What does it Mean to Support?

A study of how education auxiliaries interpret their experiences of supporting children with additional support needs in mainstream classes using interpretative phenomenological analysis

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ABSTRACT

The study of how education auxiliaries (EAs) make sense of their experiences of supporting children provides an opportunity to consider how support processes could be adjusted, thereby enabling more effective practice. Adult support in classrooms has been used extensively over recent years in the hope of removing the barriers to education faced by some children. This area was chosen for study as, with such a high level of both financial input and expectation, it seems appropriate that careful consideration is given to the support process.

The subjective experience and perspective of adult support has had little previous investigation. Through detailed analysis of interviews, this study seeks to illuminate what it means to support children with additional support needs, what influences this work, what EAs believe they are doing through support and what the outcomes are that they hope to realise.

Three schools were approached and two participants volunteered from each school to be part of the study. Semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed. Interpretative phenomenological analysis has been used as it allows an in depth, idiographic analysis of the participants' account, while acknowledging the researcher's own interpretations of the participants' words.

The four analysed themes are; *communication, interface and role perceptions between class teacher and education auxiliary, development of and outcomes from a genuine and reciprocal relationship with the supported child, judging the level of support, fulfilment and engagement with the role.*

I hope that this study affords greater insight into an experience that few other professionals in education are a part of. As such, implications are outlined here for the training of support staff and teachers as well as practice within schools.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction to the Thesis

The area and direction of research stem from my own observations and resulting reflections as an education professional. Some of the belief systems and understandings that I have held over the course of my career with respect to the area of adult support may not be quite the same as my current understandings and interpretations, following this study. My history and contact with this area, however, has led to my interest in pursuing the research questions addressed here and to the way that I construe adult support.

I initially worked as a science teacher in a secondary school in England. As a young teacher I sometimes felt uncomfortable about additional adults working in my classroom. I do not recall being offered advice on how I might work with other adults in the class, but generally assumed that they would have some expert knowledge with respect to the children. Particularly in the first couple of years, I interacted rarely with these adults or the children they were supporting. This memory makes me feel uncomfortable now as I believe this was probably to the detriment of the education of the children receiving support. My recollection is that there was little discussion within the school about children with additional support needs (or special needs as they would have been termed in England) and I think I believed that adult support staff would feel they knew what they were doing and did not require input from me. I also remember a sense that I found it harder to manage the classroom behaviour when there was another adult present. This was partly because I felt watched and partly because I felt that another adult managing the behaviour of one or more children in the class detracted from my authority and gave conflicting messages to the children. I do recall there being a general consensus among teaching staff that support staff should have an idea of the work to be covered before the lesson. In practice, the logistics of this seemed awkward.

Within the funding authority, in which I practice as an educational psychologist (EP), there is an overt ethic of inclusion. Indeed, the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc

Act 2000, (section 15) refers to a 'presumption of mainstreaming' in reference to children who have additional support needs. Within the funding authority this legal requirement is taken seriously. There are no special schools, although for some children with a high level of additional need there are special classrooms that offer an enhanced provision. Many children who access the enhanced provisions are also supported for part of their day in mainstream classes. Still more children with additional support needs are supported for all of their education in mainstream classes.

Now as an EP, I am often in the position of observing lessons in which children with additional support needs are supported in mainstream classes by an EA. In terms of inclusion, adult support may be a double edged sword. On the one hand it can enable children to be physically within a class that may practically speaking find it difficult to otherwise accommodate them. On the other hand, the regular presence of an adult close to a child could foster a dependent learning style and make it harder for the child to integrate socially with his or her peers. Through my class observations as a practising EP, I have sometimes felt that I was witnessing the creation of a dependent learning style and this has prompted me to consider EA support more closely.

This study was carried out in the Northern Scottish funding authority. In Scotland, the term 'additional support needs' (ASN) is used to signify learning needs extra to the norm (Education Additional Support for Learning Scotland Act 2004). ASN encompasses needs that are directly related to learning difficulty as well as wider needs related to a range of factors, including social and behavioural that could affect learning in some way. As indicated above, while in mainstream classes, children with additional support needs, in the funding authority, are sometimes supported in their learning by an EA. The stated purpose of the role would seem to be in contradiction to my initial feeling that dependence was fostered in children with ASN. The job description issued to EAs in the funding authority at the time of writing is:

'To attend to the physical and social needs of children with special educational needs, as directed, to help create a supportive and positive atmosphere where children can work towards maximum independence and integration with their peers. '

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In addition to EAs, classroom assistants are employed in the authority, the role of whom is subtly different and defined in their job description as being:

'To assist the classroom teacher in providing administrative, practical and organisational tasks and also to support the learning activities of pupils.'

There are degrees of overlap between the two roles in practice and it is planned that there will be a merging of the two roles to become a combined Education Support Assistant (SQA, 2009). Training for this role is due to start being offered in the funding authority in the 2010/11 academic year.

The Classroom Assistant Initiative in Scotland (1998) and the National Agreement (2003) in England and Wales have resulted in increases in the numbers of support staff in schools in Britain. Recent research has questioned the impact of this support. There have been indications that the presence of support staff has a favourable effect on teacher stress and workloads (e.g. Blatchford et al., 2004; Albortz et al, 2009) and while there have been indications of some indirect benefits to learners (Wilson et al., 2002) these have been harder to extrapolate. Recent press releases (e.g. Marley and Bloom, in TES, 2009) have suggested that much of the deployment of support staff has brought no significant benefit to learners and in England a reduction in the number of Teaching Assistants (TAs) in schools has been recommended.

I hope to add to the current debates surrounding the work of support staff. In particular, my aim is to give greater voice to the perspective of primary school EAs and to consider the experiences that they have of the process of supporting children with additional support needs. I hope that greater appreciation and interpretation of the experiences EAs could be used to inform best practice with respect to the deployment and work of EAs and support staff in general.

The specific research questions that I consider in this study are:

1. How do EAs interpret the different aspects of their role?

2. What do EAs regard as influencing their professional
practices and how?

3. How do EAs make sense of the experience of supporting children with
additional support needs?

These questions are explored through a detailed examination of the lived experiences
of EAs in the funding authority and will contribute to our understanding of what is
happening in this dynamic between supporting adult and child. Through interpreting
these experiences, I elucidate further EAs' perceptions of when the role of supporting
children seems to be working well, factors that may facilitate the role, as well as
obstacles to their work.

As an ex-teacher and now as an EP, I have observed adults supporting the learning
activities of pupils with additional support needs and have at times been asked to
work with EAs in an advisory capacity. I feel a greater understanding of their
experiences would aid other education professionals in pitching advice or training to
EAs as well as informing head teachers and class teachers on factors to consider when
working with support staff.

Interpretative Phenomenonological Analysis (IPA) has been used as a means of
engaging with the experiences of EAs. IPA concerns itself with examining how
individuals make sense of their personal experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2008). I have
used semi-structured interviews to explore EAs' subjective accounts of the experience
of supporting the learning activities of children with additional support needs. These
interviews have been audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The transcripts
have been examined in detail to look for recurring themes. Using IPA, I seek to tread
a line between the descriptive and the interpretative. In the analysis, I begin with a
thorough and rich description of the verbal accounts, moving on to tentative
theorisation. Such theorisation will seek to be grounded in and developed around
substantial verbatim excerpts, as is a key commitment of IPA (Reid, Flowers &
Larkin, 2005). I ultimately hope to develop a cohesive narrative argument focusing
around several themes that had been drawn out of the transcripts.

In the literature review, I first cover the specifics and theoretical underpinnings of a range of pedagogical methods used to facilitate learning and a brief coverage of adult and workplace learning. I go on to examine the extant literature on the area of adult support in classrooms and the training of EAs in Scotland. In the methodology section I take the reader through my journey in choosing IPA as a methodology. The philosophy behind IPA is discussed, as are the practicalities of using IPA. The procedures section covers details of how this particular study was carried out. The analysis traces my interpretations of the participants' perspectives from verbatim excerpts of interview transcript. Excerpts are used as illustrations of individual differences between participants and also of common themes that I believe can be seen. Within the discussion and conclusions section I seek to provide a dialogue between themes taken from the analysis with the existing literature. The thesis ends with proposed implications of the study for both professional practice and also for further research.

1.2   Author World View and Assumptions in Relation to Epistemology

I outline here my assumptions in relation to epistemology (theory of knowledge) and how we, as humans, see and interpret the world. These assumptions bear upon my beliefs about effective practice in education and my choice of methodology. My assumptions about epistemology occupy a largely social constructivist position, complemented by social constructionist principles.

My understanding of a constructivist position (setting aside the social element for a moment) is a theory of the individual person making sense of his or her world in response to interactions with the world (e.g. Piaget, 1928). Each individual builds, construes or constructs for him or herself a version of the world, a reality that exists for him or her (e.g. Glaserfeld, 1989). I view the individual as making sense of new experiences of the world by linking them with existing knowledge or beliefs. In turn, existing knowledge or pre-understandings may be altered in response to novel experiences or information.

I understand social 'constructionism' as an interpretation that discourses, or ways of understanding, emerge within society through the interactions between people (e.g. Burr 2003). This sits in contrast to a positivist view of the world in which it is assumed that ultimate truths exist and can be discovered through rigorous scientific methods or observations of an objective reality. I see social constructions, or discourses, as influencing the way in which individuals make sense of and construct their worlds.

I place importance on the 'social' side of social constructivism and view social interaction with other people as being crucial to how the individual constructs a perception of a 'reality' for him or herself (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978, Bruner, 1990). Other individuals act as 'mediators' to the learning or knowledge constructing of the individual in two senses. Firstly, they support the bridging between an individual's existing and future understandings. Secondly, other people can act as a channel to the individual learner from existing culture and discourses within society. In this way, the individual is influenced by prevailing discourses and social constructions within society. I see sense making and building of a personal reality occurring on an individual basis. I acknowledge, however, that personal 'knowledge' or understandings are influenced by discourses and social constructions mediated to the individual by other people. Although supported by their social interactions, the sense making of an individual is unique, since the way in which an individual makes sense of novel experience and discourses differs in response to existing pre-understandings and the range of discourses and subcultures to which they are exposed.

My world view speaks to my understanding of how children, supported by EAs, learn. It also explains how I believe the understandings of participants have been formed during this study. Existing interpretations of experience have not been uncovered, but rather have been created through active research with participants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction to the Literature Review

I begin the literature review by considering processes of interaction between a learner and more able individual that support and mediate the learning and knowledge constructing of children The areas of literature covered here echo my world view outlined above and can be viewed as social constructivist in nature. The theory of zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) is discussed, as is scaffolding (e.g. Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976), mediated learning experiences (e.g. Feuerstein and Feuerstein, 1991) and sustained shared thinking (Sylva et al, 2004). These processes are defined under separate headings, although there are broad conceptual overlaps.

The participants in this study are adults seeking to support children to learn. They are also learners themselves and how they have learned or constructed their own understandings of how to support and how children learn is of relevance. For this reason, I have included literature relating to adult learning and work place learning.

I go on to look at literature in the area of education support staff. I have covered guidelines concerning support staff in schools, literature on support staff and the support of children with additional support needs, followed by training available to support staff in Scotland. Some of the literature covers the area of adult support in classrooms generally while some is specific to those children considered to have additional support needs. Although this study seeks to explore support for children with additional support needs, I see both types of the literature as being relevant to this study since the needs of children viewed as having mainstream and additional need are not mutually exclusive. The majority of the literature covered is fairly recent as I was keen to consider documents and reports that have influenced current discourses and practice. Studies by Blatchford et al (2009) and Alborz (2009) have reached the popular press and have had a bearing on recent political debate. While publications are less numerous, I have included Scottish literature since this is where the research took place. Although less recent and taking place in the U.S. a study by Giangreco et al (1997) has been included. This study considered an area that was of

initial interest to me, that of the possible detriment effects to the learning processes of supporting children. Most of the literature focuses on the effects that might be observed as a consequence of adult support, both on learning and teacher work load. Similar to this study, O'Brien and Garner (2001) sought to give voice to the experiences of support staff through the use of participant journals. It felt important to include these accounts as this appeared to be the study that came closest to my own, in exploring the perspectives of support staff.

2.2   Social Constructivist Processes of Interaction between Learner and Adult

The interactional processes examined here draw on a social constructivist view of education and learning. A constructivist perspective asserts that new learning, 'knowledge' or understanding is not given to the learner as a complete truth, but is constructed by the learner as a result of the interaction between his or her existing ideas and new experience. Since there are individual differences in experience, each person will construct his or her own version of knowledge and own 'reality' (Burr, 2003). Socially constructed learning is influenced by other members of a culture and culturally transmitted views. Even if a fundamental 'reality' were to exist, it can be argued (e.g. von Glasersfeld, 1981) that this cannot be directly accessible to individuals as people can only have contact to perceptions and social constructions of reality. The way each individual constructs their own version of reality is inevitably a product of cultural artefacts passed on to this individual along with the activities and social interactions of the individual and other members of their culture (Kukla, 2000).

A constructivist view of learning has implications for the way in which an adult seeks to support the learning process of a child. If knowledge could be uncovered in a pure form and learners could internalise it in its entirety then a traditional lecturing or dictating means of transmitting knowledge might have more credence. If each learner constructs their own understanding, then a different sort of role, one more of a facilitator, seems appropriate. When I was a class teacher, I would have sought to facilitate children in their own construction of new understandings and would have

placed an emphasis on active learning, in which the child plays a constructive role. This pre-existing belief will have influenced my observations as an EP and sense of disquiet relating to what I felt might be dependent and passive learning.

Since the process of knowledge construction is different for each learner, it is important that an educator appreciates the unique starting point of the learner (Wertsch, 1997). Learners will approach a task with their own understandings of related tasks. They will have opinions and previous experiences that affect how a task appears to them. This view of learning necessitates the educator and learner engaging more actively with each other than would be the case in more traditional didactic teaching. The processes of interaction between educator and learner outlined below hinge on the premise that the adult (or more able other) should seek to facilitate the learner in their personal construction of new learning.

A counter-argument to the importance of the adult in the process of a child's learning might stem from a Piagetian view point. Piaget (1928) suggested that indeed children are active in the construction their own understanding and that new learning comes about via the interaction of a child with his or her world. He claimed, however, that learners tend to discard their own ideas when teamed with more capable individuals. This implies that adult support could potentially be detrimental, having the effect of de-motivating the child and making him or her more passive in the learning process. For me, this argument suggests not that adult presence or support would always be detrimental, but that thought and sensitivity are paramount to prevent it from doing more harm than good. The emotional climate (as discussed later) will be important to ensure that the learner is confident in putting forward new ideas.

2.2.1 The Zone of Proximal Development

Lev Vygotsy (1978) developed a learning model known as the zone of proximal development (ZPD) which has continued over the last three decades, in Western culture, to be used in informing educational developments. Vygotsky defined the ZPD as being:

'the distance between the actual developmental level, as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers' (Vygotsky,1978: 86)

The assertion here is that children can learn new ways of thinking or understanding, supported by the mediation of more able individuals. The child moves from observation through to collaboration and on to independent working. This suggests that thoughtful close adult support, aimed at bringing understanding forward, could be of benefit to young learners. It also implies that there is something active about the support offered by the adult, which may or may not be the case when children are supported in class by EAs.

2.2.2 Scaffolding of Learning

The concept of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976) has links with Vygotsky's ZPD. Although Vygotsky himself did not use the term scaffolding, the sorts of processes involved in what is referred to as 'scaffolding' of learning would describe how a more able individual can support a learner to move forward in their skills and understanding, thereby moving through their ZPD.

A 'scaffold' to learning can be understood as a temporary framework in place while learning is in the process of construction (Cazden, 1983). Key to this process is that scaffolds are gradually withdrawn from the learner as he or she increases in competence and autonomy.

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Applebee (1986) proposes a set of criteria for effective scaffolding:

1. Learners should feel some ownership of the task and actively contribute to the learning activity.
2. It is important that the task set is appropriate, in that it takes account of the initial starting point of the learner. This would necessitate the educator paying careful attention to individual learning needs.
3. There should be a structured learning environment in which progression can be clear.
4. Shared responsibility should exist between learner and the more able individual collaborating on the task.
5. The scaffolding should culminate in a transfer of control to the learner.

This last criterion is pertinent to the way in which support is offered to children with additional support needs. The implication is that there should be a conscious effort on the part of the supporting adult to shift control throughout the learning of a new skill, task, or way of thinking. Rather than there being an on-going level of support or collaboration, one might expect to observe an ebb and flow in the support offered to young people as they move through the learning process to greater competency and independence. If some support staff are not effectively transferring control there could be a range of factors contributing to why this is not taking place. Lack of awareness of control transfer as good practice is a possibility. Where a number of hours is 'allocated' to a child, support staff may feel they are required to be seen to be obviously supporting at all times. When Applebee's second criterion (relating to appropriate learning task) is not in place, the fulfillment of the last criterion (transfer of control) would also be difficult to achieve. This might occur if there was little differentiation of task set to children with differing needs. The supporting adult may have limited control here since the class teacher is usually the person with responsibility for the setting of learning tasks. Good communication between class teacher and supporting adult would seem important to ensure that the awareness of learning needs, task appropriateness and transfer of control is a joined up and effectual process. The question of effective communication is revisited in the discussion, following analysis of the interviews.

Insensitive scaffolding that does not adhere to the above recommendations might tap into Piaget's (1928) claims of learners discarding their ideas in the presence of more capable individuals. This might be expected where a learner is not encouraged to play an active role and take significant ownership of the problem. It might also occur where the task set is out-with the current learning potential, or ZPD, of the learner.

In practical terms, the success of educational developments based on the principles of ZPD and scaffolding, seems to have been borne out and reviews have often been very positive. Such developments have included reciprocal teaching (Palincsar and Brown (1984), the accelerated reader software (e.g. Ross, Nunnery & Goldfeder, 2004), precision teaching (e.g. Lindsley, 1990). As suggested, there perhaps exists a difficulty here if the adult setting the specific learning tasks is different from the adult 'supporting' the learning, as would often be the case with teacher and EA support. The concepts of ZPD and scaffolding may present within teacher training, but perhaps less so in the training of support staff. On the other hand, adjusting one's support according to the needs of the individual one is working with and reducing support as a learner progresses may also be common sense principles practised as a matter of course by adults in their interactions with children and indeed each other. It may be that an awareness of and attunement to the specific needs and ZPD would be easier for an EA working in close and regular contact with one or a few children, as compared with a teacher interacting with a large number of children. Where many children within a class are working within a similar ZPD, perhaps it does make sense that somebody spends time gaining a greater understanding of and tailoring tasks and the learning environment for those children whose ZPD is quite different.

It seems that there are potential gains, as well as pitfalls to close adult support. Scaffolding is about allowing the child to learn and complete tasks largely independently with the more able individual acting as a facilitator to the learning process. Providing too much support detracts from a child's opportunity to master tasks at the edges of his or her capability. It is this mastery of challenges that may provide children with greater faith and confidence in their own learning potential (Glasersfeld, 1989; Seligman, 2002).

2.2.3 Mediated Learning Experience

The idea of a mediated learning experience (MLE) (e.g. Feuerstein and Feuerstein, 1991) hinges on the belief that intellectual abilities are not fixed, but modifiable. A MLE is an encounter between a learner and more able individual with the result of enhancing the intellectual abilities of the learner.

Feuerstein (Feuerstein and Richelle, 1963) noted that many children who might be viewed as having learning difficulties were able to significantly improve their performance on standardized psychometric tests following intervention and mediation. This led to his theory that intellectual abilities are influenced by social interaction and experience. He outlined a set of cognitive functions and gave suggestions as to how, through interaction with more able individuals, those functions might be enhanced. The list of cognitive functions included abilities in; gathering information, using information, showing what is understood and approach to learning tasks.

