concept of science, divergence in this area is certainly not surprising.

More recent history saw psychology become intertwined with education (Billington and Williams, 2015), and specifically the measurement of children’s individual traits, pioneered by the likes of Cyril Burt (1909). This has seen the focus of much critique shift towards an acknowledgement (and problematisation) of psychology’s role, using the positivist paradigm, in the regulation and categorization of children and the legacy this has left in relation to contemporary notions of professional identity and purpose (Billington, 2000; Billington and Williams, 2015).

Applications And Implications

Fundamental debates such as these invariably lead to repercussions within the discipline, including a deal of confusion about the nature of the psychology

that is practiced within it. In this regard, for a number of years, much has been made, by various commentators, of the fact that educational psychology has grappled with its identity; with defining its role and identifying unified theories for practice which can reflect its 'unique contribution' (e.g. Anthony, 1999; Lunt, 2002; Ashton and Roberts, 2006; Cameron, 2006; Love, 2009; Fox, 2011).

Often buffeted by various cultural and political winds, educational psychology has needed to come up with new ways to reinvent (and even justify) itself within an unpredictable and ever-changing educational landscape. Over the last two or three decades, following a path trodden by other disciplines within applied psychology (such as clinical psychology), educational psychology has appeared to seek to assume a certain legitimacy (and to protect its interests) through developing and constructing a narrative of 'scientist-practitioner', within what can be understood as a positivist framework.

This narrative, carrying with it the unspoken assumption that in order to be rigorous, and to be taken seriously, a traditional 'scientific' paradigm is necessary to underpin practice and research, reflects the so-called 'technical-rational' view of knowledge that has served to privilege a particular view of practice as simply the application of theory (Bradley, 2014). According to Schon (1983), who contrasted the technical-rational model with his notion of the 'reflective-practitioner', the technical-rational model has not only occupied a prominent role within contemporary psychology practice, but represents 'the view of professional knowledge which has most powerfully shaped both our thinking about the professions and the institutional relations of research, education and practice' (Schon, 1983, p. 21).

Many have critiqued this standpoint, however, pointing out as misguided, attempts to apply the methods and methodology of so-called 'natural science' to a 'human' science; the construction of rational, technical and objective measures as the basis for research and practice, in the name of empiricism (e.g. Schon, 1983). Yoeli (2009) sets out his own particular critique of this evolution, highlighting what he describes as the failure of the attempt 'to

anchor the study of human behaviour to a larger scientific project (Yoeli, 2009).

For psychology as a whole, these debates reflect the ideological shifts experienced across the discipline over the past several hundred years. Back at the turn of the last century, for example, William James offered a definition of psychology as ‘the science of mental life, both of its phenomena and their conditions’ (James, 1995, p. 119). Even then, James bucked what was the trend of the time by seeming able to stay committed to elements of his early science training, whilst also acknowledging an inner dimension (holding that nothing is purely ‘mental’ or purely ‘physical’), and recommending caution in ‘accepting physiological theories as comprehensive accounts of psychological reality’ (Bird in James, 1985, p. xxxi).

During another ‘golden age’ of a developing psychology, Lev Vygotsky introduced a revolutionary social and cultural dimension to thinking of the time, and is credited with influencing the historical course of psychology as a human science from that time to the present day (Newman and Holzman, 1993). He emphasised, for example, an idea that our understandings grow out of who we are and what we have done, and contributed towards the development of a ‘new human psychology’ which challenged the dualistic nature of western scientific methodologies which, for example, ‘sought to separate ‘the world’ from ‘knowledge about the world’”(Newman and Holzman, 1993, p.1).

Doing Meaningful Science

These early interpretations suggest the inadequacy of attempting simplistic understandings of a ‘scientific psychology’, and hint at the fact that notions of what constitutes scientific endeavour are far from unified – indeed, that perhaps ‘science’ is not a unified term at all (Rose and Rose, 2013). Some from the ‘natural sciences’, for example, have even questioned the ‘empirical’ nature of what might usually be considered by the non-expert as fairly mainstream: Baggott (2013), for example, challenges ‘theoretical’ physics, (calling this type of metaphysical physics, ‘fairy-tale physics’) as impossible to test in a lab, and therefore as not rooted in reality. At the same time, some of the received wisdom surrounding empirical science has been called into

question: so just as Freire challenged the notion that the only 'good' knowledge is 'scientific' knowledge, and Nagel (1979) attests to the idea that 'good knowledge' is 'not just about what we experience through our senses' (Nagel, 1979, p. 143), Parker (1994) argues that both the procedures that science should follow and 'the claims made for it as the only purveyor of truth' (Parker, 1994, p. 8) have been disputed.

That 'science' has become something of a loaded term within psychology seems clear enough. Is it possible – or indeed even necessary – to think about how the term may be meaningfully applied to the work that is carried out within the realm of human endeavour and experience? For professional psychological practice, this is important specifically in the context of how particular traditions have become attached to particular forms of practice within psychology, leading to particular ways of viewing and understanding the human experience being explored.

Thus, while the word 'science' is now largely synonymous with an idea of rigour, and seems in many respects to have been adeptly appropriated by a 'positivist' perspective, this belies the evidently more complex picture. Billington (2006), for example, attempts to reclaim the term 'science', challenging the assumption of a particular framing of knowledge as being synonymous with a particular type of 'objective' methodological endeavour. He points to the idea that the term itself can have broader definitions and meanings, suggesting the possibility of a concept of science 'as a more inclusive, socially-situated practice' (Billington, 2006, p. 130). Similarly, Parker (1994) describes a social constructionist view which sees science 'as a form of knowledge which creates as well as describes the world' (Parker, 1994, p. 9). Harre's (2004) argument that qualitative research should not be evaluated against the kind of criteria that have usually been employed to assess quantitative research, in a sense puts quantitative research under the spotlight, when he argues that in fact it is qualitative research that is properly 'scientific', referring specifically to what he terms 'human sciences' (Harre, 2004). Harre argues that the traditional laboratory experiment paradigm in psychology was in fact 'pre-scientific', and that the task for quantitative psychology now is to take into account the reflexive capacity of human

beings, the meaningful nature of the data they produce, and the way that claims are made about individuals from aggregated descriptions of behaviour from particular populations (Harre, 1994).

Notwithstanding these perspectives, the positivist position which emphasises the quantification of human experience, in a world where randomised-controlled trials still represent the 'Holy Grail' of evidence-making, continues to prevail and, as highlighted by Billington (2006), within most scientific communities, positivist research is often privileged as more worthy and 'true'. This 'privileging' of the analytical over the intuitive, the objective and sequential over the subjective and holistic, has implications for the way that research and practice are viewed and subsequently taken up, for example within professions such as educational psychology. While this particular kind of scientific perspective may be viewed as justifiable within certain contexts, as has been argued, it is potentially extremely limiting when attempting any enquiry which seeks to explore the peculiarities of human life and experience. Once again, we become alerted to questions of the nature of what and how it is possible to know in a way that is meaningful. Marion Milner (writing as Joanna Field) in the early 20th Century, talked about the difference between knowing something intellectually and knowing it as a 'lived' experience; how it was possible for the 'lived' experience to be omitted within the scientific psychology of the time, and that 'the essential facts of experience were being missed out' (Field, 1936, p. 14). Field recognised the act of including herself in her knowing, as important but not always easy, and acknowledged the difficulty she found in actually 'living one's knowledge' (Field, 1936, p. 15). She admitted that it was the 'uneasy suspicion of this gap between knowing and living' (Field, 1936, p. 15) that first set her on her way, and ultimately saw the potential it opened up within herself, through trying to learn not from her reason but from her senses:

'As soon as I began to study my perception, to look at my own experience, I found there were different ways of perceiving and that the different ways provided me with different facts. There was a narrow focus which meant seeing life as if from blinkers and with the centre of awareness in my head; and there was a wide focus which meant

knowing with the whole of my body, a way of looking which quite altered my perception of whatever I saw. And I found the narrow focus way was the way of reason...it was the wide focus way that made me happy...'

(Field, 1936, p. 15)

This 'wide focus' that Field refers to, implies a 'richer' kind of knowing and experiencing of the world; one that includes, rather than excludes, various elements within the experiential landscape.

Similarly, this 'richer' knowing could be applied in relation to a professional identity which allows for the inclusion, rather than exclusion, of facets such as emotion and intuition. As described by Schon (1983) professionals who choose to pursue this method of knowing, eschew the 'high ground' of 'technical rigour and 'an image of professional competence', opting instead for the 'swampy lowlands' (Schon, 1983, p. 43):

'..They deliberately involve themselves in messy but crucially important problems and, when asked to describe their methods of inquiry, they speak of experience, trial and error, intuition and muddling through..'

(Schon, 1983, p. 43)

This idea of 'muddling through' in a very human way, resonates strongly with my own experiences of research and professional action as described within this thesis. The possibilities for meaningful interactions with those we work with as professional, which this way of approaching practice can awaken, will be explored next.

SCENE TWO. AWAKENING TO DIFFERENT POSSIBILITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL ACTION

At a point, or points, in one's professional life, one is likely to be involved in decisions about practice, including, even if on an unconscious level, fundamental questions about the type of work one wants to be involved in as a practitioner, and how one will attempt to engage with that work. Sometimes these decisions come about as a sort of 'epiphany' following a particular incident or moment; at other times, perhaps as in my case, these decisions

about practice come about through a creeping personal realisation about the position one wishes to take in the world of work and life.

Questions in this regard might subsequently lead one to consider more fully notions of epistemology and ontology which necessarily inform how we see the world, what we know and how we know it: what can be termed the 'thirdness' contextualising our practice. If we accept that as individuals, and as professionals, we are all in the process of 'becoming' (Freire, 1998), then as Bradley (2014) suggests, this project of 'becoming' can be what gives a dynamic and a direction to what we do as practitioners (Bradley, 2014).

As Freire asserts:

'If we reflect on the fact that our human condition is one of essential 'unfinishedness', that, as a consequence, we are incomplete in our being and in our knowing, then it becomes obvious that we are 'programmed' to learn, destined by our very incompleteness, to have a 'tomorrow' that adds to our 'today.'

(Freire, 1998, p. 79)

These considerations of practice will necessarily be influenced by any number of factors, not least of which may be the expectations to expound certain kinds of professional practice; expectations, some historical, placed upon a profession, and subsequently, the professionals working within that profession. The implications for the nature of the practices which develop are far-reaching, and resonate far beyond the individual experience of each practitioner.

What Is 'Good' Practice?

While issues of practice and professionalism, certainly within organisations, are often discussed only within the rather mechanistic realm of performance management targets set down as markers against which supposed 'effective practice' is measured, it could be argued that in reality, questions of what constitutes 'good' professional practice occupy altogether different space. Schon (1983) highlighted a distinction between professional and academic knowledge, with the latter always seeming to take precedence, with institutions tending to dismiss the potency and relevance of, for example, art and intuition within a knowledge base.

Schon pursued this 'imbalance' as a personal quest:

'We are in need of inquiry into the epistemology of practice. What is the kind of knowing in which competent practitioners engage? How is professional knowing like and unlike the kinds of knowledge prescribed in academic textbooks, scientific papers, and journals? In what sense, if any, is there intellectual rigour in professional practice?'

(Schon, 1983, p. viii)

These are genuine questions about the nature of professional practice. For those within the so-called 'caring professions', questions around practice, and rigour, become even more significant - as the 'work' involves purposeful interaction with other human beings - and the discrepancy between what it means to do 'good' work, and what it is possible to capture within a simplistic 'performance management' framework, becomes even more marked.

This work, in the aforementioned 'swampy lowlands' (Schon, 1983), corresponds to a space where 'ambiguity and complexity are more common than on the firm, sure ground where clear rules and guidelines can be applied' (Carrington et al, 2002, p. 31).

The context, therefore, is an irregular, often unpredictable, imperfect world, where people regularly get things wrong, but in the main are arguably trying their best. In this world, working amidst the frailties of humankind, it is fair to accept that sometimes rules can be applied only so far, and flexibility in thought and action are necessary to ensure that what is attempted is meaningful and does justice to the full possibilities for human experience and potential.

In addition, the responsibilities and importance attached to doing this 'good' work - by virtue of the vulnerability of the individuals it often involves – also becomes of significance. These ethical considerations go beyond the usual defining of competence in terms of the acquisition of 'a body of specialist knowledge' (Lunt, 2002, p. 71).