MLEs will have much in common with 'scaffolding' of a learning experience. Feuerstein and Schur (1996) suggested that for an interaction to be considered a MLE, the following criteria should be present:

1. Intentionality and reciprocity. The 'mediator' must intend to encourage cognitive change in the learner and adjust his or her mediation according to the learner's response.

2. Mediation of meaning. The purpose of the activity or learning event is shared with the learner. The reason for the importance of the activity is discussed.

3. Transcendence. The intended change should be one that is generalisable and allows the learner to relate it to previous and future events. This links into the criterion of mediation of meaning.

4. Mediation of the feeling of competence. Feelings of learning related competence should be fostered. Acknowledgement is offered following appropriate responses and processes from the learner. In this way, there can be a heightening of conscious awareness in the learner of what they do 'well'.

5. Mediation of regulation and control of behaviour. The mediator supports the learner in inhibiting impulsive responding and creates an atmosphere that feels emotionally safe enough to engage with learning.

6. Shared participation. The learner should be actively engaged with the mediator in the learning task.

There are similarities between this list of criteria for a MLE and Applebee's (1986) criteria for effective scaffolding. Applebee's student ownership and shared responsibility criteria link into Feuerstein's criterion of shared participation. Applebee's criterion of task appropriateness links in to that of reciprocity in Feuerstein's list in that the mediator should take account of responses from the learner, adjusting their mediation in accordance.

Where a MLE might be seen to exceed the criteria set out by Applebee for scaffolding would be in the emphasis on meaning and transcendence, in addition to the emotional aspects of the MLE. The learner is supported in linking the immediate task with a wider meaning and connecting it to past and future experiences. It could be argued, however, that in taking account of the learner's starting point, as is suggested for scaffolding, that the learner may also be encouraged to link the new task in with their existing understandings.

2.2.4 Sustained Shared Thinking

The construct of Sustained Shared Thinking (SST) proposed by Kathy Sylva et al (e.g. 2004) also has elements in common with ZPD and scaffolding and MLE. In her longitudinal study, funded by the DfES, into the effective provision of pre-school education, Sylva suggests that SST is important in extending the learning of children. SST can be viewed as taking place where two or more individuals work together in an intellectual way such as to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate an activity or extend a narrative. Both parties should contribute and it should extend thinking. It is suggested that adults may contribute through the use of modelling or open ended questions. This was an extensive study using a mixed methods approach. Over 3000

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children were involved in the study and a huge amount of observation took place looking at when and where SST and effective interactions between adults and children took place. Some more intensive case studies were also included. The study concluded that:

'Having trained teachers working with children in pre-school settings for a substantial proportion of time had the greatest (positive) impact on quality' (Sylva, 2004:4)

This bears upon the work of EAs and support staff in general if their presence leads to a reduction in contact time between the child and a trained teacher (as discussed below). It is acknowledged that the claims in Sylva et al.'s study are specific to the pre-school context and may not necessarily follow through into the primary school setting. There may be differences in the learning styles of pre-school and older children and it is likely that children learn more through social learning (copying) in the very early years. However, the claim that the perceived benefit of the presence of trained teachers sits alongside the assertion that SST benefits the learning of children. As part of their initial training, teachers study pedagogical theory. As such, their attempts to bring forward the learning of children are likely to be influenced by these theories. Without such study, the practice of support staff seems less likely to be informed by an awareness of why careful scaffolding, questioning and debate would be important. In addition, Ho, Watkins and Kelly (2001) and later Akerlind (2004) have proposed that even before discussion of the specifics of how productive teaching or facilitating might take place, the underlying conceptions of the processes of teaching and learning held by educators are crucial. If principles of learning support are based on a constructivist view of learning, these claims imply that reflection upon constructivist views of learning should precede discussion of the practicalities of support hinging on such ideas.

Anke Konig (2009) completed a study which draws on the idea of SST. Video footage was analysed to look at the nature of the interactions between German pre-school teachers and children. The starting point of the study is that the interactions between adults and children form the basis of a stimulating learning environment. Evidence was sought within the footage for SST, emotional engagement with children,

negotiative processes and specific ways of posing questions. Konig concludes that there was relatively little evidence of the above forms of interaction being used within the settings studied.

It was Konig's research that initially gave me the inspiration for my study. There were elements of her work with which I identified, in respect of informal and passing observations of interactions between support staff and children. I was concerned that similar findings might be found in analysing the interactions of children and EAs. The difference between Konig's study and this study is that, after deliberation, I felt that a detailed qualitative look at the experiences and viewpoints of EAs may at this point be more illuminating than a largely quantitative categorisation of the types of interactions displayed. Konig used observations and quantified the different sorts of interactional processes that occurred between adult and child. These sorts of observations could miss the subtleties of interaction between two people that have grown to know each other well. They will also miss the personal reasons held by the observed interactions that would help to explore 'why' the actors in the interaction behave as they do.

The concepts of ZPD, scaffolding and MLE and SST have been considered here as they are important elements of the interaction processes of adults supporting children in their learning. They are not specific to support staff in schools working with children with additional support needs. The following is a review of the current history of support staff in mainstream classrooms.

2.3   Adult and Workplace Learning

My assumptions about adult learning are broadly similar to those detailed above for child learning and hinge on social constructivist principles. In practice, the way that workplace learning takes place may have some differences to classroom based learning. These differences may have more to do with the context and purpose of the learning than the fact that the learner is an adult, not a child.

Malcolm Knowles (1984) suggests a set of assumptions about adult learning:

1. Self concept: With increasing maturity, there is a move from being a dependent individual to a self-directed human being.

2. Experience: Increasing maturity brings an expanding wealth of experience that can support learning.

3. Readiness to learn: With greater maturity the readiness to learn is more oriented to the developmental tasks of the leaner's social roles.

4. Orientation to learning: There is increasing immediacy of application of new learning for more mature individuals. This can bring orientation of learning to greater problem centredness, rather than subject centredness.

5. Motivation to learn: Greater maturity brings internalisation of motivation.

It is easy to see how these assumptions map on to some of the criteria for MLEs and successful scaffolding. Points of commonality include the need to see meaning, to have ownership of the learning experience and the benefit of internal motivation. Differences may exist since the purpose of formalised learning may be different for adults. Although children engage in new learning experiences in their day-to-day lives, curricular learning in a school setting is often removed from the direct application of that learning. Adults will often be in the position of choosing the focus for learning which may well (especially at work) be of direct relevance to their daily activities. As suggested above, adults could have a richer experience to draw on. A more complex structure of pre-understandings is likely to interact with new learning, but could also present a barrier to adults where pre-understandings, that have been held for many years, sit in contrast to new information.

It can be argued that there is nothing intrinsically different about androgogy (theory of adult learning) compared with pedagogy (theory of child learning) (e.g.Kidd, 1978). Some of the distinctions made by Knowles may be less relevant given the current climate of pedagogy and practice of child learning and teaching. The suggestion that adults have greater internalisation of motivation may have more to do with problems arising in traditional models of pedagogy in which punishment and reward have been used to encourage learning. As I suggested above, the differing contexts of adult and child formalised learning may give rise to some discontinuity in the practical activities involved in learning.

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Kolb (1984) proposes a description of the processes of adult learning. Again, this model appears to hinge on an assumption of a greater immediacy of learning application, as might be expected in work based learning. I do not interpret this model as indication that adults intrinsically learn differently to children. Kolb (1984) suggests a cyclical process in which concrete experience gives rise to reflective observation. Reflective observation in turn brings about abstract conceptualisation which feeds into active experimentation, leading to further concrete experience. In practice this means that the learner reflects upon and make sense of direct experience. Through reflection, the learner arrives at his or her own understandings and formation of rules about the experience. This reflection, sense making and rule generation leads the learner to try out new responses and behaviours which form the basis of further concrete experience to be reflected upon.

The apprenticeship or 'situated learning' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) model of learning argues that learners move from being in a peripheral role to playing an increasingly active role. This suggests that for new employees, a period of observation, or social learning (Bandura, 1977) should precede increasing engagement with an active role. This model might appear to sit in contrast to Kolb's (1984) cyclical process if we understand 'concrete experience' as necessarily being active in nature. If direct observation is also viewed as experience then the two models do not contradict each other. The learner can observe the practice of more able or experienced individuals, reflect upon it and make his or her own sense of the observations. This can then lead to the learner experimenting with active participation which will give rise to a different set of concrete experiences to be reflected upon. What Kolb's (1984) model does not appear to comment on is how the phases of reflection and abstract conceptualisation might differ depending on whether they are carried out alone by the learner or in collaboration with peers or more able others. The latter scenario would enable the inclusion of social constructions and discourses into the understandings of the learner.

Eraut (e.g. 2007) suggests that the majority of learning within the workplace is informal. Again, this is not a suggestion that adults go through qualitatively different learning experiences to children. It is a comment on the nature of learning within a

particular type of context. It is argued that although learning is informal and perhaps incidental in nature there is still much that can be done to enhance such learning. Eraut (2007) suggests that observation followed by reflective discussion with other professionals can allow workplace learners to become privy to the tacit knowledge and intuitive decision making of others, elements that would not be open to observation alone. There is a perceived advantage of learning about the workplace and workplace activities informally while at work, in preference to formal learning in a training setting. Learning is more easily contextualised with observations being linked to discussion. There is not the difficulty of selecting potentially relevant knowledge or understanding acquired in a different context for use within the workplace (Eraut, 2004a).

Eraut et al (2000) describe a relationship between learner confidence, supportive relationships and workplace challenges. Undertaking challenges is encouraged by supportive relationships. Meeting the demands of challenges leads to enhanced confidence. The absence of supportive relationships and meeting of challenges could bring about a downward slide in confidence and learner motivation. These points have implications for the relationship between the EA and CT. The CT is in a position to be able to offer a supportive relationship to the EA, thereby fostering the pursuit of challenges and further confidence and motivation to learn.

My interpretation of the literature is that there are not necessarily qualitative differences between the learning processes of children (e.g. those supported by EAs) and adults (e.g. EAs themselves). What I do suggest is that the context of workplace learning could necessitate particular considerations if successful learning is to be encouraged. Such considerations include opportunities for observational learning, the facility for reflection (possibly in collaboration with others), the fostering of supportive relationships and the pursuit of new challenges on the part of the learner.

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2.4   Recent History of Support Staff in Mainstream Classrooms

The numbers of adults supporting children within mainstream classrooms in England, Wales and Scotland have increased over the last two decades. The initial rationale was to reduce the workload of teaching staff and it was believed that higher adult to child ratios would increase pupil achievement. Suggestions have been made recently that the large numbers of support staff in schools has not led to the positive effects that were intended.

In Scotland, the Classroom Assistant Initiative (as reviewed by Schlapp et al, 2001) recommended an increase in the numbers of adult support staff in classes with the aim of achieving an adult to child ratio of 1:15. The rationale for this move was that smaller class sizes were seen as allowing children to achieve better and also that more supporting adults would lead to a reduction in the workload of teachers. In 2001(updated in 2006) the Scottish Executive Education Department (now The Scottish Government) published the report 'A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century'. This report documents that a key function of support staff is in reducing the administrative and non-teaching work load of teachers, (p.16).

There is the possibility that this form of statement could affect the way the role of support staff is viewed by teachers. The mention here is specifically of classroom assistants rather than EAs, however, as mentioned above, there is often a merging of the two roles and indeed some staff take on both roles. The explicit message to teachers is that support staff are present to reduce the burden on teachers. There is no explicit message about potential benefits and ways of collaborating with support staff.

In England, the National Agreement 'Raising Standards and Tackling Workload' was published in 2003. This report contains recommendations for new staffing levels and deployment of support staff. Like the Scottish report, the title promotes the message that support staff are present to reduce teacher workload associated with 'non-teaching' tasks. I do not argue that there is anything wrong, per se, with other members of staff completing some tasks in place of teachers. I would question whether a strong message in the absence of other messages might affect the dynamic

between teachers and support staff. This latter report does, however, recommend that support staff are recognised for their role and given opportunities for career progression. It also introduces the idea of higher level T.A.s.

In the current climate of national financial difficulty, questions have been raised in the media regarding the cost effectiveness of support staff within the classrooms. A huge amount of money is spent across England, Scotland and Wales and the fear has been publicly mooted that this has not been money well spent. In England in the academic year 2007-8 the total spent on support staff came to £4.2 billion (Marley and Bloom in the TES, Sep 2009). Within the small funding authority, the sum spent on EA support is over £2.6 million. This article, which takes from the research led by Blatchford (2009), claimed that those children with the most support made an average of a year's less progress than their peers with the least support. It is claimed that the above holds true even when factors such as level of educational difficulty are controlled for. The TES article also includes Christina McAnea, Head of Unison, stating her belief that schools had been overly concerned with ensuring high numbers of adults within classrooms, to the detriment of making sure they were effective. In the same month, an internal government report commissioned by Ed Balls, then secretary of state for the UK Labour Government, was described by the BBC (2009). The report was said to have recommended that 40,000 TAs could go with no adverse effects to education. If this claim is given any serious consideration it should necessitate inspection of the support process from a variety of angles. Linear academic 'progress' may be harder to establish for children whose educational needs fall outside the norm. The report asserts that a reduction in progress holds even when controlling for level of educational difficulty. Reasons for educational difficulty will be numerous and varied and at times progress for a child with additional support needs may not be available to traditional assessment. Task related confidence, willingness to attend school, increased independence in learning activities and organisational skills may be some of the forms of 'progress' that would be important for some children, could be enhanced by additional adult support and may be missed by assessment.

These questions relating to the expenditure of money in education have come at a time of national financial crisis, when there is a keenness to ensure that any money spent is money well spent. Politicians, union heads and researchers alike have called

into question the effectiveness of the current practice surrounding adult support staff in schools.

2.5 Themes arising from the Literature on Support Staff

Much of the literature considered here is from England as this is the source of the majority of UK research. There are some Scottish reports reviewed, in addition to one from the US. The conclusions drawn about the impact of the role of support staff are mixed. Some suggest that there could be positive outcomes seen as a result of this work (e.g. Albortz et al. 2009), others conclude that there are no tangible benefits (e.g. Schlapp et al. 2001), while still further studies caution that detrimental effects may be seen as a result of the presence of support staff (e.g. Giangreco et al 1997). The information here is organised according to the themes that appear to arise from the literature. The themes are:

- Benefits to the teacher versus benefits to the pupil
- Fragmentary deployment
- The support staff- teacher interface
- The Emotional element to the role of support staff
- The Interactions between children and support staff
- Physical presence of a supporting adult

2.5.1 Benefits to the Teacher Versus Benefits to the Pupil.

It can be hard to disaggregate the factors that lead to pupil academic progress and the effects of being supported by an adult are no exception. This was a conclusion drawn by Wilson et al. (2002) for whom the study respondents felt that there was some indirect benefit to learners of classroom assistant presence on pupil attainment, but that this was most likely to be in terms of freeing up teachers. Schlapp et al. (2001) concluded that it was not possible to definitively answer whether or not the recent Scottish Initiative to increase Classroom Assistants in schools had actually led to an improvement in pupil outcome.

The reports of Schlapp et al. (2001) and Wilson et al. (2002) were both based on the evaluation of Wilson, Schlapp and Davidson between 2000 and 2002. This evaluation had ambitious aims in that it sought to establish whether classroom assistants increased pupil attainment, led to more effective use of teacher time and what the effects were on classroom interactions and pupil learning experiences. Data was gathered largely through questionnaire, with six case study schools also involved with interviews. The case studies consisted of interviews with head teachers or a member of staff responsible for classroom assistant deployment and were accompanied by photographs of classroom interactions. This work has elements in common with the Konig's study on interactions in German pre-schools. Judgments and conclusions from the above studies are made by those external to the support process itself. As such, the intricate reasons for actions will be missed, as will important clues to how class support and interactions could be ameliorated.

As suggested above, it may be hard to explicitly prove through examination results that adult support is of benefit, but this is perhaps not the only measure of educational success that we should be looking at. Test results are perhaps designed more usually for children whose academic abilities and learning styles lie closer to the norm. Where a different path through learning is required, maybe alternative and unforeseen outcomes will suggest that progress has been made. An increase in learner confidence that means a child feels able to engage in discussion, a new ability to organise his or her self at the start of the lesson might be examples. Learner goals that are the most relevant may not appear on a curriculum.

Blatchford et al. (2004) formed conclusions based on observation, questionnaires and interviews with class teachers, head teachers and TAs. They claim that the presence of TAs in the class positively affected the interactions between teachers and children. It appeared that more active interaction took place with TAs in the room, while when TAs were absent, children were more likely to be in an audience role. Could additional adults in the class enable teachers to spend more time interacting with children, due to increased time available and due a lighter administrative burden? This may be the case where adults are present to support generally in the class, as would be so for many TAs in England and classroom assistants in Scotland. Schlapp et al.

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(2001) suggested that when classroom assistants were present an increased range of learning experiences and practical activities for pupils followed. The time sampled observations carried out by Blatchford et al. (2004) indicated that the interactions between pupils and teachers were more active in nature when a TA was in the class. A suggestion is made in the report of this study that:

'In a large class the presence of teaching assistants can increase individualised and sustained teaching between teachers and pupils.' (Blatchford et al, 2004:53)

The meta-analysis of Albortz et al. (2009) echoes Blatchford et al. in reporting that TA presence did seem to support teachers in engaging with more practical and creative activities. Similar conclusions are also drawn by Wilson et al. (2002).This may be particular to TAs who are supporting the class generally and so might enable small group teaching to take place.

There were counter effects seen in both of the former studies. Blatchford et al (2004) also heard, through their interviews with teachers, that TAs were generally viewed as having a greater impact on teachers and teaching than they were on learners and learning. They found a perception that TAs relieved teachers of the demands made on them by SEN and less able pupils, enabling them to attend to the needs of the rest of the class. Alborz et al. reported that an intensive reliance on TAs by a pupil can lead to reduced engagement with teacher instruction. This appears more in keeping with Giangreco et al. (1997) and worrying in terms of how teachers view their own role with respect to SEN.

Where adults are present to support specific children with particular needs (as with EAs in Scotland) this dynamic can lead to less interaction between the teacher and the children with additional needs. These two factors appear to be linked in the views of some teachers. Again in Blatchford et al (2004), teacher interviews showed that TAs were seen by to affect teaching since they 'relieve the demands made by SEN'. This allows teachers to 'devote themselves to the rest of the class'. Alborz et al. also indicate that intensive one-to-one relationships between individual pupils and a TA could lead to a lessened engagement with teacher instruction. Perhaps it is a harder

task for a child to attend to and engage with more than one adult. If supported children engage heavily with an EA then attending to the CT could be impeded.

The work of Giangreco et al. (1997) contrasts with the above claims. Through interview and observation, Giangreco et al. interpreted the presence of supporting adults for children with learning difficulties as hampering the interactions and relationship between the child and class teacher. The findings suggested that the teachers generally deferred to the assistant and saw the education of the supported child as not being their role.

The evaluation reported by Schlapp et al (2001) and Wilson et al. (2002) examined the work of classroom assistants for whom there was a more explicit remit of reducing general teacher workload. Giangreco et al. (1997) examined the support of children with 'learning disabilities' in mainstream classrooms. The Giangreco et al. study has perhaps more in common with the work of the EA in Scotland, for whom there is generally the expressed role of supporting specific children with additional support needs. Taken together, it looks as though support staff may enhance outcomes for teachers and classes as a whole, but could impede outcomes for individual children with additional support needs. It might be interesting to consider whether the merging of the two support staff roles in Scotland affects the nature of the deployment and perception by teachers.

Howes (2003) has documented that the presence of support staff can lead to more 'on task' behaviour from pupils. This, alongside possible satisfaction from teaching staff, may lead senior management within the school to have little impetus in critique of support. Giangreco and Broer (2007) went on to construct a screening tool for schools to use to determine over-reliance on what they termed 'paraprofessionals'. This seems like a positive step in that it encourages school staff to take a critical stance with respect to the practice in their schools and a more detailed examination than might generally take place.

Groom and Rose (2005) reported on how one particular English authority had used TAs in supporting children with social, emotional and behavioural needs (SEBN) in mainstream classes. Groom and Rose documented that individual support for

particular pupils was viewed by teaching staff as the most effective and successful intervention in terms of children with SEBN being included in classes. Based on the views of teaching staff, it does not seem surprising that this might be found and would not necessarily be commensurate with pupils having greater engagement with learning. The same concerns relating to a high level of proximity to an adult might be seen as has been documented by other studies (e.g. Giangreco, 1997; Blatchford et al, 2004). The views of teaching staff on this issue may interact with the view that they no longer have to spend a significant proportion of their time in managing the behaviour of specific pupils and so feel able to allow them to remain in the room. Blatchford et al (2004) reported that teachers perceived that 'TAs relieve teachers of the demands made on them by SEN and less able pupils, thus freeing them to devote themselves to the needs of the rest of the class'. (p.37). It may be that teachers in the study by Groom and Rose feel that they have been relieved of the demands of SEBN.

Determination of whether a particular factor has impacted directly on academic success and progress is a difficult task and the effects of support staff on pupil performance is no exception. It seems to be easier to clarify that support staff can have a positive effect on reducing teacher stress and workload and as such, are generally valued in schools. Some studies (e.g. Groom and Rose, 2005) have suggested that support staff can enhance teacher interaction with pupils and improve augment creativity within lessons. Other studies (e.g. Giangreco, 1997) have indicated that the presence of supporting adults can increase the likelihood that particular children with special or additional support needs are distanced from their class teachers who may view their education as primarily the concern of the support staff.

2.5.2 Fragmentary Deployment

In some schools the deployment of support staff can be problematic (Blatchford et al., 2004). Situations arise where support staff frequently change the teachers and pupils they are working with, as well as the type of tasks they are completing. Some support staff voiced this as leading to a level of job dissatisfaction. Effective deployment of staff is an area to be handled with thought and sensitivity. Lengthy periods of time

with one pupil could lead to overdependence on the part of the pupil, while frequent changes may cause staff to feel little connection with pupils and ownership of their work.

Through questionnaires and interviews, Wilson et al. (2002) ascertained that class teachers generally felt unsure of how best to allocate classroom assistant time between routine tasks and support for pupils. Without an understanding of support staff roles, training and competencies and in the absence of time allocated for planning and liaison, it is not surprising that many teachers are not aware of what tasks they might be able to request support staff to complete. This is a perspective that I can identify with, following my own experience as a teacher. Cremin, Thomas and Vincett (2005) carried out a study in which three models of support staff deployment were analysed. What was interesting was that all three models appeared to lead to observed increases in pupil engagement. The term 'engagement' seems a little unclear, but the implication seems to be that this was something more than 'on-task' behaviour, with more involved participation from the learner.

The Cremin, Thomas and Vincett (2005) study begs the question of whether assistants and teachers generally have an unclear sense of what the support staff member's role really is. Without such clarity it could be difficult for purposeful joint work to take place. With a clearer notion of what they will be doing through the lesson, assistants could feel a greater engagement with their work.

Woolfson and Truswell (2005) completed a very different study entitled 'Do classroom assistants work?' The study was carried out in Renfrewshire, Scotland and saw five additional classroom assistants (CA) being placed in three primary schools in disadvantaged areas for a period of nine months. The deployment of these additional CAs was intended to; improve the quality of learning in the classroom, have a positive impact on the personal and social development of pupils and to encourage parental involvement in their children's learning. This remit is quite different to that usually assigned to support staff, particularly the element of interface with parents. Questionnaires, focus groups and interviews with parents and carers, CAs, teachers and pupils were supported by classroom observations to examine the extent to which the aims had been met. Positive outcomes were documented as a result of the project.

What the study does have in common with that of Cremin, Thomas and Vincett (2005) is that there is a clear, agreed nature to the deployment and this seems to lead to generally effective team working and enhanced pupil engagement.

2.5.3 The Support Staff – Teacher Interface

The interface between class teacher (CT) and supporting adult was a common theme through much of the literature (e.g. Blatchford et al., 2004; Alborz et al., 2009; Schlapp et al. 2001; Wilson et al, 2002). In general, little or no time is being set aside for mutual planning, preparation and liaison between CTs and support staff. This is viewed as detracting from the impact of support staff. All observations in the literature relating to prominent levels of communication between teaching and support staff are positive. One of the models of support staff deployment analysed by Cremin, Thomas and Vincett (2005) was 'Reflective Teamwork'. As the title suggests, this involved the class teacher and assistant reflecting and planning together. Both teachers and assistants were positive about the experience, reporting that it led the assistant to feel more empowered and the teacher to focus more on individual pupil needs.

It does not seem conclusive from the study by Groom and Rose (2005) that greater inclusion in the classroom due to TA presence necessarily goes hand in hand with greater pupil engagement in learning. However, the positive reports from teaching staff and parents alike in this study sit alongside evidence of strong partnership between professionals and effective communication and participation of TAs in planning and liaison around cases. This seems to increase the likelihood that effective and agreed ways of working with children might be borne out in practice. A key concern for me relating to Groom and Rose (2005) is that the assertion that 'the role of the TA is perceived as crucial to the effective inclusion of pupils with SEBD in mainstream classrooms' is not taken in isolation. I would see it as vital that this suggestion is taken alongside the advice on specifically 'how' to support. Groom and Rose document the work of TAs who appeared to have experienced sound communication with their teaching colleagues and thoughtful deployment. In schools

were these latter two features are not as strong, the message that TA support should be allocated for children the SEBN is unlikely to yield the positive results seen by Groom and Rose.

O'Brien and Garner (2001) compiled a series of first-hand accounts from learning support assistants (LSAs) in England entitled 'Untold Stories'. The general sense from this work was that LSAs largely felt valued in schools by teaching staff and pupils alike and that this fed into the level and nature of communication experienced by the LSAs in this study. There was mention of LSAs being included in the writing of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and being involved in regular planning meetings with teachers. O'Brien and Garner are clear about the use of opportunistic sampling in their study. The LSAs included were people they had met at training courses, people attending long training courses at higher education institutes or people with whom they had professional contact. It seems likely that such a cohort would be from schools where they were viewed as professionals and whose expertise were valued. As such, it might be expected that these LSAs would experience more inclusion in meaningful communication than LSAs who were not afforded training opportunities or contact with other education professionals.

It seems that greater satisfaction is experienced when value is placed on and time is given over to liaison and planning between teachers and support staff. Alborz et al. make a recommendation following their meta-analysis that teachers should be trained in team teaching and collaborative working in initial training, echoing the conclusions drawn by Cremin, Thomas and Vincett (2005). The resulting obstacle of collaborative working is that planning and liaison, although leading to more effective practice, provides an extra workload and potential administrative burden in itself. Since part of the rationale for support staff in classrooms is to reduce teacher workload, resistance may be encountered to tasks that appear to add to it.

2.5.4 The Emotional Element to the Role of Support Staff

Schlapp et al. (2001) documented that the high turnover of support staff found was attributable to job dissatisfaction on the part of support staff. Some of the reasons put forward by Blatchford et al. (2004) for low assistant job satisfaction included lack of time for planning, preparation or feedback in addition to a disjointed nature to the work. Other causes of job dissatisfaction cited were; feelings of boredom, disagreements with the teacher and viewing the teacher as being disorganised. Boredom may link in to a lack of purposeful and meaningful deployment or planning time to give consideration to the role. Those TAs feeling satisfied with their work expressed a good relationship with the teacher and team-working as being the main reason. Second to this was satisfaction drawn from working with pupils and seeing them progress. This latter factor in job satisfaction was found in the O'Brien and Garner's (2001) of LSA accounts. Some participants explained how a great deal of satisfaction was gained through being able to see small but tangible steps forward in pupil learning. In addition, participants reported feeling valued by both pupils and teaching staff which contributed to job satisfaction.

In 2006, the Equal Opportunities Commission published a formal investigation into the role and status of classroom assistants (CAs) in Scottish schools, entitled 'Valuable Assets'. The report aimed to put forward the perspective of the classroom assistant and argued that CAs were grossly underpaid. Indeed the TAs in Blatchford et al's (2004) report claimed that a pay increase was one of the main factors that would increase their level of job satisfaction. The Valuable Assets report documented that typically CAs were being paid between £5.68 and £7.58 per hour. Three quarters of the investigation respondents said that they regularly worked overtime. Of these, 60% said that they were never paid extra while 20% were only sometimes paid for overtime. Perhaps this is because within schools, where the dominant profession is teaching, there is not a culture of overtime and being paid extra due to teachers not traditionally having set hours for the work they have to complete. Teachers, however, are paid accordingly for having to work sufficient hours for their planning and preparation to be done.

A dominant strand running through the literature is that the conditions of employment for support staff are less than adequate, in terms of pay and expectations. This can have adverse effects on job satisfaction.

2.5.5 Interactions between Children and Support Staff.

Interactions between children and supporting adults is the area that was initially of most interest to me. I wanted to know more about what might be going on when adults sit next to children to 'support them'. My study looks at the experience of supporting from the adult's perspective with the possibility that this may perhaps explain in some way the nature of the interactions.

Blatchford et al (2004) indicate that TAs spend the majority of their time in interactions with pupils. They suggest a detailed examination of the interaction processes would be beneficial, considering elements such as methods of questioning, encouraging independence, scaffolding and assessing learning. A recommendation is made to articulate to support staff how the above methods may be used to complement the role of the teacher, perhaps making use of Robin Alexander's (2000) analysis of pedagogic functions. I agree that such an overview of the interaction processes taking place would be of interest.

Time logs used by Blatchford et al (2004) indicate that pupils spend less time waiting for help when a TA is present. The assumption is perhaps that the TA will respond to a child's queries and obstacles, allowing them to return to their learning tasks. A risk is that through the availability of adult expertise, increased reliance on adult support may be seen. The same study revealed that pupils felt they could have longer interaction spells with TAs than with teachers. Included in this report is the quote:

'There appears to be an assumption built into the approach to SEN that longer periods of interaction with an adult will succeed in meeting the needs of the pupils. To this extent... most needy are receiving more attention. However, it

appears to be TAs, not teachers...providing...bulk of....interactions with SEN pupils and others with particular needs ' (Blatchford et al, 2004, p. 64)

The later 2008 Blatchford et al study showed that children were more likely to have sustained and active interactions with a TA, compared to the teacher, with whom they were more likely to have a passive role. On the face of it, this looks as though TAs engage children in sustained shared thinking, scaffolding and moving their learning forward. This implies that the quality of the interactions may be favourable, compared to those with teachers. There is, however, the need for teachers to inform children of tasks to be completed and to offer initial instructions. This would often necessitate children taking a passive role. I wonder whether the same differences in teacher and TA interactions hold if only the interactions of one adult sitting next to an individual or small group of children to work were looked at. Is it feasible for teachers to be able to relax enough to fully submerge themselves in sustained shared thinking with a limited number of children or even individuals? Would the awareness of the learning and behavioural needs of the rest of the class be too great a distraction? Perhaps TAs are, in fact, able to occupy a role that the teacher's time and demands does not afford them.

Responses from the Valuable Assets report suggested that a 'role stretch' existed as CAs routinely carried out functions that fall within a teacher's remit, including assessing the learning and development of pupils, teaching new concepts, setting learning tasks and planning the curriculum. Of the CA respondents, 71% said that they took a group for reading or maths. These findings are echoed by some participants in O' Brien and Garner's (2001) study who felt, at times, that they were teachers without a teacher salary. It need not necessarily be a matter of concern if assistants assess learning and set learning tasks and it would imply an active involvement in the learning of the pupil. If there is a lack of planning and liaison time with the class teacher, however, it would be difficult for the teacher to monitor the learning tasks being set. Asking assistants to carry out teaching tasks on a fraction of the pay without teacher training is surely doing a disservice to the pupils being taught as well as exploiting assistants.

For support staff, interactions with children seem to take up the majority of their time. There is some evidence to suggest that children can be more actively engaged in sustained interactions with support staff than they tend to be with their class teacher. This may connect with the fact that support staff will have fewer pulls on their time and will often have the explicit remit of working for long periods with individuals or small groups of children. The specifics of what usually takes place during such interactions, remains an under-researched area.

2.5.6 Physical Presence of a Supporting Adult

In Scotland, support staff roles have been divided into two groups, classroom assistants (CAs) and Education Auxiliaries (EAs). CAs attend to a range of issues within the class, including supporting a number of different pupils and administrative tasks. EAs typically support individuals or small groups of children with additional support needs. The frequent close proximity of EAs may have both disadvantages and merits.

A prevalent assumption within schools and education authorities seems to be that additional needs will be met by the close presence of an adult. This personal view has been influenced by the conversations that I have been part of and opinions that I have heard expressed while practising as an EP. There appears to be much more emphasis on establishing the presence of adult support for a child than there does on considering what that support will constitute in practice.

Research on zone of proximal development (ZPD), scaffolding and sustained shared thinking (SST) suggest that there would be some merit in the view that support from a more able individual will aid learning. None of the above can easily take place without the presence of a more able other. This more able other does not, however, necessarily have to be an adult. Peer mediated learning and mixed ability groupings point to the benefits of children learning from each other. Indeed, social learning would suggest that a more similar peer would provide an easier model to emulate than an adult. It is also the case that the close physical presence of a supporting adult can

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lead to reduced interactions between the supported child and his or her peers. Within the job description offered to EAs in the funding authority it is stated that they should: 'help create a supportive and positive atmosphere where children can work towards maximum independence and integration with their peers'. This is a skill that requires sensitivity. Classmates of children with additional support needs can feel disinclined to interact with a child if there is an adult present for much of the time. Giangreco et al. (2001) carried out a study on the effects of instructional assistants for children with a range of what were termed disabilities. All of the children in the study were educated in general education classrooms (U.S. terminology), much as is the norm in the funding authority. Observations and interviews led the study team to conclude that regular close proximity to a supporting adult had implications for children both in terms of physical separation from peers and social separation. In practical terms, events such as waiting till the rest of the class had filed out of the hall before taking a supported child out signify a kind of 'separateness'. Peers of a supported child indicated that there was a certain stigma attached to the child having a 'shadow' so much of the time and that they would feel intimidated in their interactions with the child due to constant adult presence.

Giangreco et al. (2001) also found that an ever-present adult could lead to over dependence and a reduction in children developing their own strategies. It would be interesting to consider how children who have previously been supported deal with new learning experiences in the absence of support. I wonder how the support process might influence a child's view of his or herself as a learner and to what extent it might lead support being sought very early on in a learning task before personal inquiry and investigation has taken place. I wonder how these factors are offset against any increases in confidence due to on-going adult encouragement. One of the key findings stated by Alborz et al. (2009) is that sensitive TA support can facilitate pupil engagement with learning and social activities. This requires TAs to be skilled at encouraging interaction and also aware of when the pupil needs to undertake self-directed choices and actions.

The Alborz et al. (2009) meta-analysis recommends that TAs should not normally work on an exclusive one-to-one basis with pupils and that, even where children have

special educational needs, learning and participation are maximised when they take place in the context of a group.

As Blatchford et al. (2004):

'There is something paradoxical about the least qualified staff in school supporting the most educationally needy pupils'. (p.64)

The above study saw that the most usual context for TA support was to a named pupil or a very small group of pupils. It was found that only a minority of teachers deployed assistants across the class with pupils of a range of abilities. To what extent is the view held that where a pupil has additional support or special needs the assistant working with them is in fact 'the pupil's assistant'? By viewing the assistant as being present to aid the pupil rather than the teacher will this then reduce the capacity for the assistant to work with other pupils while the teacher works with less able or named pupils?

Physical proximity is a frequent facet of the relationship between child and supporting adult. Such close presence may well have benefits in terms of allowing the adult to appreciate the work of the child and to effectively scaffold the learning process. Barriers to learning and development may also be put in place by close physical proximity. Peer mediated learning and social integration with peers can be inhibited, as can the growth of the child's own learning strategies.

2.6   Support Staff Training in Scotland

2.6.1   Overview of Support Staff Training

In Scotland at the time of writing there is one Professional Development Award (PDA) for EAs and a second for classroom assistants. There is over-lap between the courses and a planned merging of the two qualifications for the academic year 2010-2011, which aims to extend the current training. At present, the training that would be

most appropriate for EAs is the PDA for Support for Learning Assistant. Through this qualification, EAs are given the opportunity to learn about:

- conditions that could give rise to additional need
- a range of models of disability, including those associated with interaction between the learner and his or her environment
- pertinent legislation, guidelines and the roles of other professionals
- ways in which learners may be assisted in the context of an educational setting
- elements of effective relationships with learners
- school curriculum
- Additional Support for Learning Act 2004

The training appears to adhere to the model of the assistant aiding a specific child, rather than collaborating with a teacher and supporting other children at times to free up the teacher to work with a child with additional needs. However, mention is made of the importance of supported children being full members of the class. It is also stressed that support should be appropriate, rather than just 'extra' help.

There is no obligation to complete training and it seems to have occurred in pockets with many support staff gaining no formal training at all (Wilson et al 2002; SCER, 2006). National standards relate to the development of the training itself, rather than any requirement for uptake of the training or for adherence to the standards in practice.

2.6.1 Perceptions of Support Staff Training

Teachers and support staff alike tend to see training as highly beneficial (SCER, 2006) although many head teachers (e.g. Blatchford et al. 2004) rate personal qualities more highly than formal training, some being critical of the training on offer. Some head teachers prefer to offer bespoke in-house training. Indeed, the training of support staff for specific and targeted interventions may be more useful than the overarching

training since it is in these structured tasks where the work of TAs has been seen to offer pupils the most significant learning gains (Alborz et al. 2009).

Lack of training for assistants may be of particular concern if they are asked to fulfil roles that are normally associated with a teaching remit. The Valuable Assets (SCER, 2006) study describes what they term as a 'role stretch', whereby assistants are regularly asked to undertake tasks such as teaching new material and being placed in charge of classes at times. This viewpoint is echoed by the head teacher respondents in Blatchford et al (2004) who felt that good training was essential since assistants are often called upon to act as 'quasi-teachers'.

2.7   Literature Conclusion

I began the literature review by discussing how adults (or more able individuals) can interact with learners to facilitate learning. I saw this as important since I make the assumption that aiding learning is an objective of adult support staff in close proximity to children with ASN. The literature selected reflects my social constructivist view of learning. I see learning as taking place on a personal basis with the individual making their own sense of novel experiences and information. New learning and interpretations will be influenced by existing conceptions and pre-understandings. Although the construction of learning is unique to the individual, it is influenced by social interactions with others, particularly more able individuals. Such interactions serve to scaffold learning and expose the learner to social constructions and discourses in society. Adult and workplace learning are also considered since this has implications for how participants in this study have constructed their understandings of how best to support children with ASN.

I went on to examine the literature in the area of education support staff. Over the last two decades, the numbers of adults paid to support learning in mainstream classes has risen in Scotland, England and Wales. This has largely been due to formal guidance aimed at bringing down teacher workload. Feedback from teachers suggests that there has been a perceived lightening of the teacher burden as a result of these measures.