In many cases, educational psychologists and other caring professionals are making ethical decisions every day – often not even realising the underlying ethical issues that are present (Carrington et al, 2002).

Like Schon, Mercieca (2011) also attempts to get to the bottom of what is involved in a professional life, and what constitutes 'good' practice and research, and poses the question of what it means to be a 'caring professional' – and indeed, what it is that caring professionals do. Specifically, she identifies a strong ethical component to professional work, and connects 'good' work and 'moral' work as being two sides of the same coin. Among other things, she highlights the Aristotelian idea of a 'virtuous' practitioner, constantly trying to better herself in her practice. In this respect, professional guidelines can only go so far in being relevant to what happens in practice, especially given that we each bring to different situations 'our own core constructs and deep-seated values' (Carrington et al, 2002, p. 31). Mercieca concludes that what the individual practitioner brings, in terms of these constructs and values, is not only an important part of what ultimately makes for what may be termed as 'good practice', but is in fact the crux of the matter: the 'personal self' as participating in the 'professional self' (Mercieca, 2011). In this sense, it is as much about what informs *how* practice is enacted by the professional, as *what* the professional actually does.

The 'Professional Self' As Part Of An 'Authentic Whole'

While the practitioner/researcher within the traditional, 'scientific', positivist tradition is assigned a necessarily inert, rather self-conscious and, as Yoeli (2009) points out, rather detached role, other approaches, such as those from the interpretative school, rather than seeking to dismiss or minimise the significance of this personal dimension, seek to honestly acknowledge it. At the same time, it is important to understand the 'self' as a dynamic entity, which is shaped in social and relational contexts (Walther and Fox 2012), and as such, it is a fluid rather than an 'essential', static concept in the 'structuralist' sense; one embodying ever-changing possibilities. Returning again to Field (1936), for her, enabling the personal dimension to affect her observations and to show itself in her quest for knowledge was a significant breakthrough for her understanding of herself as a researcher:

'I had not realised that the no-man's land which lay between the dark kingdom of the psychoanalyst and the cultivated domain of my

conscious thought was one which I could most profitably explore for myself. I had not realised that by a few simple tricks of observation I could become aware of quite unexpected things in myself. And it was gradually, by exploring this region, that I came to understand what forces were distorting and limiting my powers of perception, preventing me from making use of that constant source of happiness which my earlier observations had brought to light...'

(Field, 1936, p. 16)

Here, Field seems to be describing a realisation of hitherto hidden personal insights which could be allowed free reign to add new perspectives to old perceptions.

Just as Field describes the scope that acknowledging and celebrating the human dimension in real-life, everyday experiences can give, Mercieca (2011) argues that a similar level of personal insight can add to the relationship between client and professional. Specifically, she suggests that by, for example, allowing uncertainty and our own vulnerabilities to be given expression (rather than being suppressed), we become more able to relate authentically to the vulnerabilities of those we work with (Mercieca, 2011): using our humanness to do good practice. In essence, this view implies that to be able to engage *with* the whole person, one has to engage *as* a whole person – which resonates with Lacan's (1977) idea of the 'full speech' that becomes more possible during professional interaction when we are not distracted by trying to live up to the expectations of what we believe the 'imagined other' wishes us to be.

Psychoanalysis has long acknowledged the need for analysis on the part of the therapist, not least as a protective measure in the interest of the client's emotional safety, so that the therapist is more aware of their own internal motivations in order to be able to offer the best help. This capacity to, on some level, listen to oneself and to swing the dynamic round to focus on the 'self' is a reflexive technique which could also be framed within an understanding of 'mindful' professional practice', (developed from Buddhist mindfulness practice) resonating as it does with goals of encouraging individuals to focus the mind on the present, and let go of that which can preoccupy our senses as we try to resist the discomfort that can be brought

up as part of our personal and professional lives. This 'letting go', often of habitual responses to discomfort, can allow us to remain more willingly in the present moment, and to become more 'available' to what is in front of us.

In terms of practice, what becomes of importance is not simply the presenting 'problem' and how to 'deal with' the complexity that people inevitably bring, but how we are able to both scrutinise and mobilise our human qualities and resources in order to respond in the most open way to what is presented to us in our work. This necessarily involves 'fronting up', and reflecting in the moment, about our own uncertainty in our practice, and seeing this as being a valuable, and indeed necessary, part of good practice (Schon, 1987; Mercieca, 2011).

Engaging With The Role Of Experience

This 'reflection-in-action' (Schon, 1983) is hardly ever easy, particularly, as I found, during moments of professional anxiety. However, as I also found, 'reflection-on-action' (Schon, 1983) can lend some useful insights, in learning, in Eraut's (1994) terms, about what helps us to make 'wise judgement under conditions of uncertainty' (Eraut, 1994, p. 17).

For Bradley, as for Schon (1983; 1987) this involves using the value of 'experience', and consciously and unconsciously moving away from rigid notions of theory towards an idea of 'experience-based practice'. Bradley asserts that 'experience can build on practice': in effect, practice becomes its own tradition (Bradley, 2014, no page number). As with Mercieca previously, Bradley believes that this speaks to the 'personal qualities' of the practitioner, and leads to increased self-knowledge.

Fox (2011) like Bradley, questions the 'psychologist-as-scientist' paradigm, preferring to see the educational psychologist as 'artist' in the application of theory to practical problems. However, while he does promote practitioner research as a means of developing expertise, Fox considers a reliance on experience as problematic in terms of risking attachment to particular perspectives. In contrast, Bradley's position is that the real purpose of experience is to make us more aware of our own limitations. Like others, he highlights the ethical and moral tensions inherent in working with people,

especially in complex situations and cases; in trying to do the 'right' thing, rather than simply an idea of the 'true' or 'correct' thing. In such cases, Bradley asserts, knowing what is 'right' is often a matter of experience and putting into effect the wisdom gained from practice.

Pursuing Virtue In Practice

While the managerial focus on 'inputs and outputs' and outcomes referred to earlier, is increasingly implicated within helping professions (Gardner, 2009; Mercieca, 2011), and might lead us to ask further questions about how the effectiveness of this care and engagement might be measured, Mercieca (2011) advocates a more fruitful focus on the actions, qualities or attributes of that practitioner which support the care that that 'caring professional' is able to give. She again refers to the notion of 'virtues', this time citing MacIntyre (2000), where the 'virtues' which the practitioner is able to express as part of their professional practice, become a significant part of that practice.