Such gains have not been echoed in the perception of pupil learning. Recent reports in England to reach the mainstream media have stated that a large number of support staff could be lost with no detriment to education. I chose to review much of the literature that has influenced these current discourses.

Formally, the roles of support staff within Scottish classrooms are split into EAs and classroom assistants although in practice the roles overlap. Classroom assistants offer support across the class with a range of tasks. EAs are asked to enable specific pupils with additional support needs to access their education. This is usually interpreted as the EA maintaining close physical proximity to the supported child and helping him or her with the work set by the teacher. The literature is generally critical of this model with Blatchford et al (2009) claiming that the more explicit support a child receives, the less progress will be made. A range of factors have been cited as possibly contributing to a lack of success. A physically close and exclusive working relationship with an assistant may foster dependency in young people and disengagement from teacher instruction, while setting them apart from their peers. This can have social consequences and inhibits peer learning. A paucity of interaction and joint planning between the teacher and assistant may mean that the supporting adult is not briefed on the material to be covered and there is little discussion and reflection regarding the most beneficial ways to support.

It is suggested that adult support can be of benefit where the assistant shows skill and sensitivity in knowing when to encourage and when to step back, thereby promoting independent working styles. Recommendations are made (Alborz et al., 2009) that within a classroom children should generally be supported as part of a group rather than working one-to-one with an assistant in an exclusive relationship. On the other hand, significant gains have been reported where assistants are trained to work with children in specific and focused interventions. This has been particularly the case for literacy interventions.

I hope that this study will complement the literature by offering further exploration of the perspectives of EAs on the support process. A richer and more subtle appreciation of the sense that EAs make of their experience presents new understandings of how practice may be changed so as to become more effective. As will be seen below, the

use of IPA as a methodology affords an engagement with the personal constructions of learning and support processes of the participants. My assumption about learning and epistemology is that individuals construct their own knowledge in response to their dealings with the world and in particular their interactions with other people. I aim to use IPA to become involved with the participants' 'constructing' of their understandings at an individual level in response to their prior experience and dialogue with myself as researcher.

METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction to the Methodology

This chapter begins with an overview of how I view this study in relation other literature on the role of support staff. I go on to offer an insight into the journey that I undertook in selecting what I perceived to be an appropriate methodology. A rationale is given for the qualitative route that has been taken, using interviews as a vehicle for data collection. Reflections on the relative merits of conversation analysis, narrative analysis and discourse analysis are considered in turn before arriving at those of IPA, thereby illustrating the path in my thinking as I moved between possible methodologies. This is followed with an overview of the processes involved in IPA, possible constraints of the methodology and lastly factors relating to thoughtful practice and ethical considerations.

3.2   Position of the current study within the literature.

The relatively recent meta-analysis by Alborz et al. (2009) has reviewed much literature in the area of support staff. The aims outlined by Alborz et al. (2009) were to look at the impact of support staff on the participation and learning of pupils and the support process that lead to these outcomes. This is a different focus to this study. Alborz et al. (2009) sought to answer specific questions relating to 'what' processes lead to 'which' outcomes. The 'answers' yielded have been that trained support staff can enhance literacy progress through specific programmes and that sensitive support can improve pupil engagement in learning and social activities. In elucidating the experience of EAs, my hope is rather to consider 'why' support staff carry out their work in the way that they do and what factors feed in to the nature of the support processes.

Some studies (e.g. Blatchford et al., 2009) have included questionnaires and time logs detailing, on a macro scale, what it is that comprises the work of support staff. This is

a largely quantitative slant, the consideration being what we can observe and know about what support staff are doing. Some studies (e.g. Giangreco et al, 2001) have included observations. Again these have tended to have been on a macro scale, looking at whether assistants support individual children, groups of children, listen to the teacher, plan with the teacher and so on. In this study I hope to explore elements that are not observable, but rather the lived experience and perspective of the support staff.

Within most of the literature, the voices of teachers, including head teachers, have generally figured more prominently than those of support staff. This may be since the introduction of greater numbers of support staff has been in part with the hope of allowing teachers more time to teach and a better work-life balance. A different kind of study was put forward by O'Brien and Garner (2001). It was the intention of O'Brien and Garner to represent and give voice to LSAs, a sector of the workforce they believed to have relatively little influence over the evolving direction of their role. In this respect the aims of the study by O'Brien and Garner overlap with those of this study.

O'Brien and Garner compiled a number of accounts offered by LSAs about their work. They suggest that to interpret the 'data' or to probe during questioning would be to contaminate the data and wrongly assume a greater, more academic knowledge and appreciation of the LSAs' experience than they have of themselves. This study seeks to offer a rich and idiographic description and interpretation of the experiences of a small sample of EAs supporting children with additional support needs in mainstream classes and makes no apology for the interpretative element. I do not consider it as patronising to add an interpretative layer in portraying the experience of others. As a participant recounts experience there will be more elements present in the dialogue with a participant than may be available to conscious and explicit verbalisation by that participant. Scrutiny of choices of phrases, metaphors and exclusion of certain elements can afford greater insight.

Through in depth analysis and interpretation, this study details the sense that EAs make of their personal experience. This 'sense making' is reached in a way that would be inaccessible to observation or even questionnaires and structured interviews that

may streamline the types of responses that may be offered. This perspective can add to our understanding of the support process and factors that bear upon these processes, rather than how these processes impact upon the processes of teaching and learning.

3.3   The Journey to a Choice of Methodology

3.3.1 Observation or Interview?

The journey to my choice of an interview format took me through scrutiny of what I really wanted to explore about child and supporting adult interactions. Observation and conversation analysis were rejected as possible research methods as I felt influenced by social interactionist ideas and the investigation of the subjective viewpoints of participants.

I began contemplation for this study with the general sense that more thought ought to be given to the support of young people with additional support needs in mainstream classrooms. This area receives a high level of funding and sometimes seems to be viewed as the answer to meeting a child's needs. I felt that some exploration of what constitutes effective practice should occur. My first thoughts were to conduct detailed observations of what took place between children and the adults supporting them. I wondered if conversation analysis would be an appropriate methodology for this task. I considered conversation analysis (CA). This methodology might take me some way to exploring what support staff were *doing* with their words and verbal interactions when supporting young people. It could look at how verbal dialogue was used to encourage, scaffold and remind during the learning process. Developed by Harvey Sacks et al. (1974), conversation analysis claims to reveal power at work in actual verbal interaction (Woolfitt, 2005). This could be key in exploring how the support process is used to encourage learning or foster dependence in young people. Through the study of real time talk or conversation, CA can be used as a tool to examine how conversational actions, such as advice giving and turn-taking, play out in particular institutional contexts (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2008).

Although an assumption of CA is that talk depends on displayed understandings of prior talk (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2008) I decided against CA. I felt there would be some elements of what support staff were *doing* with their words that I would not be able to observe. As a practising EP, I am aware that when observing I glimpse a 'snapshot' of behaviour and learning. I cannot fully comprehend the context within which it takes place. I cannot observe the history of interactions that have led people to adopt certain patterns and strategies. I was interested to find out what could be learned by exploring the personal perceptions of adults supporting young people. I wanted to try and look at more than snapshots, to perhaps access an account of a story around what happened within interactions and how it had come about. This would involve a step further into qualitative research, in that I will be considering the *why* of how support processes take place as much as *what* those support processes entail.

This sense that I cannot directly observe all aspects of the interactions draws on elements of symbolic interactionism and my social constructivist viewpoint detailed in the introduction. First coined by Herbert Blumer (1937), symbolic interactionism starts with the idea that people invest meaning into objects, events and experiences and then respond to such 'things' based upon the meaning that has been placed in them. The meanings given will be shaped by social interactions with others and modified based on experience of interacting with the 'things' themselves. These ideas imply that if the 'thing' to be looked at in this study is the support of young people with additional support needs by EAs, in order to engage with this 'thing', research should seek to explore how meaning is invested in the support process, shaped by interactions and experience of the support itself. This may imply that research should aim to explore the angle of participants in that support process to see what the experiences hold for them. For this reason, interviews, rather than observations were selected as the pathway for research.

Within the interviews, participants go through a process of constructing understandings of their experience, as mediated by their discussions with me as researcher. They are likely to have had a range of pre-understandings in relation to supporting children and education even before engaging in their role as EAs. Further interpretation will have been constructed through their professional practice and

before coming to the interview. The way in which these understandings are formed into a narrative will be unique to the interview and to their interactions with me.

3.3.2 Qualitative Research

The interviews I conducted were designed to explore, rather than confirm or disprove hypotheses. The study is qualitative in nature, with many objectives and assumptions of quantitative research set aside.

In quantitative research, observed phenomena are worked with and expected to be classified according to frequency and distribution. There is an aim to reduce the impact of confounding variables, in order to correctly attribute causes of observations. Confounding variables will include researcher effects, with an aim being to maintain objectivity of research.

Quantitative research originates from within the natural sciences. The question should be raised as to whether there would, at times, be a different sort of methodology more suited to the requirements of research in the social sciences. There is the danger that through the removal of everyday confounding variables, quantitative findings can be interpreted as facts. It can be suggested that theories are 'proven'. This is the basis of positivism, that there exists absolute truths that can be uncovered through systematic observation. Flick (2006) suggests of quantitative studies that:

> *In order to fulfil methodological standards their investigations and findings*
> *often remain too far removed from everyday questions and problems.* (p.13)

Problems arise where findings generated in the absence of everyday variables seek to say something about situations that arise in the presence of everyday variables. By choosing to adopt a qualitative research methodology, certain commonly perceived advantages of quantitative research are let go. Quantitative research aims to produce results that clearly isolate causes and effects. There is usually the aim that results can

be measureable and will allow for some level of generalization to a wider population, (Flick, 2006). The same is not be true of qualitative findings.

Qualitative research disputes the possibility of uncovering facts or value-free knowledge. It cannot be claimed that researcher effects have been minimised to the point of having no impact upon research findings. There can be an open acknowledgement of researcher personal experience as the starting point from whence research questions develop. Such a stance views the researcher as being inextricably involved in the formation and organisation of subsequent findings, rather than 'collecting' data that exists in some sort of perfect, true form (Robson, 2007). Furthermore, it seems likely that in qualitative, exploratory research there may be less inclination from the researcher to 'find' something in particular. Much quantitative research sets out with the intention of disproving the null hypothesis (i.e. that there will be no effect seen by the independent variable under study). That being the case, a thesis is likely to be of far less interest if it does not prove one particular hypothesis. The quantitative researcher may have more invested in a certain result.

In order to access the perceptions of EAs, quantitative study with the removal of any possible confounding variables was not a possibility. Interview, similar to a conversation in nature, was the vehicle for eliciting detailed accounts of those views. To do so objectively and with no researcher effects is a nonsense. Instead, I acknowledge those researcher effects and the context in which that data was generated. In so doing, the reader is able to judge for him/herself any possible interactions between the interview process and the data produced. The findings can then be interpreted accordingly.

3.4   Finding a Path within Qualitative Research

In selecting a more specific route within qualitative research, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was the style most heavily drawn upon. Other styles that were given consideration and have a bearing upon the methodological approach of this research are narrative analysis and discourse analysis.

3.4.1 Narrative Analysis

An element of narrative analysis (NA) has been incorporated into this study and can be found at the beginning of the interviews. NA takes the narrative interview as the datum and focuses on biographical experiences (Flick, 2006). Using NA, researchers allow participants to talk at length, telling their stories. The rationale is that through narratives and the telling of stories to oneself and others, people make sense of their lives (Webster & Merton, 2007).There is virtually no verbal input from the researcher as the participant is allowed to talk freely, making links with past experience as they go along. Using a story format, a range of diverse events can be brought together into a structure with linkages and causal attributes being made as they occur to the narrator. The result can be an extremely rich data that allows the researcher to investigate human experience, as depicted in stories (Webster & Merton, 2007).

I had mixed feelings about the NA form of data collection. I did want to allow participants to tell their stories in a way that made sense to them and included details of personal pertinence. If a more structured data collection was used, great care would have to be taken not to steer the interview in a direction that could preclude the emergence of interesting and pertinent data. On the other hand, there were certain questions to which I did wish to seek responses. I was not sure that a completely open ended interview would afford me coverage of the areas that I wished to explore. I was also unsure about how comfortable the participants would feel with one sole open ended invitation to talk about support. I wanted the freedom to verbally encourage participants to talk.

Conversation is the usual way that people share stories about their everyday lives, rather than being asked for monologues. Flick (2006) suggests that a potential problem in conducting a narrative interview is that it includes systematic role violation. People are not used to giving monologues *to* others, they are used to talking *with* others. Such role violation can lead to irritation which is unlikely to be conducive to relaxing into the interview by either researcher or participant. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) emphasize the need to be mindful of the dynamics between researcher and participant in the co-production of the data. The participants in this study were EAs and would have their own interpretations of my role as an EP in the

authority. I had a level of discomfort with the notion of a professional, who might usually be perceived as coming to the school in an advice giving capacity, asking the participants to talk at length without giving any verbal input back. I did not feel that such an unnatural form of verbal interaction would put the participants at ease. The same dynamics would, however, need to be acknowledged where a more structured form of data collection was used. The more input from myself as researcher, the more possible points at which participants could feel inclined to agree and be steered.

The objective of NA to encourage the free telling of personal narratives has been incorporated into the planning of this interview process. The minimal presence of researcher within the interview has not been considered quite right as a more natural conversation style has been felt more appropriate.

3.4.2 Discourse Analysis

Ways of understanding that exist within society known as 'discourses' are likely to bear upon the sense making and interpretations of both EA participants and myself as researcher.

Discourse analysis has elements in common with conversation analysis. Both methodologies use verbal interactions as raw data to be analysed. While conversation analysis focuses upon naturally occurring verbal interactions, discourse analysis can use interviews and focus groups.

Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) looks at how discourses arise within verbal accounts. In FDA a discourse is defined as a prevailing viewpoint or way of understanding that operates in society at large. An assumption is that since humans are social beings who construct their beliefs in a social context, discourses from the wider society will be apparent in an individual's verbal account. These discourses are seen to shape the way that a given topic will be understood (Parker, 1992).

There are elements of FDA that are of relevance to this study. EAs and other support staff now make up a big group. There are presumably socially constructed discourses at large relating to bodies of knowledge or ways of understanding that bear upon the support of children with additional support needs. This could include discourses surrounding what it means to have additional support needs or what it is to take on the role of supporting another member of staff's professional activities.

The emphasis that I felt drawn to for this study was a 'bottom up' approach to sense making. I was primarily concerned with how the individual goes through the process of constructing ways of understanding, rather than using individual accounts to access pre-constructed ways of understanding within a wider culture. Individuals in a modern society can move between a number of subcultures. Combined with their unique backgrounds and personality traits, people can form their own personal blend of ways of understanding. This is not to suggest that discourses within society do not feed into the constructions of understandings by an individual. The constructions of the individual and the discourses in society must be deeply interwoven. However, the fact that cultures change and shift direction over time would seem to imply that individuals are not vessels that take on current culture without manipulation of discourses in the wider society.

Discourses within society, as understood by FDA, will bear upon both this data collection and interpretation. The manner in which participants weave together their personal appreciation of a range of discourses, experiences and influences are hoped to be explored here.

3.4.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPA is the principle methodology used in this study. I was attracted to IPA because it would allow me to interview EAs about how they viewed their experiences of supporting children with additional support needs, engaging with the participants' subjective accounts.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) engages with participants' subjective accounts of their experiences. It seeks understanding of lived experience and how participants make sense of and understand their experiences (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005). IPA generally uses transcripts of audio-recordings of semi-structured interviews as the raw data. Analysis then centres around verbatim extracts of transcribed data, aiming to tread a line between being descriptive and interpretative. That is, the participant accounts are used as the basis of analysis, with the researcher going on to form interpretations that may be slightly different from those made by the participants themselves. Through preservation of substantial verbatim extracts, analysis strives to remain transparent to the reader, as interpretations made by the researcher can be traced back to the original source. IPA studies are idiographic in nature, using a small sample size. They generally have a maximum of 10 participants and produce detailed analyses (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Individual accounts are analysed in detail so that conclusions are rooted in an understanding of personal experience, taking a bottom up approach to theorising.

Using an IPA approach, I could explore how the interactions in supporting learning are understood by the adults involved and how they personally interpret what is happening. I hoped to tap into the internal world of the participants in a way that would not be possible through observation and techniques such as conversation analysis. IPA aims to use verbal accounts to say something about the cognitive processes of individuals. As stated above, one of the ways that FDA did not feel right for me for this study was in that it speaks to discourses at work within society. While IPA can acknowledge such discourses, it is concerned with the personal understandings and meaning makings of the individuals that give voice to those discourses. In this study participants do belong to a group that has common experiences, many of whom have regular contact. This is likely to result in the emergence of socially shared representations or discourses.

For me, IPA, in contrast to NA, offers the freedom to interact with participants during the interview in a more typical conversation style, facilitating them in exploring their experience. I did want to draw on NA, allowing participants to verbally relay their experiences without initial guidance or interruption. It also felt important to me, however, to be able to probe participants to go further into an area where it appeared

there was more to recount. The use of emotion laden words and body language from participants could suggest greater pertinence of a topic than the initial words of a participant might imply. By encouraging participants to go into such areas I intended to bring out elements of their experiences that they perhaps did not consciously engage with. Equally, some elements of experience might be viewed by participants to be so obvious as to not warrant discussion. Through the use of 'probing' it was my intention to expose more aspects of participants' interpretations of experience. I was mindful of the metaphor of an IPA researcher used in Eatough and Smith (2008) as being:

'like a traveller who wanders with local inhabitants, asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their stories'.

Kvale (1996, p.4)

IPA shares with the social cognition paradigm the view that a link exists between the verbal report, cognition and the physical state. The perceptions of participants are not seen as 'transparent windows' (Smith, Jarman and Osborn, 1999) although verbal accounts are viewed as enabling the researcher to say *something* about cognitive processes.

IPA seeks to offer a detailed account of the sense-making of participants through a detailed exploration of how participants present their understandings and the interpretations drawn by the researcher. Following analysis and identification of themes within the data, themes are drawn together into a coherent narrative account using verbatim excerpts to illustrate the arguments made. Shared themes that are found across the various participants form the structure of the write-up (Smith, Jarman and Osborn, 1999). The final write-up is a narrative that shows the meaning making of both participant and researcher, moving between the descriptive and the interpretative (Eatough and Smith, 2008).

3.5   Philosophical Underpinnings of IPA

3.5.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology relates to the descriptive phase of IPA analysis. This stage seeks to attend closely to the intended messages of the participants, although it should be acknowledged that these will be the researcher's interpretations of intended messages. The transcribed verbal account is analysed in the hope of stepping into the participant's shoes and gaining a thorough appreciation of their perspective, as perceived and conveyed by them.

Phenomenology is concerned with the way that things are perceived by us in experience (Langdridge, 2007). An experience can be described as 'a unit in the flow of time' (Dilthey, 1976, p. 210) where a person becomes aware of what is happening (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). In social research, a participant may already have become aware of an experience, but his or her awareness may be heightened through the recounting of events, as further sense is made of what has happened. The way that an experience is perceived by an individual will be partially dependent upon factors that are directly related to the individual him/herself. The unique social and historical experience of people will cause similar experiences to appear differently to different people.

Heidegger (1962/1927) suggests that human beings are not distinct from the world, but that their very being is intrinsically interwoven with the world. Their interface with the world is part of what makes them who they are. As Eatough and Smith (2008) suggest:

> 'your body unfolds for you a world which is particular to you and different from the world which is disclosed through your friend's body' (p.180)

IPA is based on the interpretation of the unique inter-subjectivity of the experiences of the individual. To this end, consideration of the interrelationship between an EA and the class (including the supported child, teacher and rest of the environment)

should be done via interpretation of the perspective of the EA, since the experience does not exist for me as it exists for the participant.