In MacIntyre's notion of 'intrinsic goods', individual professional practice towards the achievement of these 'goods' becomes 'a good for the whole community who participate in the practice' (MacIntyre, 2000, p. 190). In this sense, the nature of the practices and principles which are applied by the professional, through the cultural medium of the profession, hold a value and have far-reaching influence.

As Mercieca reiterates, practice provides the space in which the virtues are exhibited, and which will enable practitioners to maintain the integrity of the practice but also of the profession: '...thus we become good through the practice, which has to occur within the institution, but the virtues that are needed sometimes work against that institution ' (Mercieca, 2011, p. 119). The note of caution in the last sentence, hints at the idea that there is not always an easy relationship between the aims of an institution or even a profession and the values held by individual practitioners within it (Gardner, 2009). When there is this type of perceived mismatch between values relating to 'good' practice and that which comes to be considered normative for a profession, real dissonance can be experienced, which leads to the kind of

deliberations referred to earlier by Mercieca, and which were lived out at points within my own research journey.

Equally, we are often faced with making professional decisions in the face of perceived external (and internal) pressures, emanating from normative societal constructions of how professionals 'should' behave, which can throw us off-balance in relation to the 'good' practice we may be trying to enact. This has relevance for this thesis in terms of the internal struggles that are often played out, invisibly, within professional trying to do their best, and will be explore as a recollection, in the next scene.

SCENE THREE. PERSONAL SELVES, PROFESSIONAL LIVES: A STORY (OF LESSONS LEARNED) IN TWO PARTS...

I've learned that I still have a lot to learn. I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel

(Maya Angelou, from poem read in an interview on her 70th birthday. Accessed from www.wisdomquotes.com>quote>may)

I once had an experience which taught me something important about the complexity of being 'human' within a professional context, and about trusting in the idea of 'relationship'. It taught me about some of the powerful, unspoken tensions which can exist between our ordinary human frailties and trying to meet our own and others' expectations within the 'professional' role. A while later in my professional career, I had another experience; this one caused me similar internal conflict, but at the time I did not place it with any significance alongside that first experience. On later reflection, I came to realise that I had in fact forgotten important lessons from that first situation, which might have helped me act differently in the second. This is my attempt to re-remember and honour those lessons.

The first occurred while working in a psychiatric hospital (of the old 'asylum' variety) in East London...

As a young, naïve, support assistant working on an acute Admissions ward, I knew little of what I was doing, or indeed was supposed to be doing. My main tasks as far as I could work out, involved getting people out of bed, steering them towards ablution, breakfast and medication (ideally in that order), during the day, trying to keep them out of bed and hopefully involved in some kind of diversionary activity, and at the end of the day (after dinners, cups of cocoa and evening 'meds') steering them back into bed in the hope that they would remain there until the morning.

As it was an acute ward, the client group changed day by day, week by week, and people stayed for a little or a longer time, depending on which 'section' (of the Mental Health Act) they were detained under. This might mean 'informal' assessment where people could leave the ward as they wanted or more formal detention for a fixed period of time. Many different people, in varying states of distress and anxiety, passed through the ward, and I was privy to the stories and histories that they brought with them – both through access to medical records and through direct conversation with them. I found it a challenging job, on many levels, but was also aware of inhabiting a position of both power and privilege. My main aim was 'to do no harm', and my young, naïve self found it easy enough to chat, smile, absorb the incessant badgering for cigarettes, and participate in the innumerable games of cards or dominoes, as required.

One client that I got to know for a brief time, who we can call Jim, was an informal client on an assessment placement. Jim was in his late forties - although he looked considerably older, partly as a result of heavy drinking and the difficult life he had led. It became clear that Jim was very sad, expressing suicidal thoughts and ideas which had ultimately been the catalyst for his admission. We made a connection of sorts: I felt sorry for his situation, and he told me some of his story and the life journey which had taken him from Scotland to the streets of east London. Jim did not describe himself as an alcoholic, but this was how he was described in his medical notes. Eventually the medical and nursing team came to the decision that his drinking constituted his main area of difficulty, rather than an underlying mental health concern, and it was this that needed to be addressed first – assuming that he was willing. Since the hospital, and the acute ward in particular, was not

deemed to be the appropriate place for this to happen, Jim was duly discharged.

A few months later, I moved to work in a secure ward in the same hospital, where staff members were occasionally called to support 'critical incidents' involving clients elsewhere in the hospital. On one such day, I was called to assist along with colleagues, to an incident where a former patient was in some distress and calling to be seen: the patient turned out to be Jim. By the time we arrived, the situation had escalated to the point where staff were desperately trying to calm him down, and Jim, surrounded by these staff, was getting more and more alarmed and agitated, to the point that restraint was now being considered. A bit like a cornered animal, Jim looked around, as if searching for an escape route; for something, or someone, to help him. On recognising him, I immediately felt that I should show myself as somebody familiar, but I hesitated, and did not go forward. I hesitated for a number of reasons: for fear of being ridiculed for thinking that I, in my lowly role, had anything to offer; for fear of him not remembering me and subsequently rejecting my advance; for fear of publicly getting it wrong. As the minutes passed, the situation stabilised somewhat, but remained fraught, and Jim continued to rant and rage. It was decided that just two members of staff should try and talk with him. Despite myself, I decided to join the two. As I approached with my colleagues, Jim immediately called out to me in recognition, and visibly seemed to calm; he spoke to them while looking at me, about his concerns and why he was there. I felt relieved, but also that it had been an opportunity almost missed – to offer a familiar face, some connection forged from a relationship previously established - because of my own fear of professional failure. I was young, but certainly on some level I was disappointed in my inaction in that moment, and the incident left me with a new understanding of the seemingly small things, such as our connections with each other, that can and do matter in a big way.

The second lesson came some years later, while working as a newly-qualified teacher in an inner city primary school.

...In this, my probationary year, I was undergoing something of a 'baptism of fire' trying to manage a group of extremely lively Year 6 pupils. As things

progressed, the incidents in class of what felt simply like 'crowd-control' gradually grew fewer, and relationship-building, and actual teaching, were able to be established bit by bit.