Langdridge (2007) talks of the use of phenomenology in psychological studies as seeking to use detailed descriptions of experiences to bring about change in the 'lived world' stemming from new and more subtle understandings. The aim of this study is to seek understanding of lived experiences of EAs. My motivation for so doing is that as an EP and practitioner in the area of additional support needs I want to feel comfortable with my interpretations of appropriate support for children and therefore comfortable in my responses to teachers, EAs and education officers relating to how to support children. The implications for practice that I put forward at the end of this thesis draw on my analysis and interpretation of the experiences of EAs and how they make sense of those experiences. I am striving towards Langdridge's stated purpose of phenomenological psychology. I would aspire to bring about change, where I felt it was necessary, in the lived experiences of EAs, teachers and the children they support, based on my personal understandings of the current experiences of EAs.

3.5.2 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation. The goal of hermeneutics is to understand lived experience. Through hermeneutics, the second stage of IPA analysis will move beyond a purely descriptive phenomenology, bringing in an interpretative element, in the hope of further illuminating that lived experience (Eatough and Smith, 2008).

IPA can be seen as having three levels of hermeneutics, or interpretation. Prior to and during the process of the interview the participant is making their own sense of personal experiences. Through analysis, the researcher seeks to interpret and make sense of the participant's sense making. The third level comes as the reader forms his or her own interpretations of the researcher's hermeneutic. If reflexive notes have been included in the write-up, the reader will be able to consider the interpretations of the researcher in the light of such notes, forming their interpretations accordingly.

Both the researcher and the reader will be unique in the particular meanings that they impress upon the text (Schleiermacher, 1998), each using their own unique set of skills, including personal intuition. The use of intuition in scientific writing may seem uncomfortable and is certainly at odds with traditional styles. To omit it, however, seems to be suggesting that only scientific skills are of value, as opposed to those that have been developed by human beings throughout their lives and indeed throughout evolutionary history. Transparency is essential if intuition is used within interpretation to allow readers to judge its merits for themselves.

3.5.3 Idiography

IPA takes an idiographic approach, focussing on the particular, rather than the universal. Idiographic research sits in contrast to nomothetic study, which aims to generalise. Large sample sizes are used in nomothetic research in order to form general conclusions about what seems to be true for all or the majority of a population. The inference would then be that using these conclusions it is possible to make assumptions about what would be true for an individual within that population. Idiographic study starts theory generation from the individual and moves up. The aim is to gain a thorough understanding of the individual case before moving on to tentatively making links with other cases. Harré (1979) argues that this, rather than a nomothetic route, is the logical way towards universal laws:

> '*such a science is aimed always at a cautious climb up the ladder of generality, seeking for universal structure, but reaching it only by a painful step by step approach* '.(p.137).

A fine grained analysis that does justice to each individual is gained before cross-case analysis is attempted.

Warnock (1987) suggests that probing deeper into the individual can take the researcher closer to the universal. It is in this way that the really noteworthy elements can surface from within the messiness of human life. Seeking to over-generalise from

the onset, cuts out the messiness and variety that is intrinsic to human life and experience.

A nomothetic approach would result in generalisations that cannot be traced back to any particular individual (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). This creates the potential that findings describe 'non-people', pertinent to no real person. Through an idiographic approach in IPA, we can see the holistic nature of a person, complete with complex and intertwined elements of experience, rather than filtering out and isolating individual factors.

3.6   Data gathering

3.6.1 Overview of the Data Gathering

A number of interview formats are considered here. The eventual interview was semi-structured, drawing on elements of narrative interviewing and episodic interviewing.

The interview style that I adopted in this study has most in common with the semi-structured interview. There were areas that I did wish to cover, so there were elements of the interview that were pre-determined. A formal structured interview, however, could mean that what the participant had to 'give' might go largely untapped. To avoid missing important areas for exploration an element of flexibility was maintained.

An interview guide was prepared with a series of questions. In practice, the questions were answered in different orders with different participants and additional questions were asked as appropriate. It did not feel necessary to maintain uniformity between interviews. To do so would not allow for natural dialogue and response to the individuals involved.

To some extent, I drew on the narrative interview style. I was attracted to the idea of allowing the participant to talk without any guidance from the researcher or pruning

of possible avenues for exploration. One of the first questions on the interview guide was an invitation to tell me all about their experiences of supporting children. Each participant was encouraged to talk for as long as possible with no additional verbal input from myself. I hoped that this would provide the opportunity to allow areas that were of interest to the participant to surface. I was surprised at how long most of the participants continued to talk with only smiles and nods as prompts. As suggested above, an entirely narrative interview was not considered the right choice for this study. There were perhaps more elements in common with the 'episodic interview' (Flick, 2006). The central feature of the episodic interview is to recurrently ask the interviewee to give narratives of situations, asking about one incidence after another. It is a more real dialogue than purely narrative interviewing. The theoretical background of episodic interviewing is similar to narrative interviewing in that experience of reality is socially constructed through the presentation of those experiences.

The resulting interviews moved through an interview guide, rather than a schedule. A basic plan was in place to serve as a reminder to me, but deviations from the plan were permitted. The start was open and narrative, while later stages were more focussed.

3.6.2 Questioning Style

In writing the planned element of the interview, the interview guide, it was borne in mind how different forms of questioning may have more or less desirable effects on the participant.

The interview should ideally be a forum in which participants' perceptions of their experiences are brought to the fore. Flick (2006) suggests using very open unstructured questions particularly at the start of interview to avoid a participant's frame of reference from being narrowed. This ties in with how I started the interview with an invitation for a narrative. Throughout the interview, questions should be as open as possible and carry very little in the way of presumptions (Hollway and

Jefferson, 2000). For example the question:, *'Tell me about how you cope with challenging behaviour displayed by pupils'* would carry the presumptions that challenging behaviour is 'coped with' as opposed to managed comfortably and also that challenging behaviour was necessarily a part of the participant's experience.

Care should be taken to ensure that open questions do not lead to very general statements. The wording of initial questions should be specific enough that it will bring out the meaning of an event (Flick, 2006) *'To increase specificity, you should encourage retrospective inspection'.*(p.151).

I tried to open up the likelihood of retrospective inspection by talking to the participants initially about the mechanics of their work before I asked for a narrative. This enabled me to get a quick flavour of the types of work they had completed and people they had worked with so that I could encourage them to 'retrospectively inspect' those events.

It is recommended that tapping into perceived emotion while the participant is talking can be a gateway to richer data. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) advise listening out for clues to emotion while participants speak through the use of emotion laden words and phrases or other nonverbal cues. The interviewer can pick up on these points and probe further to explore the roots of emotion. By focussing on feelings, an interview may bring out more self-revelatory comments (Flick, 2006).

An alternative to exploration of emotion is de-personalising questioning. This can afford interviewees the chance to view their experience from a different angle as they compare against their perceptions of the experiences of others.

Care should be taken in the phrasing of questions, guarding against the use of long, double-barrelled questions or those that contain jargon (Robson, 2002). The beauty of interview styles that allow for a degree of flexibility, however, is that any misunderstandings can be clarified.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) make some suggestions for the interview process that are aimed specifically at IPA. Before the interview commences it is reasonable to

give the participant some form of introduction to the interview. This may be particularly beneficial where a style of questioning is used that differs somewhat from normal conversation or would contravene usual social rules. For example, where there is an invitation to give a narrative, it may be helpful to remind the participant of an interest in hearing about the area in question, including all details and that everything will be of interest to the researcher.

Throughout the interview, the maintenance of comfortable rapport with the participant is crucial, as is the practice of active listening skills. The aim here is to respond to the speaker through the reflection of emotions and certain phrases. Guarding against the offering of interpretations mid-interview is recommended, as this could narrow the participants' frame of reference. In practice this may be difficult and itself would seem to contravene usual rules of conversation. An example is given in the analysis section of when I did fine myself spontaneously offering an interpretation during the interview. It is suggested, on the other hand, that probing at certain points can help reach greater depth. I feel that care should be taken here, particularly at the start of the interview. Specific use of interviewees' wording in mirroring back could retain the frames of reference and trains of thoughts better than questions such as 'how did that make you feel?'. This latter sort of question carries the danger that this could lead participants to receive the message that they should have responded in a certain way with a degree of emotion worth commenting on. Attentive probing and questioning can be important in encouraging participants to recount further and deeper elements of their stories. In so doing, the use of respondents' exact ordering and phrasing is a tool to safeguard and retain the interviewee's meaning frame, (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000).

The style of interview used expects a lot in terms of sharing information with a relative stranger. A few minutes was therefore spent at the onset in talking about the 'nuts and bolts' of what they have done. This enabled me to hear a few specific names or classes so the invitation to talk relates directly to supporting particular children. This serves the purpose of *'anchoring peoples' accounts to events that have actually happened'* (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p.35). The account relayed has the chance then of being something of a 'story', as opposed to abstraction. An advantage of stories is that they will contain more elements than the concrete content. There will be

details and morals drawn that may be beyond the conscious reach of the teller, but open to analysis and interpretation. For the same reason, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) advise the avoidance of 'why' questions which can lead to hollow abstractions that are disconnected from lived experience.

A range of questioning was planned. Some questions were aimed at encouraging free thinking and recall. Some sought to anchor participants' accounts in real events, while others were designed to explore alternative perspectives.

3.6.3 Interview Skills

The product of the interviews is affected by the manner in which the interview is carried out as well as the specific questions used. Thought is required to ensure sensitivity and care during the interview process.

As a practising EP, talking to people about their perspectives and views is something to which I am accustomed. Just as familiar, is to do so while also offering my personal opinions on a situation. It is relatively common for me to listen at length to parents, children and education staff alike with a view to immediately feeding back elements of their stories that I notice. The need to set aside the impetus to feed back or offer reflections during the interviews was an area in which care had to be taken. Using IPA, it has been important for me to use the ability to encourage people to talk and notice pertinent lines of enquiry to follow up, while shelving the inclination to offer a perspective or test out working hypotheses during the interview. Prior to the actual interviews, a pilot interview was carried out in the presence of another EP. The interviewee was an ex-EA who had recently joined the educational psychology team as an assistant. This gave me the opportunity to discuss my interview technique and to hear how it was perceived by others, both in terms of observation and being interviewed.

Kleinman and Copp (1993) talk of the influence of emotions in the interview context, in how the researcher and participant interact as well as the subsequent interpretations

drawn. Emotion exhibited within the interview will affect the extent to which participants are able to feel comfortable and open up. Through facial expressions and body language (both conscious and unconscious), researchers are able to convey empathy, warmth, interest, belief, surprise and respect to name a few. Even without probing and questioning, therefore, it will be possible to encourage talk and shape the pathway chosen by the interviewee. Display of emotion may have the same potential pitfall of structured interviews and leading questions in that it could encourage interviewees to follow particular lines of thought, at the expense of others. To seek to reduce the display of emotion, however, may reduce the depth of disclosure. Care should be taken by the researcher to be calm and relaxed during the interview as anxiety and tension can be picked up on by the participant.

As the interview was semi-structured, some of the questions were not planned in advance. This necessitated thought being given to the delivery of questioning during the interview. This is a task that requires keen attention to the details of what participants are saying, probing and encouraging as appropriate.

3.6.4 Choice of Sample Group and Interview Forum

The relative merits of different sample sizes and the forum for interviewing had to be weighed up. Decisions were taken on how many participants to include in the study and whether they should be interviewed individually or within a group setting.

Although not generally used for IPA, focus groups were considered. A focus group is a group interview in which questions are posed to a relatively homogenous group of people to gain their opinions and perspectives (Krueger and Casey, 2000). The group is able to discuss their ideas collectively. Since many beliefs develop as social constructs through discussion in society there is some sense that the development of responses to research questions should be socially mediated. This has links with FDA in that discourses or bodies of understanding could be explored.

Focus groups did not feel right for this study. I was aware that many EAs are likely to discuss their experiences as a group and that discourses around support of children with additional needs will exist. I wanted, however, to look at very personal experience and encourage a level of introspection that may be easier and more comfortable without the presence of peers. Such introspection would be a different journey for each participant and not something easily captured in a group conversation.

Case studies can be analysed with IPA and clearly suit the idiographic nature of IPA. Case studies are a good tool when there are deep 'how' and 'why' research questions to be asked and when the focus is on phenomena within a real-life context (Yin, 2003). The case study is a method of experience relaying to which the reader can easily relate and has been used as a teaching device in public policy (Yin, 2003). The examination of cases of child neglect and abuse, such as Victoria Climbie and Baby Peter, have the power to clearly illustrate how a range of factors can interact. This cannot be achieved in the same way through the examination of isolated factors and variables. Nor can it be seen through the use of large-scale questionnaires and investigations that cannot speak to the entirety and holistic nature of case-studies. The case study is a tool to help us 'quasi-experience' the world of others. Facts and generalisations may be able to get us so far, but appreciation of the life-world of others is better achieved through the holistic opening up of other's experience. Examples come from historical novels and biographies that help us to appreciate events that are removed from us at the level of personal experience.

'The distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand
complex social phenomena'. (Yin, 2003, p.2).

The analysis in this study starts with a detailed look at the interviews at an individual case-by-case level. It then moves on to tentatively make links between cases. This study used six participants carrying out similar work in three primary schools within the same local authority. All participants offered support to children with additional support needs within mainstream classes. All were female, since there were no male EAs in the selected schools at the time of study. The opportunity to be involved in the

study was offered to all EAs in these three schools, with volunteers from this group being used. There was, therefore, an element of self-selection in the sample choice.

As opposed to randomly selected large sample sizes, there is not the intention with IPA to generalise findings to a wider population. Because of the homogeneity and relatively small sample size it will be accepted that the findings reflect the experiences of these particular individuals in this particular setting. The participants represent a perspective, rather than a population (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).The reader is required to judge for themselves the extent to which the findings may be relevant for other samples. Sample sizes of three to six participants are seen as appropriate for IPA studies (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

This study has used a sample of six participants from three primary school, with partial self-selection. The sample size is small enough to allow thorough detailed analysis and just large enough to be able to look for commonalities of experience between participants.

3.7   Analysis and Discussion

The analysis is the main event in IPA. The process outlined here is based on Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009). It is a thorough process that starts with a serious engagement with the transcript of an interview, before moving through stages of analysis, interpretation and theorisation.

Reading and re-reading of the transcript allows the researcher to become absorbed in the account and consider how elements of the text relate to each other. It may be difficult to avoid making flip judgements and once having interviewed a participant it will be likely that some interpretations will already have taken place. There is a recommendation to try to 'bracket' those initial interpretations so as to retain an open mind through the process of reading and re-reading the transcript. These concerns are revisited in the analysis section.

Typically, a three column document is prepared (see fig. 3.1) in which the interview dialogue appears in the centre column. On the right hand column, exploratory comments are made as the researcher reads. The researcher starts making notes and describes all aspects of the transcript. A line that may initially appear of little significance may later seem of higher importance, in relation to the rest of the text. The left-hand column remains for the formation of emergent themes.

Emergent themes	Transcript	Exploratory notes

Fig. 3.1   Transcript Notation

As the initial exploratory comments are made, the phenomenological and hermeneutic aspects of IPA interplay. Three categories of initial noting are made. Descriptive comments (engaging with the phenomenological) remain close to the explicit meanings of the participants. Linguistic comments will explore the use of language by the participant. Conceptual comments (engaging with the hermeneutic) interrogate the text, seeking to make sense of meaning makings. Through repeated readings, extracts will be appreciated in relation to the text in its entirety. Likewise, specific short extracts may prove themselves important in illuminating the text as a whole. In practice, during initial readings it felt important to make notes on anything that occurred to me and categorise it later. A convention of IPA is to underline conceptual notes and italicise linguistic comments. I generally carried out this step during second readings when, interrogating both the transcript and my own initial notes.

With a comprehensive set of exploratory comments, or initial notes, emergent themes can then be identified. These themes speak to the essence of the initial notes, as interpreted by the researcher. It is important that interpretations are rooted within the transcript, even though the meanings may not always be those that would be explicit in the transcript. This is as opposed to the formation of interpretations that come largely from extant theory, external to the transcript itself. In practice, interpretations will necessarily be influenced by the researcher's existing theoretical awareness. It must be possible, however, to clearly trace interpretations back to specific verbatim extracts in the data. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggest that a 'Gadamerian

dialogue' can emerge, whereby there is an interaction between the researcher's pre-understandings of the transcript that will be largely affected by experiential and professional knowledge and later understandings that are more heavily influenced by emerging understanding of the participant's world.

Once a list of emergent themes has been formed, examination of links between the themes begins. Theme titles may be cut out and physically moved around to see how they seem to relate to each other. Some can be grouped under one particular theme or explained through the formation of a new theme title. Others may be seen as having very little significance. A new list of super-ordinate themes is created that draws the majority of the interpretations into a shorter list of areas.

With subsequent cases, a researcher may choose to start the analytic process again from scratch or to examine the new transcript in light of the existing super-ordinate themes from the first case. In this study the process was started afresh for each case. The lists of super-ordinate themes from the various cases were examined together, just as the emergent themes were examined to form the super-ordinates.

Comparison of super-ordinate themes from different cases was interesting in terms of how some cases can expose the absence of certain themes within other cases. Sartre (1956/ 1943, p. 42) stressed the ability of the *absence* of something to create meaning. Where participants have not talked about a particular subject, the reason may be that all elements of the subject area necessary to give satisfaction are in place. So much so, that it becomes 'invisible' to the participant as an area for consideration. This relative importance can become apparent through the prominence of a theme in other cases. An example of this is the area of 'communication' in this study. For some participants, this was an area that they seemed to want to talk about a great deal. It was a pertinent issue to them because the level of satisfaction with communication experienced was low. A strong feeling was present for some participants that poor communication hampered their work. For participants who were comfortable with the communication between EAs and CTs it was seemingly less notable to them as they appeared to accept it as standard practice. For the participants experiencing poor communication, its absence caused the importance of communication to be more strongly felt.

The analytic write-up makes use of the super-ordinate themes to take the reader through a cohesive and coherent narrative, illustrating the arguments made with verbatim extracts. Because of the nature of IPA, it may feel appropriate to incorporate the analysis and discussion sections together, with theory and extant literature being woven into the narrative argument. It may also be seen as fitting, as has been the case in this study, to retain the two separate sections with the discussion used purely as a dialogue between the points raised in analysis and theory and literature.

The journey of moving through from transcript reading and description to analysis and discussion is one that involves progressive levels of interpretation. The product is a set of common themes that are rooted in the transcript and are discussed in relation to theory and extant literature.

3.8   Appropriate and Ethical Practice in Qualitative Research

3.8.1 IPA and Ethical Practice

Using IPA, an intrinsically qualitative form of research, it would not be possible or relevant to apply the same senses of validity and reliability that have been traditionally applied to research studies. Nonetheless, it is important that qualitative research is carried out with care and adherence to principles of ethical and appropriate practice. Such principles can include:

- Maintaining transparency of results
- Reflexivity of interpretation
- Self-reflection

Reliability could be understood to relate to the ability of results to be replicated, through the reduction of confounding variables. The idiographic nature of IPA means that large scale generalisation is not an aim. As stated above, the findings will represent a perspective, not a population. It is accepted that the nature of the story

drawn from a participant is shaped by a range of factors that could not be controlled or replicated. Unstructured or semi-structured interview styles cause the researcher to relinquish much control over the direction so that the account elicited will largely depend on the choices of the individual participant. Interaction with the researcher will facilitate the account relayed. Again, the spontaneous interaction between two individuals is not something to be controlled or replicated.

Since it is acknowledged that the control of many variables is neither possible nor appropriate, it is important that researcher effects are not hidden. Through reflexivity, there is an awareness of researcher effects on the construction of meanings within the interview. Researcher assumptions and the nature of the interaction can be made explicit. This will allow the reader to consider how they may have shaped the data. The inner world of the researcher can be kept visible and traced to any interpretations formed. Burgess (1982) suggests the keeping of substantive field notes, including records of personal impressions and self-analysis. In providing visible elements of reflexivity within the write-up, the reader is afforded some insight into what factors have contributed to the nature of the research (Oliver, 2004, p.25). In this study, a log was kept of any post-interview reflections. Subsequent interviews were carried out in the light of previous post-interview reflections. Examples of such reflections are contained in the analysis chapter.

It is not only the data collection that will be unique to the situation and researcher, the interpretations drawn will also be unique to the researcher. It could be argued that by moving away from the meanings intended by the participants, the possibility of representing a perspective is lost. However, if the researcher does not interpret the data then conclusions drawn will be solely dependent on what the participant is able to (or chooses to) verbalise. Interpretations allow the researcher to look beyond what is presented at face value. Such interpretations can be offered alongside the intended meanings of the participant. The inclusion of verbatim extracts to illustrate arguments allows for transparency of interpretations.

Ensuring thoughtful practice in a qualitative IPA study like this is more about exposing the nature and extent of researcher effects, than seeking to present findings that are free from confounding variables. Honesty and transparency are ideals, but the

intention is to maintain integrity of the research through offering the reader a view of the route from data collection to interpretation.

3.8.2 Protecting Participants from Harm

It should be the role of the researcher to take steps to minimise any risk of harm to participants while also making them aware of the potential for harm. Scrutiny of the research process before commencement of active research was carried out to this end.

The risk of physical harm was not qualitatively different from that incurred during the working day of the participants since the interviews were conducted at the schools in which the participants work. There was no intention to ask questions or discuss topics expected to invoke emotional distress. However, since this could be a possibility it was explained both in writing and verbally to participants that, should they so wish, they were free not to discuss particular areas or indeed end the interview. It was also explained to participants that the opportunity for debriefing at the end of the interview with a different psychologist was available.

The main anticipated risk of harm to participants was that of inconvenience. Financial compensation was given for their time, at a level equivalent to their earnings. This was considered reasonable as compensation for the inconvenience caused but not so high as to coerce participants to consenting without feeling comfortable with the study.

3.8.3 Informed Consent

The notion of *informed* consent suggests the idea that research participants have a full and realistic appreciation of what they are involved in and what is being asked of them.

I initially met with prospective participants to explain the nature of the study, giving the opportunity for any questions to be asked. Written information sheets, including details for contacting me were given out. There was a period of several days between first contact and interviews, to allow prospective participants time for deliberation. Written consent was obtained from all participants and they were made aware, both in writing and verbally, that they were free to withdraw consent at any point during or after the study and that if consent was withdrawn at any point the data held on those participants would be destroyed. This option would continue up to one month after interview. In practice, no participant did withdraw consent.

3.8.4 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Factors pertaining to the confidentiality and anonymity of the data were disclosed to the participant within the participant information sheet and before obtaining consent.

No person, other than the participant and I were present during the interviews. It was likely that some other members of staff within the schools would be aware of interviews taking place and therefore who the participants were from the school in which they work. The data itself was anonymised, with the raw data only being shared with my supervisor. As stated above, verbatim extracts were included in the final writing up of the study and there was the possibility of people being identified from their words. The data itself was analysed at my home and kept securely.

Participants were made aware of their right to access personal information and receive a copy of the final report. They were also made aware of their right to have their personal information destroyed if they chose to withdraw consent following the phase of data collection.

3.9 Reflections during the Analytic Process

The process of analysing the data required periods of intensive thought and deliberation, combined with periods of distance from the data to gain perspective. As set out in the methodology, the guidelines on IPA put forward by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) were largely followed in this study. That said, the guidelines are not intended, nor were they received by me, as a rule book. I have included here my own reflections during the course of initial reading of the transcript, coding the data and putting together the master list of super-ordinate themes. These reflections show how the process of IPA was moulded to my needs in this particular study and how the various merits and difficulties of the process resonated with me.

3.9.1 Initial Reading of the Transcript

I felt aware, reading through the transcripts, that some elements raised by participants were more readily available to conscious abstraction. Other elements seemed more implicit, with participants becoming aware of the significance of something while they were talking.

Using the transcript to look over my own interview skills and use of questioning, at times I wonder why I did not follow up various points during interview. I remember feeling that it was hard to process what the participants were saying during interview to the extent that I could formulate further questions as I went along. I was aware that it felt significantly more difficult than a normal conversation in which I would ask whatever occurred to me as I go along. The burden of avoiding steering the participant and of 'keeping the participant going' through the use of body language seemed to lead to me missing cues. The following shows an extract of interview 6:

Nicola:

> .....but I think everyone has their own way of doing things. I think as long as
> the foundation......

(6:425-428)

It seems a shame that I did not ask what the 'foundation' was. At the time I think I was too concerned about the interview in its entirety. I was thinking about the answer as a whole, about what my next question would be and so on. The conversation can feel awkward because of having to shelve the natural inclination to offer affirmatives, agreements, alternative perspectives and empathy. There was one point in interview 6 in which I offered my own opinion during an interview. I was not aware of having done this at the time. It seems as though it was an unintentional slip into normal conversation style.

I wonder if a method that might have worked better for me would have been to start similarly to what I actually did, in that I began by allowing the participant to talk freely. Moving on from this, perhaps a period of more naturalistic conversation would have allowed me to pick up on cues more readily. I could have rounded off the interview by looking though the guide and asking any questions that may not have been covered during the course of the conversation. There are two sides as to whether this approach would be more open to the participant being led by my agenda. On the one hand, a greater unplanned verbal input might lead to me picking up more readily on points that were of greater interest to me and offering reflections mid-interview. On the other hand, it would also have allowed me to make better use of unexpected points raised by the participant that fell out-with the interview guide.

3.9.2 Coding the data

The process of coding data and putting together lists of super-ordinate themes was interesting, yet tiring and it was important to keep a sharp and fresh mind as interpretations were formed. The use of grouping themes manually on pieces of paper and taking time between sessions of analysis helped me to retain clarity of thought.

While coding the initial themes of each transcript it became apparent that I was using the same theme more and more as I went through a transcript. As I began coding the themes I searched for words that would encapsulate the essence of what I wanted to say about a series of similar extracts. This led to different wordings being used on each occurrence. There often came a point, part way through coding, where I settled

on a theme name that felt just right for what I wanted to say. This sometimes meant that this wording would then be used repeatedly from that point onward. As the next stage was the forming of super-ordinate themes, theme names that had started to be used more frequently later on in coding, due to their feeling 'right', were used to 'subsume' earlier similar theme names that hadn't quite captured the essence of the extract quite as I had intended.

It could be difficult to decide under which super-ordinate to place a theme. The distinctions between the themes and groupings are, of course, artificial. They are a construct to enable me to better interpret and explain my interpretations. There are not neat groupings of thought from the participants, but fluid moving between areas and times when conflicting thoughts co-exist.

I was aware, through the notation and writing of emergent themes, how some days the analysis seemed to 'work better'. It was important to resist the temptation to just get sections finished when I became aware that my thinking was no longer as sharp. Time between bouts of analysis to refresh was necessary to ensure that the notation and themes did not become glib.

During the writing of the tables of super-ordinate themes I became aware that I was more drawn to and interested in some themes than others. It felt important to guard against placing too much emphasis on themes that were already pet interests and theories of mine. I was aware that I felt drawn to the notion of 'flow' and also to the concept of zone of proximal development. It was necessary to take care that my attraction to particular themes was in response to a sense that they somehow encapsulated the meaning of certain messages within the transcripts, as opposed to a pre-existing interest in an associated theory. As suggested above, this is not a truly attainable goal as I can never be sure of the extent to which my own constructs and motivations intermingle with the interpretations that I make. All I can do is to be mindful of this issue, reflect upon it and aim to be transparent in the process of interpretation.

As I put together names for super-ordinate themes I tried to ensure that the core of the super-ordinate theme was rooted in the verbatim extracts, rather than my own projections. IPA incorporates an element of the interpretations of the researcher, but it

is important not to miss a stage of interpretation. It should be my interpretation and sense-making of the interpretations and sense making of the participants. On one occasion I felt that I caught myself skipping out the sense-making of the participant and going straight to my sense making of the events themselves. I had scribbled down a note to myself that read 'the need for ring-fenced time for communication with CT' as a possible super-ordinate theme. On reflection, however, this was not a direct interpretation of how the participant saw their experience. It was how I saw things, based on what I had been told by the participant. Given the points made by the participant, I felt almost certain that the participant would have agreed with me, had I suggested that ring-fenced time for communication with the CT would be useful, but this was not an interpretation that she had come to independently. These sorts of points would be more appropriately drawn in at the discussion stage and in implications for practice.

Consideration was given to whether I would use a computer software package such as Atlas Ti or NUDIST to assist me with the organisation of initial coding and themes. I had previously used Atlas Ti in a previous study and felt that, on reflection, the use of a computer to arrange my thinking did not feel quite right for me as I wanted a process that was more immediate and physical. In this study I opted for the use of hundreds of tiny pieces of paper being moved around on huge pieces of paper instead, grouping the little labels by placing them in different areas of the paper.

I was right that in using pieces of paper I did feel as though there was more physical contact with the work. It felt easier to see how all the themes interacted together in their entirety, rather than having to scroll up and down and flick back through on-screen pages. The downside was that it felt harder for me to keep track of the names of initial themes as I went along. The process of using Atlas Ti had felt 'neater' in as much as it was easier to code sections of transcript, to keep track of the names of the codes that I was inventing and re-use them appropriately. Sections of transcript with the same code could then automatically be stored together and so retrieval of an entire corpus of transcript for a particular code could be accessed in a couple of clicks.

It felt important to keep a close eye on my own interpretations through coding the data and putting together the super-ordinate themes. Time away from the data helped to keep a sharp mind and allowed me to return with fresh eyes. Care was also taken to ensure that interpretations were rooted in the transcripts and did not arise due to my pre-existing interests are miss out the sense making of the participants themselves.

Although computer analysis packages have benefits, for me the physical process working with the themes allowed me to 'see' how they interacted with each other.

3.9.3 The Master Super-ordinate Themes

Once the super-ordinate themes for each individual transcript had been formulated the process of knitting the different super-ordinates together to form a master list to represent all the transcripts together began.

I was aware when putting together the tables of super-ordinate themes from the various interviews that although some themes cropped up in more than one interview I had put them under different super-ordinate groupings. My first response to this was to feel that perhaps I ought to have mapped the themes from subsequent interviews onto the first super-ordinate list from transcript one. This might have afforded me greater ability to see how themes existed across the participant group. However, the method I did use of starting from scratch with each transcript and forming new sets of super-ordinates had a different advantage. The grouping of themes was not a matter of organising individual abstract words. The meaning of the themes was subtly different in each transcript and how the themes related to each other was interpreted in light of a particular transcript and the unique story of that participant. In the same way that I took care to limit the reading of my own constructs and beliefs into the data, I wanted to guard against mapping the sense-making from one participant onto the transcript of other participants. For this reason I believe it was beneficial for me to start afresh in the coding of each transcript.

In forming the master list, there was the need to narrow down the complexity of the discourses from the participants into a few key themes. The meaning of a theme was

subtly different for each participant and made it hard to decide how to label them. Some ideas did not fall comfortably into any category. In writing the analysis section a few days later, that slight bit of distance, both in time and also not physically staring at the entire body of themes at once, meant that some discourses permeated through the fog more directly to me than others, while other ideas seemed to drop back.

The process of taking a complex set of ideas from each participant and shaping them into a narrow set of coherent arguments took time and discipline. It was important to remain linked to the sense making of the participants, rather than forcing the data into neat groupings. The final master list of super-ordinate themes is an artificial set of groupings. Notwithstanding, the arguments put forward in the analysis are grounded in the transcripts and are clearly backed up with verbatim excerpts. This should allow the reader to see how the arguments have evolved and is open to different interpretations by the reader.

I have included my own experience of IPA since it has implications for the interpretations drawn in the analysis. In an IPA study the researcher does not play an objective role, but is inextricably woven into both data gathering and analysis. My experiences will have affected my interpretations and so I have aimed to make them as transparent as I can to the reader.

The final section of the analysis includes details of my own experience of conducting a study using IPA. The broad methodological guidelines for IPA put forward by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) were adhered to in this study. In keeping with the premises of IPA, these guidelines will be interpreted uniquely by each researcher and I have attempted to show how my own interpretations have led to the writing of this particular study.

This methodology section began by offering an account of why qualitative research, using idiographic interviews has been used for this study. Narrative analysis and FDA have influenced this research, but IPA is the methodology that is primarily used. As such, a detailed description is given as to the processes involved in IPA. The constraints of the study are acknowledged, alongside those factors that have been borne in mind to ensure pursuit of thoughtful and ethical practice. Lastly, I have

included my reflections on the process of analysis, considering how the guidelines of IPA worked for this study.

PROCEDURES

The procedures section gives details of the practicalities of the study. The sub-sections are:

- Identifying and recruiting participants
- Details of participants
- Contact with participants prior to interview
- Data collection
- Interview guide
- Reflexive notes

4.1   Identifying and Recruiting Participants

Volunteer participants were taken from the three primary schools contacted, following presentation of detailed information about the study to all EAs in the schools and a three week period of reflection.

All participants were EAs working in the local authority in which I practice as an EP. In the first instance, I spoke with three head teachers at schools in which I have practiced to ask if they would be comfortable with me interviewing the EAs and to assure prospective participants of the anonymity of the study. The head teachers initially informed the staff in their respective schools of my impending visits and a set of participant information sheets (see Appendix 1) was forwarded to each school for distribution. I then visited the schools and met with any interested EAs. This first contact gave me the opportunity to explain the aims and methodology of the study and afforded prospective participants the opportunity to ask questions. There was a period of three weeks between the first contact and the interviews for participants to consider giving consent to involvement.

4.2   Contact with Participants prior to Interview

Participants were met as a group in each of the schools, three weeks in advance of the interviews. By this point, prospective participants had already received written information about the proposed study. The meeting provided an opportunity for me to clarify verbally what the study entailed and to answer questions. My intention in holding group meetings was that participants would feel comfortable enough to ask me any difficult questions they may have in the presence of their peers. Following the group meeting, prospective participants were asked to let the head teacher know of their interest in being involved in the research.

4.3   The Participants

A total of six participants were interviewed. Each participant worked as an EA in one of the three primary schools in the authority in which I work.

Table 4.1   Participant pseudonyms

Pseudonym	School	Position in Chronological Order
Thea	A	1
Ruth	B	2
Siobhan	B	3
Claire	C	4
Sallie	A	5
Nicola	C	6

As can be seen from the table above, there were two participants from each of the three schools. I have included the chronological order in which participants were interviewed so this can be considered alongside post-interview reflections. It should then be visible how the reflexive notes bear upon the nature of subsequent interviews.

4.4   Data Collection

Interviews took place in a quiet room with no other person present. It was agreed at the start of the conversation that the maximum length of interview would be one hour. In practice, 50 minutes was the maximum. A dicta-phone was used for audio recording of the dialogue. This was later transcribed into a word document for analysis.

4.5   Interview Guide

The interview is preceded with a period of free talk, an introduction/ reminder of the process and the opportunity for participants to ask any questions.

The questions are numbered here. In reality, the aim is for the 'interview' to be more of a conversation and so questions may be asked at the point that feels most appropriate.

Table 4.2   Interview guide and rationale

Question	Rationale
1. How long have you done this job?	*The purpose of this question is initially to start a conversation with the participant. The hope is that she will talk a little bit about general experience of the role and the 'nuts and bolts' of what she has done.*
2. Tell me all about supporting these children in class and how that process has been for you.	*The phrasing of this question will be dependent on the response to question 1. The idea will be to pick up on elements that are mentioned in question 1 and also to encourage retrospective inspection. The participant will be encouraged to talk at length through body language such as nods and smiles. The hope is that something of a narrative will emerge*

	with very little input from the interviewer, thereby avoiding the conversation being driven by the interviewer. Further questions or prompts may be put forward at the end to encourage her to say more about certain elements.
3. How do you see your role in the support process?	*Questions 3- 7 may be phrased differently in reality so that they relate more to the individual experience of the participant being interviewed. They may also be drawn out in different orders as points crop up naturally in conversation.*
4. Could you tell me a bit about what it is like being an EA?	
5. Tell me about the sorts of things that you do when you are supporting children.	
6. Can you tell me about the sorts of things that help the support process to go well?	
7. Can you tell me about when the support process is hindered?	
8. What else do you think you could tell me that would help me to understand and appreciate the role of EAs?	
9. How do you imagine your experiences compare with those of other EAs?	*The purpose of this question is to allow participants an alternative perspective of their experiences. By comparing themselves to others, they may be able to stand back and look at their experiences in relation*

	to others. They may see some elements in a sharper focus as they consider elements that they feel are particular to them and elements that they feel they share with others. Analysis will only seek to explore what participants relay about themselves, not others.
10. What would you wish to tell a new member of the EA staff that would support them in their role?	
11. What could you tell a new teacher that would help them to work effectively with EAs?	*At the end of the interview, questions 10 and 11, move away from the in-depth exploration of lived experience to something more general. The hope is that, since they are placed at the end of the interview, participants will be able to draw on the account of lived experience to pick on elements that are particularly crucial to them.*

ANALYSIS

5.1   Analysis Introduction

This analysis is in two sections. The introduction to participants as individuals gives some background to the circumstances of the interview, along with what seemed to stand out for this particular individual. The comparative analysis looks at the convergence between the participants. The areas of congruence are grouped under the themes of:

- Communication, interface and role perceptions between class teacher and education auxiliary
- Development of and outcomes from a genuine and reciprocal relationship with the supported child
- Judging the level of support
- Fulfilment and engagement with the role

In the interests of transparency and to give the reader a sense of what constructs may have influenced my interpretations, researcher pre-understandings are outlined below. The following is not a set of firm beliefs, but tentative suspicions or points that I felt were possibilities:

Table 5.1   Researcher Pre-understandings

Researcher Pre-understandings
Some children may be 'over-supported' which can lead to dependence on the part of the child
The allocation of an EA to support a child can sometimes lead teaching staff to feel that the child's additional needs have now been met
Support can lead to some children interacting less with the rest of the class
Different children benefit from different levels of adult presence, modelling and encouragement
Some support staff perceive a pressure from teaching staff to have tasks completed. This can mean that a good finished product is given priority over the learning processes

There is not enough thought and discussion surrounding how individual children are supported

5.2   Introduction to the Participants as Individuals

Verbatim excerpts from the interviews are used to illustrate this and the comparative analysis section. Following each excerpt is a reference indicating the interview and the corresponding line numbers. For example the first excerpt is referenced with (1: 160-175), showing that it is lines 160-175 from interview 1.

In the introduction to the participants as individuals I have included a table for each participant of the super-ordinate themes that I interpreted as being the most meaningful for those participants. These will be slightly different from those found in the comparative analysis as this latter stage attempts to draw together and show points of convergence between the participants. I have not analysed all the super-ordinate themes for each participant in this first section, but rather pick out areas of apparent uniqueness. Areas of overlap are considered in the comparative analysis.