One particular Year 6 pupils, Sammy-Jo, could be especially challenging - but she could also be funny and inquisitive, and as I got to know her more, I came to see beyond the 'gobby' exterior, and to see her vulnerability and desire to please. At the end of that academic year, Sammy-Jo moved on to High school with the rest of her peers, and that was that.

Many of the staff in school were local to the community, and from time to time, news of the happenings of some of the pupils who had passed through the school would filter into staff-room conversations. Now in Year 8, Sammy-Jo it seemed, was running into trouble in school, hanging out with a 'bad lot', staying out late and getting into unsavoury situations. One morning a short time later, the Deputy-head teacher informed us that Sammy-Jo would be coming back into school. 'Officially', she was there to help out in one of the younger classes, but the full story was that she had been temporarily excluded from her high school. This seemed like an attempt to give Sammy-Jo something useful and positive to do (she had always enjoyed working with younger children and wanted eventually to study Childcare) in a place where she had had positive relationships.

However things did not work out. A few days in, the Deputy, with solemn face, informed us that regretfully she had come to the decision that Sammy-Jo could no longer be allowed to come into school as she had been overheard using bad language in front of the children in the class she was working in. The point was made that she had been given a chance, but had subsequently let people down, that it was unfortunate, but that she had to see the consequences of her actions.

I felt very conflicted at this news: yes she should have watched her language, but she had made a mistake. And maybe she needed – deserved - a second chance at this time in her life. The Deputy, a charismatic 'opinion leader' in the school, obviously felt that a limit had been reached, and her decision appeared to be supported by the majority: there was no dissent that I was aware of. Things were further compounded as gossip emerged about Sammy-Jo staying out late with older boys, and there was the

feeling that perhaps this showed that it was all a bit too complex for school to deal with and that she was beyond our help. Inside me, however, there was dissent, and a seed of doubt, of concern, began to grow, and I wanted to speak out and say that perhaps we were her only chance. But I didn't do this, nor did I go to the Deputy to argue her case. Again, in echoes of the incident in the hospital a few years earlier, I felt fear of ridicule – of standing outside the majority, and speaking up for what I intuitively knew to be important: maintaining relationships which might well prove vitally important for someone's ultimate survival.

I feel sure I would act differently today, and in many ways, the incident with Sammy-Jo is often revisited on a subconscious level, as I come across troubled children who, it seems to me, sometimes need someone to stand up for them, advocate for them, and allow them the possibility of a second chance.

A couple of years ago, totally out of the blue, as I stood in a school playground waiting to collect my son at the end of the day, I inexplicably bumped into Sammy-Jo, also waiting, with a friend whom she happened to be visiting that day. She recognised me and welcomed me warmly, as the teacher I had been to her back then, knowing nothing of what had unfolded in my head, years earlier. Now aged 18, it transpired that she had a baby son of her own, and was getting on with her life. She seemed happy, and had the support of people around her. While at the time and since, I had felt that I had let Sammy-Jo down in not speaking up on her behalf, it was doubly significant and important for me to see her again as a young adult, making a life for herself, and it allowed me some closure in terms of trusting that life can work out in its own way, despite its complexities and difficulties. In terms of the incident itself, on reflection I realise that it constituted another important lesson in trusting one's instincts, in the importance of 'relationship' as something which really does matter, and in the absolute relevance of that understanding within the professional context.

PROLOGUE TO ACT VII:

FINALE: BRINGING THE JOURNEY TO ITS CONCLUSION

This thesis has traversed the domain of the 'personal' and the 'professional' and the interface between the two.

From its starting point looking at how a 'peer support' approach could bring value in work with a cohort of pupils for whom educational and life outcomes have historically been poor, It has explored spiritual, humanist, social and critical 'means' to the 'end' of meaningful work with young people.

It has described an experience of significant professional uncertainty, how this slowly gave way to the development of a new professional identity, and resulted in professional change in terms of perspective and approach.

It has concluded, in the last section, with considerations of some of the possibilities, and also tensions, which can exist when professional practice is 'done differently' in terms of an explicit acknowledgement, valuing and embracing of the experience, motivations and 'inner worlds' of individual practitioners and professionals.

The final Act will now attempt to pull together some of these and other themes which have emerged from this research study, and to explore their implications for meaningful practice in the often challenging but always stimulating context of people working with people.

ACT VII - CONCLUSIONS

AWAKENING TO NEW UNDERSTANDINGS: HOW MY KNOWLEDGE OF A PROFESSIONAL 'SELF' WAS RECONSTRUCTED THROUGH AN EXPERIENCE OF RESEARCH

When one is deluded, it is as if one were dreaming. And when one is enlightened, it is as if one had awakened

(Nichiren – from The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, Vol. 1, p. 758)

SCENE ONE. INTERPRETATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON A PROCESS

This thesis has been a reflexive account of my experience of a research project with a particular cohort of pupils, using a particular approach; these three aspects separate in themselves, but intrinsically linked as part of this research experience.

It has described a journey of learning which was ultimately shaped by the research process itself. Specifically, it explored how the research experience served to shape and sculpt my knowledge and understanding of my professional identity and practice.

In this regard, the thesis has described a process of professional and personal 'awakening', which involved a change in research focus, and ultimately resulted in a change in my perspective on how professional and research practice may be performed and enacted by the practitioner (in this case, me) in trying to do meaningful work with individuals.

Beginning

The research project started life as an attempt to explore the experience and effects of developing peer support skills with a group of pupils in a 'BESD' provision. Mindful of the fact that research on the benefits to 'supporters' had not tended to look at the potential of positive benefits for pupils categorised within the 'BESD' population, it had started with a research focus that sought to further explore this question: specifically, how becoming a peer supporter might be considered as positively impacting on pupils' views of themselves, while also exploring these pupils' ideas of what it meant to them to help others in this way.

However, as has been described within this thesis, through the research process itself, and through the journey of a literature review embarked on as part of the research process rather than prior to it, a more fundamental question emerged: that of 'how should I conduct my research and practice with these (and other) young people within the professional, educational domain that educational psychologists inhabit'. In terms of the questions which were being explored, then, the study was very much in the territory of 'practitioner research'.

The literature review explored a range of themes: the engagement with life philosophies which can inform and guide actions; the interpersonal and also environmental factors which can serve to facilitate personal growth in relationship to others; the significance of connection and connectedness in supporting universal needs and well-being; how realities and practices can become shaped by discourses within a social, historical, political and cultural context; and how critical, revolutionary and politicized pedagogies can be used to challenge social imbalances, especially in relation to vulnerable groups.

Within the thesis, this led to a consideration of how professionalism and professional action which holds all the above in mind, might be 'performed' from the perspective of 'authenticity'. This might be defined as a way of 'being' which places value on reflexivity and intention, and which celebrates and enables the existence of personal insights, perceptions and experience which

can be positively expressed as part of the intersubjective interplay constituted within professional interactions.

In attempting to address the primary research questions of what I have learned in how to 'be' an educational psychologist doing research which has value and meaning (and learned from the process of engaging in a 'peer support' project), it is important to acknowledge that there are in fact two aspects which are implicated: the 'being' and the 'doing'. The 'being' necessarily relates to the way in which the practice of educational psychology is enacted and 'performed' by the individual within the professional context; the 'doing' relates to the type of work which is done, which can be said to have value, or otherwise, and is implicitly linked to the 'being'.

Middle: Researching A Shifting Life Experience

The life I have acted and authored during this research experience has involved me shifting from positions of anxiety, supposed certainty, and also great uncertainty. The research experience has required and involved a 'letting go' of what I thought I knew; a frank acknowledgement of a pervasive feeling of something not fitting quite right, and finally the acceptance and understanding that something needed (and was indeed) shifting in my perspectives on practice and research. This shift was duly enacted, week by week, during my participation in, and during the governance of, the group-work activities with my 'peer support' participants.

Clandinin and Connolly (2000) refer to this 'shifting' ground when they describe the naming of the phenomena at study as being a far from easy task; however, as they acknowledge, these explorations are necessary and indeed par for the course:

'As inquirers, we tend to define our phenomena as if life stood still and did not get in our way. But life does not stand still; it is always getting in the way, always making what may appear static and not changing into a shifting, moving, interacting complexity.'

Clandinin and Connolly, 2000, p. 125)

And so it was for me: my focus changed and moved on as I navigated the changing landscape of my research experience, and my original research

'phenomena' changed with it. 'I' became the phenomena, and the result was a new perspective on my identity as a practitioner and a researcher.

To get to this point, the development of my research was certainly 'not an entirely sequential, logical and rational process from beginning to end' (McIlveen, 2007, p. 296). Much as McIlveen describes in relation to the development of his own work, large parts of the final product of my research have constituted a 'creative endeavour that was influenced by a range of professional and personal factors' (McIlveen, 2007, p. 296). These factors constitute the life I have lived, the research process I experienced and the person I have become as a result of these life experiences, and the 'creative endeavour' has necessitated the accessing and examination of the different parts of 'me' which are simultaneously embodied within my professional and personal lives.

In illuminating his reflexive research experience, McIlveen cites the 'theory of dialogical self' (Hermans and Kempen, 1993). This refers to the 'I' as being able to continually shift perspective, and describes the way that a person 'engages in reflexive dialogue with himself or herself and with others – real or imagined – and, by doing so, authors and acts a life', (McIlveen, 2007, p. 297).

Research can thus be viewed as an extremely personal endeavour, of personal learning in and through practice; not just involving the acquisition of new facts, but learning through a 'reflective practicum' (Schon, 1987, p. 8). Through this 'phronesis', the development through practice and experience, the research space can also serve the function of providing the opportunity to work through issues of practice which one may, even unconsciously, find discomforting. Just as 'Know Thyself' seems to hint at the need to be aware of one's own internal life and motivations, perhaps to better know and help others, this recurring theme as it appeared within this study, speaks of the value of developing an awareness of one's own feelings and expectations in relation to the research: bringing to the fore the assumptions and the mechanisms which construct those assumptions.

This can be helpful in acknowledging and moving beyond our own prejudices and assumptions, and to 'begin to fully appreciate the nature of our investigation, its relationship to us personally and professionally, and our relationship as a researcher and experimenter of the world to those with whom we wish to gather experiential data' (Shaw, 2011, p. 235).

In terms of the learning process within this research journey, just as archaeologists, rather than yearning after 'perfect' specimens, celebrate the cracks in ancient pottery as evidence and representation of a history otherwise lost, I understand that the ups and downs of this research process have been a necessary part, and reflect the learning which has taken place.

Ending: Finding (And Representing) My Voice

Part of the story that is told through this research is me finding a professional position, and the writing of this thesis has allowed the expression of, in many ways, my professional voice.

This has been supported and amplified by the use of autoethnography, which has served to put my experience (and those implicated) and interpretations of that experience, at the centre. As Gergen (2009) points out, the form and structure of the writing is as significant as the content. I used a form of 'layered writing' (Gergen, 2009) which incorporated the use of a 'scholarly voice', alongside personal and aesthetic elements, whereby the writing itself became a 'medium that carries a message...that more fully embodies the relational thesis' (Gergen, 2009, p. xxv).

The use of autoethnography in research may well be seen by some as the telling of 'mere stories without academic value' (Pathak, 2013, p. 195) at the very least, self-indulgent and narcissistic (Gonzalez, 2003) at worst. However, aside from the 'insider' account it allows from the writer's perspective, autoethnography can also allow the opportunity to serve a social justice agenda through the telling of stories that would not otherwise be told, and to 'disrupt the academic imperialism of absent, omnipotent, white, male voices as scholarship' (Pathak, 2013, p. 196).

In this thesis, I used my new-found professional voice to talk of things which felt necessary to say, but which, in my position, I would likely never be asked about; after all, I am perhaps too brown, too female, too working-class, or perhaps even too ordinary.

I also felt enabled to write about things which felt real to me; things which might feel too uncomfortable for some, because they relate to failure and uncertainty, issues which are somehow very discomfoting within the realm of the 'professional' life, although undeniably commonplace within the realm of normal life. In this respect, I was attempting to write as a 'full self' (Gergen, 2009, p. 225); to abandon some of 'the formalisms of traditional academic writing, and attempt to 'fully be there' for the reader' (Gergen, 2009, p. 225). In my own terms, I 'out' myself as a 'fully fragile and many-sided human being' (Gergen, 2009, p. 226), and like Gergen, I am interested in how this 'humanising' can contribute to an increasingly broad and also relational view of 'scholarship'.