The verbatim excerpts in this section are intended to offer the reader a view of my interpretation of the participant as a person, showing ways in which her sense-making of her experiences may differ from that of the group as a whole. For this reason, the sub-sections of each participant vary in the number of excerpts included since some participants seemed to have more in common with the group as a whole than others.

5.2.1 Thea

Thea is a participant from School A and was the first person that I interviewed. I had met Thea in passing while practising as an EP in School A, although I had not directly observed a lesson in which she was supporting. Thea works primarily to support the education of one particular child, known here as Alfie. He spends the majority of his time within the mainstream class with some periods in the school's enhanced

provision. Alfie is known to me in my role as EP and I have observed him being supported by different members of staff in the past and attended meetings to discuss his needs. He has complex communication difficulties and is often viewed as showing some challenging behaviour.

As the first interview in the study, this is the one during which I felt most self-conscious. Initially the atmosphere seemed just a little awkward and this may have had a bearing on the details discussed by Thea. I felt that I had to quickly abandon any notion of keeping an eye on my interview schedule. The more I relaxed into my chair and just tried to *enjoy* the interview, the more forthcoming and at ease Thea seemed to become. I was surprised to find that, in spite of a slight initial awkwardness, Thea continued to speak at length with very little input from me. I had found in the pilot interview that the participant spoke at length with only smiles and nods from me as encouragement, but this had been a person I knew quite well. I was glad that Thea also needed little verbal prompting as my plan was to begin each interview with a period of free talking from the participant with no guiding from me. Of course it could be argued that my smiles and nods were a form of guiding as Thea may have received them as evidence that I wanted to hear more of the same. I tried to mirror Thea's body language, in that I smiled and laughed when she did. I hope this meant that if my body language was guiding her in a certain direction it was to continue with lines of thought that she found interesting herself.

Table 5.2   Super-ordinate themes for Thea.

Super-ordinate Theme	Lines in transcript	Key words
Mismatch of external expectations, training and daily reality of the job	470-473	She has a class to teach and you're the auxiliary, so get on with it, you know.
Lack of job-related self-confidence	495	Quite daunting
Separateness of the child	629-630	He wants teacher time
Challenging Behaviour	69-70	Once you are on that road
Offering something of value	350	It's just giving them time

Perhaps in response to Alfie's emotional and behavioural needs, Thea is the only participant for whom *challenging behaviour* came through as a theme in its own right. This theme was not included in the group super-ordinate themes as no other participant seemed to interpret it as significant to their experience. She also experienced a level of discomfort relating to not feeling able to meet the expectations that teaching staff had of her role.

Thea sees the challenging behaviour as an element of her job that she finds particularly difficult. She has made efforts to manage Alfie's behaviour and seems to see the behaviour and even the child as something to be controlled.

At times, the way Thea describes Alfie's behaviour is as if there is limited controllability to it. Her descriptions remind me of a train that keeps on travelling along a particular track, without the ability to take novel routes. With this, goes the possibility that the tracks may be changed and the train sent off in an alternative direction if action is taken at just the right time.

Thea:

> *Emma, he was quite friendly with and she was part of his group. You know, he kind of pushed her out of his friendship group for some reason and so therefore if she came near him he would hit her. So I had to ask her, you know, if she could sit at another lunch table and things like that... but then that alleviates the problem and she was quite happy to do that cos you have to think on other children's safety, so Alfie is quite challenging.* (1:160-175)

It is interesting that Thea felt that she '*had*' to ask the girl to move seats. It is as though she does not believe that engagement with Alfie directly can be worthwhile, but rather circumstances must be set up differently around him to allow his behaviour to progress in an alternative direction. She suggests that Alfie pushed Emma out of the group '*for some reason*', but this is the extent of the explanation that she gives. The expression 'For some reason' tends to be used in everyday speech to mean 'for some reason that we are not going to be able to understand'.

Thea:

> *...if there is a sort of strategy that you can divert from him, em, from whatever the behaviour is that helps as well. Because if he is not going to work, he will, like.... go under the table, he will even try, you know, hiding somewhere so you've got to find something that will get him out from under the table that will take his interest. And once you are on that road the behaviour will stop because if you let it carry on he might start hitting out – hitting out at me, hitting out at anybody who's sitting beside him.*(1:58-75)

Again, there is a suggested inevitability in Alfie's behaviour if it is not re-tracked at a particular point. She already feels that she knows the end destination of the behaviour once it has started moving in a given direction.

On other occasions Thea talks about control of Alfie's behaviour with the use of incentives.

Thea:

> *So if you have an incentive at hand then your life is easier. If you don't, life becomes harder, or else you just need to break the behaviour.* (1:52-57)

The use of incentives does infer an element of engagement with Alfie himself. Still, however, the engagement is not with Alfie's cognition. It is a behavioural approach. There seems to be a sense that his thought processes are not something that can be understood. Rather, she *'has'* to do her best to manage and re-track the behaviour that arises as a consequence of his thought processes.

Another strong theme for Thea was *Mismatch of external expectations, training and daily reality of the job*. In the comparative analysis I have grouped this theme with *'Communication, interface and role perception between CT and EA'*. The incongruence between Thea's interpretation of CT perceptions of her role and her own perceived daily reality was more noticeable than for other participants. This manifests itself in Thea feeling that she is being asked to work beyond her own resources, in terms of time and expertise.

Thea:

> *They insist that somebody with packed lunches sit with the packed and somebody with the school lunches sit with the school lunches and to divide yourself between two, especially if someone was going to get up from the table and move, or has an obsession about something.* (1:285-294)

She seems to feel that what is 'insisted' upon by other staff (presumably teachers) is not physically possible on the ground.

Thea:

> *You know, there isn't a lot of training. Therefore when I came in as relief then you are just dealing with children on the move as it were, you know, and the teachers almost expected you to know what to do. Em, and I think that, that's an area where the expectation of the teacher – well she has a class to teach and you're the auxiliary, so get on with it, you know.* (1:460-473)

Again, Thea points to her sense that the expectations of the teacher are not in keeping with what she feels is possible for EAs. She says that the training she has received has not brought her to a point where she feels competent in meeting the expectations of the teacher. She also seems to feel that the teacher does not want to engage in thinking about what the EA may already appreciate or be aware of. It's as though the teacher has in her head a sense of what her own role is, what the EA's role is and no spare time to consider if her perception is accurate, '*She has a class to teach and you're the EA, so get on with it*'. Thea feels the role of teaching the class is something that takes the teacher's time and thoughts to the extent that she is not interested in considering the ins and outs of the EA role. She just wants her perception of the role to be carried out in its entirety, for the EA to '*get on with it*'.

Thea's unique case illustrates how stress can be experienced due to not feeling able to satisfactorily meet the demands of a role. For Thea, this occurs because of her difficulty in supporting challenging behaviour as well as the mismatch between teacher assumptions of her role and her own understanding of her capacities and competencies. Thea's perception that external expectations of her role are not in

keeping with her sense of what is realistic interacts with the theme of communication between EA and CT. This is discussed further in the group analysis as communication was found generally to be of importance to the participants.

5.2.2 Ruth

Ruth works in School B. This is a school that does not usually have many children with significant additional support needs. Children are usually supported individually and this may be influenced by children with additional support needs appearing quite different within this school.

Ruth talked more than any of the other participants – nearly twice as much in the same time frame. It was important to ensure that her views were not over represented as the amount of data generated was so great. I felt that the nature of this interview was quite different from how a conversation would generally unfold. Ruth moved from one topic to the next quickly, sometimes moving off at unexpected tangents. If I had been chatting to her in a more natural setting I would have felt the need to clarify the points she was making as she went along and perhaps check how she felt one theme related to another. I was keen in the interview to encourage her to talk about the themes in a way that made sense to her without the need for her to try and arrange her thoughts to fit my current constructs and understandings. I did not want to convey, during the course of the interview, that I had any difficulty making sense of what she was saying as I was concerned this might inhibit her. I knew that I would have a chance to make sense of the data later on.

Table 5.3   Super-ordinate themes for Ruth

Theme	Page, lines in transcript	Key Words
Parallels with Parenting	533-535	I suppose it's easier to say cos I'm a parent
Maintaining appearance of normality	852-856	He seems to be happy with his own company. Sometimes. We all are

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		sometimes.
Hierarchical Interface with CT	709-710	I feel it's over stepping (the) mark
Boundaries and Expectations	774-775	well I didn't know if I should
Professional Support and Development	2050-2051	college course is quite an enlightenment
Interaction of EA with child learning processes	50	Encouraging them
Genuine Reciprocal Relationship with Child	102-103	a very intelligent little boy
Emotional Fulfilment and Growth	326	I love doing this

Ruth currently supports a child known here as Dennis with whom she appears to have developed a close relationship. This sense of a genuine and reciprocal relationship with a supported child is a theme that Ruth shares with other participants. What is unique to her is the high level of emphasis she places on maintaining a sense of normality and a resistance to Dennis being viewed as different from his peers. She works towards protecting this image that she holds of Dennis. Within the comparative analysis I have grouped *Maintaining appearance of normality* with *Development of and outcomes from a genuine reciprocal relationship with child*, although for Ruth it is a strong theme in its own right.

Ruth:

> *...or he's really sad cos no one's playing with him.... He seems to be happy with his own –he seems to be happy with his own company. Sometimes. We all are sometimes. You sometimes just want to be yourself.* (2:847-858)

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Ruth starts out indicating that Dennis is sad when nobody plays with him. She then seems to contradict herself, stating that he is happy in his own company. Next she takes it a step further as she says that this is how it is for everyone. That we all want to be alone at times. This passage gives the appearance that she wants to convince herself of an alternative, more comfortable version of events.

Ruth later states explicitly that she supports Dennis in order to keep him the same as his peers. There seems to be a belief that this is the purpose of her role.

Ruth:

> *I'm just to assist him to keep him up to the same as what they are.*
> (2:1552-1556)

She talks of one CT in particular that she feels makes Dennis feel included well.

Ruth:

> *...she is the P3 Teacher and I like the fact that he is not made to be any*
> *different from anyone. That's what I like...*(2:1660-1665)

Her final statement here '*That's what I like!*' demonstrates that for Ruth this is a priority and is at the heart of supporting a child with additional support needs, the child should not feel '*any different from anyone*'. She goes on to mention her feelings in response to other children noticing differences in Dennis. This is not an area in which she feels able to maintain an appearance of normality and it frustrates her.

Ruth:

> *But there is the odd child that will pick up on him all the time and I get quite*
> *frustrated with them cos I think.... why?.... you just get on with what you're*
> *doing.*(2:1686-1694)

I found it particularly difficult in this interview to make sense of what Ruth was saying as she went along as she appeared to change topic so quickly. This meant that probing for deeper reflections was problematic. I found that I could manage to

paraphrase occasional remarks and that this did elicit a reasonable amount more information.

Ruth's case is an example of how close relationships can form between EAs and the children that they support. In this instance the attachment to and protection of the child that can grow out of the relationship has lead Ruth to promote a representation of the child as being as similar to his peers as possible.

5.2.3 Siobhan

Like Ruth, Siobhan works in School B and has the role of supporting one particular pupil. The themes arising from this interview are largely in keeping with those of other participants.

By this, the third interview, I was feeling more confident. It no longer felt strange to go for such long periods without giving any verbal input and I managed to resist the temptation to just say *something* to keep things going. This was a comfortable interview and Siobhan was coherent and easy for me to follow. I again found paraphrasing helpful in bringing out deeper reflections, particularly the paraphrasing of emotion laden words. I wondered if participants might find emotion fuelled discussion a little unprofessional, but that once I had indicated an interest in hearing more they felt legitimised in going further into how they felt.

I was not completely sure that I knew of the child she was talking about as she did not use his name. The comments she made led me to believe that it was a child I had previously observed him and for whom I had been part of meetings. When I had observed this child (supported by a different EA) I was uncomfortable with the nature of the support and had felt that a dependent learning style was being fostered in the child. This may have made me feel more sensitized to the possibility of this coming through from Siobhan's transcript.

Table 5.4   Super-ordinate themes for Siobhan

Super-ordinate Theme	Lines in transcript	Key words
Preparation and support in role	193-194	the teacher wasn't very forthcoming
Communication and relationship with CT	541-542	you're too scared to ask anybody
Necessity of constant support	390-392	had lost 10 hours a week and there wasn't enough time
Inclusion of child	101-102	having like a social time along with other kids and not on his own
Development of and outcomes from a close emotional relationship	45-46	quite rewarding knowing that I had helped him do that.

Siobhan is not alone in feeling a sense of conflict between wishing to promote independence while also feeling that her role is to provide constant support. However, this sentiment is stronger for Siobhan than most. She seems to feel this particularly acutely due to her relationship with the supported child's parent and this is conveyed right from the start in her opening sentences.

Siobhan:

> *I have a lot of hassles with the parent, kind of thing. So my experience being an educational auxiliary I think it's, kinda..... tarnished a bit from that side of things with his mum, more the interfering....stopping him doing stuff and things like that, but I'll try and not go onto that.*(3:3-10)

Siobhan goes straight to this point at the beginning of the conversation highlighting the degree to which she experiences this. The last section above '*but I'll try and not go onto that*' indicates a sense that perhaps this is not an appropriate area of discussion, perhaps she might feel that I would perceive an element of

unprofessionalism. I assured Siobhan that whatever was important to her should be discussed and she does go on to talk about discomfort with the parent several more times. She feels that the school are battling to encourage independence in Dennis that the parents counter.

Siobhan:

> ....*so that's (*one of the*) high points, seeing him do that and seeing him go up on a stage like. Just building up his confidence and stuff and reassuring him that he can do things, but then that gets taken away from him at home, where he is kinda stifled. And I think... why?, why I am bothering getting?...cos you do get emotionally involved with him, when it's just kinda squashed at home and... like there are so many brick walls with regards to him taking part in certain activities like parties and things.* (3:48-62)

Siobhan can feel a certain futility to parts of the work that she does in supporting the child. As his support in school, one of the things she does is '*build up his confidence*'. Her investment in his emotional development is heightened by what she seems to see as an inevitable attachment between herself and the child. She then feels led to question the effort, the emotional investment and her own raised hopes for the child as she perceives the emotional growth to be '*squashed*' at home.

5.2.4 Claire

Claire is a very experienced EA who works in School C. I do a great deal of work in this school and have had a productive working relationship with Claire over the last three years. This will probably have influenced the ease with which Claire felt she could speak to me. Although there is the possibility that an existing relationship may have made her more conscious of my reactions, this is not my own interpretation of the interview.

Table 5.5   **Super-ordinate themes for Claire**

Super-ordinate Theme	Lines in transcript	Key words
Role of EA in relation to role of CT	281-282	a scooping up pair of hands
Support	538	a very friendly school
Fulfilment	268-269	you are very valued
Sensitive support	344-345	letting him get on with it
Nurturing/ parent like support	611-612	learning nice things from us, or caring things
Variety of EAs working with children as energising	598-600	their experience is getting enhanced

Throughout the interview, Claire came across as calm and confident, much as she spoke of her role as EA.

Claire:

> *I'm not a shy person, so I would probably ask: 'What do you want me to do?'*

> (4: 332-335)

I am aware that Claire's husband is a teacher and she has worked as a dance teacher in the evenings for years. These factors may contribute to her confidence with respect to education.

The interview with Claire shows her moving more quickly than other participants to a somewhat abstract and generic level. It felt like a less personal account than the others, with less vulnerability revealed. This may be since Claire's high level of confidence ties in with her having very little in the way of internal struggles about her work. It may be that Claire does not have a tendency to be critical of herself and others. She may also prefer to present a positive image of herself which may include viewing others (particularly teaching staff) in a positive light.

Claire:

> *But you are very valued. You feel very worthwhile. You get a lot of satisfaction*
> *out of doing it, well I do anyway. And I'm sure everyone does....* (4: 268-273)

Since I work a lot in this school I have a more genuine relationship with some members of staff in the school and Claire would be aware of this. Although confidentiality had been assured, it may have been uncomfortable for Claire to express concerns about the practice of other members of staff within this school.

I also wondered whether it would have been helpful to ask explicitly for the 'story' of her work to begin with, thereby indicating that abstraction and professional speak was not necessary. When considering this point in hindsight I felt that I would have recounted a different sort of information if someone had asked me of my story of teaching a particular class in a particular school, rather than asking me to tell them what it is like to teach.

There were no super-ordinate themes that seemed completely unique to Claire. However, both Claire and Nicola, the other EA working at School C, seemed to make less mention of the nature of the support with individual children. Claire and Nicola made it clear that the support they offered was more to the teacher and the class as a whole, rather than exclusively to one or two named pupils. Although they were supporting children with their work for much of their time, there appeared to be less mention made of the details of the learning process. Within this same school there is a nurture group running and indeed Claire has spent a year working within the group. It would not be possible to say if this was the reason, but both of the EAs in this school made mention of nurturing children. There was some mention made of this sort of behaviour by other EAs, but it did not seem such a concrete construct for others as it was for Claire and Nicola in school C with the nurture group. Unsurprisingly for a school with a nurture group, however, this school also has a catchment area with a higher level of social deprivation than most schools in the areas. This in itself may also be a reason why the EAs placed importance on the need to nurture children.

5.2.5 Sallie

Sallie works in School A and supports a child within a mainstream class. School A also has an 'enhanced provision' for children with significant additional support needs and Sallie seems to enjoy going into mainstream classes, in contrast with supporting children in the enhanced provision. I had never met Sallie before so she would not have been used to seeing me in my role as a practising EP. She seemed to enjoy the opportunity to speak about her role as she started by telling me that she had so much to say.

Sallie:

> *There are a hundred things you could speak about and when I sit here and when I leave this door, gosh I really should have said that, I forgot about that, you know what I mean.* (5:1-7)

Sallie was so enthusiastic and free with her account that it was easy to remain relaxed myself.

Table 5.6   Super-ordinate themes for Sallie

Super-ordinate Theme	Lines in transcript	Key words
Preparation and Introduction to Role	736-737	I'm just a Mum. That's the only experience
Judging the Level of Support	61-62	I know where I need to help them
Interaction between EA and child learning	133-134	but it's prompting, it's praise
Fulfilment and engagement with job	760-761	cos I really, really like my job
Interface with CT	824-825	I take my lead from my teacher
Perceived engagement and respect of teachers and management of EA support	642-643	You get pulled in all different directions

All the themes raised in this interview also come through for other participants. The super-ordinate theme of *Fulfilment and engagement with job* is included in the master list and is particularly pertinent for Sallie. She seems to thrive on the all-consuming nature of the job and makes great mention of the competing demands and juggling of time. Below are Sallie's opening sentences.

Sallie:

> *I really enjoy my job, I love my job and I love, I like kids, but there is a different spin on being an EA it's just so fulfilling, it's tiring and there are days when you leave here just mentally ......just collapse in a chair and just give me a cup of tea and a chocolate biscuit and I'll be fine.*(5: 8-18)

Sallie makes a direct link between the mentally tiring nature of her job and how she *'collapses in a chair'* at the end of the day with how much she loves the job and the fulfilment it brings her. It is as though she is taking a literal usage of the word *'fulfilling'*. The job actually fills her. It takes her to the level of her capacities and this she enjoys.

Her enjoyment of the busy and non-stop nature of the job interacts with how much she feels valued and this can be seen in her concluding statement.

> *I have never been in a class when you feel like you are not needed or wanted, never, never. As I say there is always something to do.* (3: 889-894)

Sallie is emphatic about the fact that she is always of importance and value within the class and her repeated use of the word *'never'* coupled with *'always'* illustrates her strength of belief. It seems that for Sallie the sheer quantity of work to be done, coupled with the fact that *all* of the work is valued, is a potent mix.