Notwithstanding all of this, I can also acknowledge that the use of the reflexive voice as a central element of a research piece has some difficulties in terms of the reader's ability to critique what is described in the way they might be able to do with other research writing. The reader has, in a sense, to 'take my word for it'.

In this regard, I can only refer back to Yardley's (2000) criteria regarding what 'good' qualitative research should be judged by; also the idea of 'trustworthiness', as put forward by Wells (2011), and 'completeness' of accounts (as opposed to accuracy) as suggested by Willig (2001).

Thus, I can confirm that considerations such as a 'sensitivity to context', and the paying attention to 'process' and 'ethical and interpersonal issues' (Yardley, 2000) formed a central part of this thesis, and that attention was paid to ground the accounts in the personal, social and cultural contexts in which they were produced.

SCENE TWO. TAKING A POSITION

In nearing the end of the journey of my experiential, narrative research, one important consideration is the positioning of the work as a whole (Parker, 1994; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), and the part it may play in any theoretical conversation. Gergen (2012) specifically argues for research which makes a 'cultural contribution', especially with regard to relational perspectives, which can become research which is 'future-forming' (Gergen, 2012).

This research seeks to contribute to a future which engages in conversations around what it means to do 'good' research and professional practice with people: what it means for the practitioner/researcher and what it may mean for the people one works with - so that the '(narrative) inquiry can contribute to questions of social significance' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

In the case of this study, before the social comes the personal - albeit in a 'relational' sense, as Gergen (2009) would have it - and what emerged through the process of the research was the realisation that my professional experience and identity were not separate from my personal identity; that in fact, each was feeding into the other. In the same way, Field (1936) 'allowed' herself to be part of the data of her research; acknowledging that 'the personal is everywhere' and wrote about discovering a method for 'finding and setting up a standard of values that is truly one's own and not a borrowed mass-produced ideal' (Field, 1936, p.14).

When I reflect on the significance of the interface between my personal and professional selves, what starts to become clearer is a sense of the importance of the values and principles which have meaning for me as a practitioner. These include: a sense of the need for greater equality and social justice within our societal structures; a belief that the rights and needs of the child should be kept at the centre of the decisions made for them by others; a belief that children should be enabled to have voice and autonomy within those same decisions; a belief in the importance of relationships; and (perhaps most importantly) a belief in the value of optimism and hope.

These values and beliefs have all been borne and formed from my personal experience; once open to them, as Field (1936) found, I am able also to acknowledge the ways that they consciously and unconsciously inform my professional approaches and actions.

(While I would not wish to suggest that there exists no divide between the personal and professional 'self' (because the two are not the same), I am suggesting that there is value in not denying the personal dimension. Of course, it would be entirely possible to subsequently mobilise the worst parts of ourselves in this endeavour, but one might also argue that we are all made up of both good and bad, and that in trying to be 'authentic' in this way, regardless of our human 'frailties', one is able to get closer to authentic practice. Whether this ultimately results in better work with people would necessarily also depend on one's ability to be honest and reflective in this endeavour.

I would argue that for me, what followed on from this openness to the validity of my own experiences and influences, was a developing trust in my own professional practice, and a confidence that came from feeling somehow less constrained by notions of what 'should' be practiced or studied and how - not sticking to a rigid system as a substitute for using my mind (Bion, 1970, cited in Mercieca, 2011, p. 60).

In my case, this led to a further willingness to explore and call upon the other, often hidden, textures and dimensions of my personal self, which I had previously barely acknowledged as having value. Rather than existing as the hidden sub-text to the stories we are part of creating in our practice, these dimensions of ourselves can be allowed to become, unselfconsciously, a valid, living, breathing, acknowledged, part of the stories themselves: the personal self as participating with the professional self (Mercieca, 2011, p. 114).

SCENE THREE. 'ENGAGED' PRACTICE: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

'Being' And 'Doing'

A key focus of this research study has been how to do work which has value. My learning as part of the research process has resulted in the development of an idea of practice which I will call 'engaged educational psychology practice'. This involves for the practitioner, the mobilising of human qualities and resources in order to respond in the most open and useful way to what is presented to us in our work with people; first, engaging with ourselves and our own histories, with our values, assumptions and also vulnerabilities.

Educational psychologists are in the business of applying psychology to educational and developmental difficulties, and this privilege allows us great access to people, and to interface with a range of personal, social, cultural and familial contexts. In taking our role seriously, we as educational psychologists have a responsibility to acknowledge issues pertaining to race, class, disability and 'sexual/sexuality politics' as they may appear in our work, and we have the opportunity to engage with people ethically and authentically; with an awareness of the social, cultural, historical and political contexts in which we all live, work and by which we are inevitably influenced.

It is my view that this 'engaged' approach informs and enables practice, which can empower and transform lives: practice which is dynamic and insightful, which is respectful and inclusive, both critical and liberatory, and which offers a meaningful contribution to the society of which it is part.

Engaged educational psychology practice, can also be practice which is grounded in a 'relational shift' from a 'mechanistic' way of understanding the world, to acknowledging, celebrating and fully utilising the relational in our work (Spretnak, 2011).

In the peer support work undertaken with the group of boys, it was surely demonstrated that the learning and development of the boys in the group was facilitated by relationships. 'Peer support' as an approach is in itself a fairly simple strategy, but what it symbolises is more profound: it offers the

opportunity for peers to receive and offer support in a way which allows for the development of positive relationships (with all the benefits that research on the development of resilience has highlighted) but alongside this, it offers the opportunity for young people to develop new narratives of and for themselves - as helpful, important and valuable individuals.

This type of work with pupils becomes significant in terms of professional approaches which can provide valuable opportunities to support more positive outcomes for particular, vulnerable groups of young people.

The Use Of Narrative Approaches As Part Of 'Engaged' Practice

In terms of my learning as part of the process of the research, if doing my research interviews again, I would certainly now opt for a narrative approach. This would allow the participants to set the parameters of what they wanted to say in relation to their thoughts about the Peer Support process, but might also help the boys to construct a new sense of themselves in the present and for the future, which the original interviews within their semi-structured format did not have the capacity to do.

Using narrative approaches to help young people construct positive futures for themselves in this way would seem to be good justification for its use in research with children, narratives being seen as having important ontological status, helping to construct the realities that we experience (Hulusi and Oland, 2010).

As Billington (2006) points out, the dilemma in any research with children is that adult accounts may be different from the account the child might choose to express themselves (Billington, 2006 p. 136); in this respect, the use of narrative approaches in work with young people has been described as being instrumental in allowing them voice (White and Epston, 1990). It can also help young people develop more positive perspectives on their past, present and future, as well as an appreciation of their own progression and change (Hulusi and Oland, 2010). As such, the use of narrative approaches can bring an important sense of agency which supports the young person in feeling able to

influence important aspects of their lives which may not be going well. In broader terms,

Given the importance and influence of narrative approaches thus described, an important role for practitioners such as educational psychologists working with young people, can be to utilise such approaches to support the development of coherent narratives which can positively impact on the individual's construction of reality, and their lives in the context of that reality. As previously discussed, while a 'deficit discourse', particularly for those in vulnerable groups, can have the effect of promoting continuing and escalating difficulties, a positive discourse based, for example, on strengths, competence and resilience will serve the function of amplifying those specific qualities in the individual (Wagner and Watkins, 2005). When used therapeutically, White (1995) calls this 're-authoring' and suggests that when we explore preferred descriptions with those that we work with, we are collaborating with them in the re-authoring of their lives. This re-authoring can constitute an important form of humanistic engagement between professional and young person, and serve to facilitate the hope and optimism that I would argue form an important part of 'engaged' practice, and are necessary precursors for more positive outcomes for young people undergoing difficulty and challenge in their lives.

Doing Everyday Professional Practice 'Differently'

On a simple level, what is proposed in engaged educational psychology practice thus defined, is the striving to meet human needs in a human way, informed by the social, cultural and political context.

What becomes important is the connection between self and society; just as we as individuals reflect the processes and practices within our societal contexts, so too can these processes come to mirror noble professional actions and intentions. In this way, important principles, such as of respect and equality, can be seen as genuinely making a difference in people's lives

This is practice which is able to strike a balance between professional practicality and compassion; practice which is human and humanistic, critical and participatory.

As mentioned, this will have necessary implications for everyday 'educational psychology' through use of approaches and interventions which emphasise the relational and pay due regard to the influence of the socio-cultural and political elements which affect the Intersubjective space between ourselves as practitioners, and those we work with, as well as the outcomes for particular groups.

The result can be a way of working within research and professional interactions with people which is both honourable and authentically meaningful and which ultimately reflects the humanity which we share.

EPILOGUE.

In Buddhist terms, the great universe and the self – the great macrocosm and the microcosm – are one..... Since the self and all phenomena are one, all things are interrelated. All things weave a single whole in which individuals live in relation to all others. In other words, all beings and phenomena exist or occur because of their relationship with other beings and phenomena, and nothing in either the human or the non-human world exists in isolation. All things are mutually related to and interdependent with all other things.

- Daisaku Ikeda, 2006, p. 248.

This has been a study about people mattering: the people that we are in our work and all that we bring as psych-social beings, and the people that we work with within the social, cultural and political context that we share. Thus, the study has had a strong relational element, firmly embedded in the context of professional practice as a highly personal, but also ethical, and political, endeavour, shaped and informed by its ideological context.

This relates in many ways to the Buddhist concept regarding the interconnectedness of all things: mind and body, self and environment, microcosm and macrocosm. It relates also, to the idea that our inner world exerts an influence on our environment and those around us, just as we are influenced by all elements within our environment.

In this respect, the research experience reflected changes occurring both internally (cognitively and emotionally) and externally (in ways of practice); specifically, a conscious veering away from an idea of 'technical-rational'

knowledge, and an embracing of the idea that theories do not take precedence over lived experience.

Bradley (2005) writes of there being, in a sense, more to life than meets the eye, in terms of the place of synchrony and coincidence within the human psyche and within human meaning-making. For me, it became increasingly possible to have faith that whatever transpired would have meaning, and reflect something 'real' and important in the experience of the research.

As mentioned, in Buddhist terms, the universe and the self are one. This idea, known as 'dependent origination', holds that all things are interdependent with all other things. This is an 'interactionist' or 'relational' viewpoint, and extends to assumptions about the way we as individuals experience the world in general, including the way that knowledge is constructed and produced: through an interaction between all that exists in our environment, elements both seen and unseen. With this in mind, I consider the experience of my research journey as coming to fruition within the context of many other happenings, connections and relationships past and present, and also acknowledge that my experience during the research was not separate from the experience of those I was attempting to study, nor from the ideas and motivations of the research itself: I was both shaped by it, as well as shaping it, by virtue of my involvement with it. As Bradley (2014) points out, experience constitutes itself through discourse; experience is never our own, and the experiencing subject is never cocooned from the world – never free from 'other' – always unfolding in relation to the 'other' (Bradley, 2014, no page number).

Thus, I believe that things worked out, in relation to each other, exactly as they were meant to, and it feels clear that things couldn't have been any other way.

Lasting Effects

This study emerged from my own concerns with regard to practice, and the point of the research has remained its significance to issues of practice. For

me, the consequences for my own practice, of undertaking this research journey, have been far-reaching. At work, I have become a person more able to speak up on issues which feel important in relation to the ethical and political implications of the work that we do - where before I would hesitate to put my head above the parapet. I have deliberately involved myself in leading and facilitating work on developing a set of shared 'EP team values' within my service and see these as important in helping to re-connect us to our internal motivations, as well as to the significance of our role within the social, cultural and political context which we operate within.

I now also take the lead in facilitating the use of group Peer Supervision within my team, and this for me has constituted the single most significant new element of my practice. The group exists as a space for honest reflection on the internal and external influences on our work and practice, where vulnerability is shared and professionals can be encouraged to live out their professional selves as 'whole beings' rather than 'compartmentalised ones'. (hooks, 1994). This 'honesty' of experience has now become for me an imperative, which I strive to encourage within myself and with colleagues; rather than the misguided perception or expectation of needing to have all the answers.

For me this is an example of one important way in which every-day, professional working contexts have the opportunity to become participatory and even emancipatory spaces, which can facilitate the professional 'flourishing' of individuals, in order that 'good' work (of value and meaning) can be done.

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