I noticed in this interview, that Sallie, like Claire, also went to quite a high level of abstraction in her account. I considered whether this might be linked to my giving the participants quite a lot of information upfront about my rationale for the study and what I was interested in hearing. Perhaps, via the pre-interview contact, the written

information and verbal dialogue at the start of the interview, the participants were hearing too much and that this made them more inclined to abstractions and trying to 'cover' everything they felt I wanted to hear.

5.2.6 Nicola

Nicola also works in School C. Unlike Claire, she is not an EA who has directly worked within the school nurture group. However, the nurture ideals do appear within her account. All of the themes arising from the transcript of the interview with Nicola are broadly speaking present with other participants.

Nicola, like Claire, mentioned very few negative points about practices within the school. This could have been partly due to her awareness of my familiarity with other members of staff, as indicated above. Unlike Claire, Nicola does not seem to offer a wholly positive version of herself and others. She shows self-questioning in her approach to supporting children's social and emotional needs.

Table 5.7   Super-ordinate themes for Nicola

Super-ordinate Theme	Lines in transcript	Key words
Sensitivity with respect to balance of inclusion versus individual support	569-570	supporting the others around you as well
Genuine relationship as supporting education	670-672	she didn't outwardly show it (but) I think it obviously affected her somehow
Mutual CT-EA respect and empowerment of EA	501-502	Everybody has to be willing to help each other out
Balance in forming exclusive	508-509	It doesn't mean that

relationship with child		there is one of us with him all day
Job satisfaction	915-916	It's such a feel good job

Within the master list of super-ordinates appears the theme *Development of and outcomes from a genuine and reciprocal relationship with child.* For Nicola, taking a holistic view of the child, their needs and all the factors that contribute to his or her needs was more noticeable than for other participants. An important element of this is the role that the home background plays in the child's needs for Nicola.

Nicola:

> ....I don't know if I can say this or not......but there are some children in this school who have a difficult family background (6:135-139)

Nicola sees the school in which she works as having some children with a hard home life, apparently in contrast to how she imagines it may be at some other schools. She would not be alone in holding this opinion and School C tends to be viewed as having one of the catchment zones with a higher level of social deprivation, for this county.

Nicola goes on to give an example of how home circumstances may interact with learning potential and how she tries to be mindful of this in her support of the children.

Nicola:

> I enjoyed working with Amy. She is a really nice wee girl. She came on a lot as well, but some days she came in to school and she just couldn't be bothered.... But I think a lot of what was happening to Adam, with him going into foster care. Although she didn't outwardly show it, I think it obviously affected her somehow, cos sometimes she couldn't be bothered, but you knew she could do the work. (6:662-675)

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This extract illustrates how Nicola feels aware of factors that could potentially be influencing Amy's learning and looks beyond her behaviour at its face value. Amy does not make it overtly clear to Nicola that her brother being in foster care affects her mood and motivation to learn. Nicola uses her understanding of Amy's home situation and relates this to the fact that at times she does not seem to progress in her learning as might be expected based purely on her academic ability.

As can be seen, Nicola takes a holistic view of a child's learning and the factors affecting it. She has an awareness of how social factors may interact with learning processes, although has some internal conflict as to whether she sees it as strictly professional to consider a child's home life in the support of education.

The participants in this study are individuals and their interpretations of a range of issues and aspects of their work blend together in unique ways. Thea experiences a level of stress and anxiety due to not feeling able to fully meet the expectations of her work, while for Sallie the challenges of her role are at just the right level for her to feel really fulfilled. Claire and Nicola both emphasise nurturing children, with Nicola being mindful of how social factors affect the learning process. Ruth and Siobhan have both formed close bonds with the children they support. Ruth prioritises upholding a view of the child she supports as being the same as his peers, while Siobhan struggles with the competing demands of promoting independence while providing constant support.

The next section will consider the areas of congruence between the participants and explores four key themes that emerged strongly from the data.

5.3   Comparative Analysis

5.3.1 Introduction to the Comparative Analysis

Four key areas are explored here that flowed through the transcripts of all the participants as strong themes, although the issues of some themes resonated with the different participants in unique ways. Each theme is analysed in turn, illustrated with verbatim excerpts from at least two participants. The themes are:

- Communication, interface and role perceptions between CT and EA
- Development of and outcomes from a genuine and reciprocal relationship with the supported child
- Judging the level of support
- Fulfilment and engagement with the role

Table 5.8   **Master super-ordinate themes**

Master super-ordinate theme with example excerpts	Interview: lines
Communication, interface and role perceptions between CT and EA	
Siobhan: It's just little snippets in the class	3:604-605
Ruth: he's bored with them..... and when you are sitting up there for an hour, that's a long time	2:1491-1495
Sallie: a 10 min meeting in the day would be excellent, just a pow-wow	5:232-235
Claire: I'm not a shy person, so I would probably ask, 'what do you want me to do?'	4:332-335
Nicola: Well, obviously you need good communication between you and the	6:296-298

teacher	
Thea: There was no time – you just had to come and this is the work and I would think 'oh right!'	1:483-486
Development of and outcomes from a genuine and reciprocal relationship with the supported child	
Siobhan: he sees me as a kind of security blanket outside	3:216-217
Nicola: just be there in a professional capacity.... but then again.... you have to make yourself approachable	6:823-827
Ruth: he always knows that he has a backdrop	2:359-361
Claire: just need a grown up to be near them to help them feel comfortable and happy in this environment	4:191-194
Thea: you get something back from her learning as well.	1:238-240
Interaction of the EA with the Learning Processes of the Child (sub-theme to Development of and outcomes from a genuine and reciprocal relationship with the supported child)	
Ruth: I help him along with what he's doing, but it's encouraging them as well	2:165-169
Sallie: I am not there to do their work, but it's prompting, it's praise	5:132-134
Siobhan: I'll say the letters so that he has to think how it's written	3:78-80
Thea: So it's just giving them time	1:350

Claire: you're just there to do a bit of nurturing as well, you know the whole package	4:92-94
Judging the Appropriate Level and Nature of Support	
Siobhan: he does need a bit of independence without having a shadow behind him all the time	3:26-28
Sallie: I know where I need to help them and when to stand back	5:61-63
Nicola: you are quite often getting things ready for the teacher or working in other little groups or a specific child struggling	6:233-235
Thea: I often find that behaviour is associated with you, then it can be really draining, very draining	1: 418-422
Claire: 'Cos they're not getting fed up with the same person	4:592-594
Ruth: I suppose the one- to- one and the continuity	2:203-206
Fulfilment and Engagement with the Role	
Siobhan: It's been really rewarding	3:38
Ruth: 'cos it's what you get back	2:408-409
Nicola: I do, I do, I really enjoy it	6:914
Sallie: it's just so fulfilling, it's tiring	5: 11-12
Claire: you are just so busy you don't think of what you are doing	4: 204-206
Thea: And it would have been good to actually have the time and preparation or understanding of what was expected of you	1:516-520

5.3.2 Communication, Interface and Role Perceptions between Class Teacher and EA

.....a 10 min meeting in the day would be excellent, just a pow-wow, to drop ideas. But everything is in the passing, which is quite tricky... (5:232-240)

This is the theme that came through as the strongest across the interviews. I may have already become 'sensitized' to this theme through reading the extant literature and therefore more inclined to pick up on it when coding the data. It is also an attractive theme as it could lead to obvious and clear implications for practice. That is, for more effective support of young people there should be sound communication between CT and EA. It is these factors that should be 'bracketed' during analysis to ensure themes are rooted within the transcripts. This is not a fully attainable goal. The decisions I have made about how the participants' accounts are arranged into themes are likely to have been partially influenced by my own pre-existing constructs and motivation to produce a study that has clear implications for how the support process might be ameliorated.

With the above points in mind, readers can judge for themselves whether this theme is indeed rooted in the transcripts. I hope the transparency of using verbatim excerpts will illustrate how clearly this theme emerges.

For Thea, Ruth, Sallie and Siobhan there was a sense that a greater level of communication between CTs and EAs would be beneficial and as such, their accounts of communication with the CT were characterised by talk of a paucity of communication. For Nicola and Claire, positive working relationships supported strong communication that enabled more creative and effective work.

Siobhan:

> *It's just little snippets in the class when they're doing this or.... cos some of the stuff the class does... especially as he's getting older is out of his range of work, his understanding and sometimes they will just babble on about stuff and then at the end they will say what the task is and I will realise that he won't be able to do it. But if they had said to me at the beginning I could have*

taken him out of the class and do some of his stuff, and that sometimes wastes a lot of time. I don't know. (3:604-618)

Siobhan describes her communication with teachers as being '*just little snippets*', implying that it is not a coherent thought through communication. The term '*babble*' that she uses to describe what must be the teacher giving instruction to the class suggests that for her and the child she is supporting the instruction is not of benefit. To them it is useless, '*just babble*'. Siobhan's interpretation is that '*a lot of time*' is wasted for the child she supports due to there not being the facility or opportunity for clear communication at the lesson onset.

Ruth also makes mention of wasted learning opportunities for the supported child. She does not explicitly suggest that this is due to a paucity of communication with the CT, although it seems implied.

Ruth:

> *I go with him on my own, they're the games he finds easy and he does get bored up there sometimes, I must say. ....And I can understand why, 'cos he is rattling through these sums on the computer just like this* (mimes a person writing quickly with apparent ease)....*it's constant, he's not even having to think and the same games every week and he's bored with them..... and when you are sitting up there for an hour, that's a long time to be sitting when you are going......there are a variation of 8 games that they can use but he has done them all and he's quite good at them all and that's when his attention span tends to disappear because he's so....I have to try and keep him focused on them 'go on show me how to do this one', 'I can't do this one' and try to keep him going. Although last week they did work books, maths in their workbooks, he's pretty good at that, he's fine with his maths. I don't need to keep him correct. (2:1475-1520)*

Ruth makes clear her feelings that the work is inappropriate. The fact that such work persists '*every week*' indicates that there is little or no forum for discussion about it between her and the CT. As a result of the inappropriate work, Ruth feels that she has to support the child in maintaining his attention. In this case the nature of the work

seems to create an additional support need, rather than the more intrinsic abilities of the child. This is an example of a concern that I raised in the literature review. It was described how a child might be afforded a mediated learning experience through an adult scaffolding his or her learning with the provision of temporary supports and adjusting of the learning environment. While Ruth gains an awareness of the child's understanding and approach to some learning tasks, she does not communicate her understandings to the class teacher who sets the learning tasks. This miscommunication then limits the extent to which scaffolding can be helpful as the task is no longer appropriate to the learning needs of the child.

Sallie also feels that the forum for sharing of ideas and information that she would desire is not present in her day to day work.

Sallie:

> .....*a 10 min meeting in the day would be excellent, just a pow-wow, to drop ideas. But everything is in the passing, which is quite tricky cos then.... I could leave school and I meant to do that or say this....so it is a busy day.* (5:232-240)

Similar to how Siobhan feels that she gets '*little snippets*' throughout the day, Sallie describes an unsatisfactory and ad-hoc communication, *'Everything is in passing'*. She doesn't tie this as neatly to a sense of wasted learning opportunities, but does suggest that the discussion and planning around the child's needs are not as they could or should be as information goes unshared. The comment that it is *'in passing'* again suggests a lack of coherence and is indication that shared communication is not prioritised. The alternative that Sallie suggests is a '*pow-wow*'. This is in contrast to communication that is either '*little snippets*' or '*in passing*'. Rather, she wishes for a purposeful meeting with the clear intent of sharing ideas and making decisions. This desire for a '*pow-wow*' covers much of the disquiet felt by the participants in relation to communication. Clear, purposeful sharing of ideas and decision making is viewed as highly beneficial to the provision of adult support in response to additional support needs.

There is a sense for Ruth, Thea, Sallie and Siobhan that liaison with the CT and preparation prior to a lesson is not factored in or given a priority in terms of planning their time. The story for Claire and Nicola, both at School C, is somewhat different. They both seem to experience a good level of communication with the CT and value this highly.

Claire:

> ....*I'm not a shy person, so I would probably ask, 'what do you want me to do?' And then after a while I would maybe say to them 'Is that ok?, is that what you want me to do?' Or if I then got up and walked about after they had asked me to sit down, I would then again reinforce or reassure myself: 'is it ok if I do this?' Rather than just letting him get on with it and go back every now and then to make sure he is ok.*(4:332-347)

There is no suggestion of formally ring-fenced time here for liaison with the CT, but Claire describes an ease in her communication with the CT that allows her to feel comfortable in her work and reassured that the support she is offering is in keeping with what the CT sees as appropriate. She does attribute some of this ease to the fact she feels she is '*not a shy person*' and her examples of communication with the CT above feature Claire as the proactive person in the interaction, initiating communication as she sees necessary. It is worth considering why she feels it important to comment that she is not shy. Perhaps there is an implication here that a level of assertiveness on the part of the EA is important in facilitating effective communication.

Claire goes on to describe how she sees clarity from the CT as aiding her work:

> ....*if we know that they appreciate us for what we are doing and we feel that we are doing the right thing then everyone works better together, don't they? Sometimes teachers have clear guidelines of what they want you to do, so that makes your life easier as well if you know exactly what is expected of you from the class teacher.* (4:398-410)

This extract contrasts with the experience of Siobhan described above. Siobhan felt that because the CT was not clear from the onset, she and the supported child had to listen to her '*babble on*' before realising what was expected. Claire explains that clear guidelines from the CT enable her to know exactly what is expected of her and to feel comfortable in the knowledge that she is working along the right lines.

Working in the same school, Nicola shares this experience of positive and constructive communication with the CT. Like Claire, she places joint onus of responsibility on the EA and the CT for ensuring good communication.

Nicola:

> *Well, obviously you need good communication between you and the teacher*
> *and I think we have a pretty good team and everyone has good working*
> *relationships, but I think you need to be a good communicator.* (6:296-303)

Interviewer:

> *So how does that work, the good communication?* (6:304-305)

Nicola:

> *Just sharing information. The teacher lets you know what she wants you to do*
> *and you make it quite clear to them any problems. Or if you are trying a*
> *method of some kind to try and get someone to learn to do something and if*
> *it's not working and you think of another strategy....*(6:306-315)

Nicola upholds an effective working relationship between the CT and EA as important to her role. She highlights what she sees as the necessity for the relationship to be reciprocal in nature. The CT should be clear in defining expectations, while the EA should be proactive in sharing her experiences and new strategies. She clearly states that '*you (*the EA*) need to be a good communicator*' putting forward the skills of the EA as crucial to CT-EA interaction. There is no appearance of this sentiment in the interviews with Ruth, Thea, Siobhan and Sallie. While Nicola finds that '*you make it clear to them any problems*', Ruth finds that she is working with a child on '*the*

same games every week and he's bored with them' and yet there is no indication of attempts to communicate these perceived problems to the CT.

This variable ease with which EAs feel able to initiate communication with the CT interacts with a sense of the hierarchical relationship between the EA and the CT. This was acknowledged to a greater or lesser extent for all the participants. For some participants it is viewed as an obstacle that can hamper positive working relationships and respect for the work of the EA. For others, mainly Claire and Nicola, it is seen as an inevitability of the different roles. The EA works to support the CT and so deferring to the CT is appropriate.

Ruth is keen to point out that not all teachers appear to treat EAs as inferior, but that this can happen.

Ruth:

> *I sometimes feel some staff do kind of see you on a different level and with.....only a small minority, not specifically me personally, just in general. There are the odd teachers that feel that you....I don't know how to put that into words....not inferior... I kinda got that with the old staff.* (2:1927-1941)

Ruth struggles with how to define her perceptions of an unspoken hierarchy. Perhaps such views are not made overt, but rather picked up on through subtleties of behaviour. She has a feeling that teaching staff see themselves on *'a different level'.* Although she decides that it is not quite the right term, Ruth toys with the word *'inferior'* and appears to use it to suggest that the feeling is something like inferiority. This way of describing a relationship seems quite different to merely a distinction between roles. Perhaps for Ruth it can go beyond this and the difficulty comes in feeling that teachers view themselves on a different level as people. She is clear, however, that this aura of seeing themselves *'on a different level'* is not one that extends to all teaching staff.

Ruth:

> *....but other teachers. We had some at my old school and they wouldn't expect you to do a job that they wouldn't do themselves.*(2:1952-1959)

In talking about the hierarchy in schools, Ruth goes on to suggest that she is not emotionally affected by it and that it doesn't bother her. What she also suggests, however, is that she sees herself as not being there for the teachers.

Ruth:

> ...*that wouldn't bother me* (teachers viewing EAs as inferior), *I would....water off a duck's back! I'm not there for them. I'm there for the kids.* (2:1997-2002)

She sees herself as being emotionally unaffected by a perception of hierarchy, but also links this directly with not being there for the teachers. The perception of a hierarchy appears to be a barrier to positive communication and team working between CT and EA. Ruth describes herself as emotionally unperturbed by negative perceptions of teaching staff, but this seems to have wider implications in terms of how the two members of staff interface. In describing CT perceptions as '*water off a duck's back*', Ruth portrays herself as not absorbing CT views, as being oblivious to them. Her following comment is that she is '*not there for them*'. This may be a construction of her relationship with the CT that she has developed in order to be able to manage the potential of negative of condescending attitudes from teaching staff.

Several of the participants referred to '*taking the lead from the teacher*'. This did not appear to be accompanied by negative connotations, rather an acknowledgment that their respective roles had different remits. Claire, above, describes feeling comfortable in acting on her own initiative and checking subsequently with the teacher about the appropriateness of her work. In contrast below, Sallie describes how she would not feel comfortable in self-deploying.

Sallie:

> ....*but I take the lead from the teacher, I don't go in and say we'll do this and that, I take my lead from her and if she wants me to do something then that's fine I will go off and do that.*(5:164-170)

In saying '*I don't go in and say "we'll do this and that"*' there is the message that it would not be appropriate to go in and begin suggesting how things might be. She is

not specific about any area in particular of her work in which she would not wish to make overt decisions about self-deployment. Using the term *'this and that'* indicates that she is just not inclined to self-deploy.

Claire feels that teaching and support staff are seen as equals within school C and for her this belief co-exists comfortably alongside the idea that the CT is the one who takes the lead within the classroom.

Claire:

> *I like what we do here, you feel like you're equal. You don't feel inferior but I think in other schools I think some of the support staff are treated differently....... we are all treated the same. No-one thinks any differently from support staff to teaching staff to whatever.* (4:512-527)

This passage describes a sense of how different individuals within the school interact and treat each other as people. The following passage illustrates Claire's view of the roles of CT and EA.

Claire:

> *...if you can imagine if there was 2 of you in the classroom. Just imagine there were 2 adults in the classroom. It doesn't matter which one was the class teacher and the other the support staff as long as one of you was prepared to take the lead and the other one would follow..... that's how my role is at the moment. I am really just backing you up as a class teacher, backing you up in absolutely everything.* (4:701-719)

Claire views the roles of CT and EA as having strong similarities, the principle difference being that the EA role does not have the decision making element. Her words to describe how she supports the CT have an active element to them. She *'backs up'* the CT, enabling him or her to have carried out all the classroom work that he or she would like to have done. This is different to the more passive way that Sallie describes deployment: *'if she wants me to do something then that's fine I will go off and do that.'* Claire perceives herself as facilitating the planning and decision making of the CT by allowing the role to be carried out to greater effect. This perception

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contrasts with Ruth's interpretation of CT opinions being *'water off a duck's back'*. Claire (who sees herself as experiencing mutual respect and communication) aims to support the CT in all she does, while Ruth (who feels she experience virtually no communication) describes herself as not being there for the CT.

Claire makes a further interesting point about the hierarchical relationship between the CT and EA (which may exist just in terms of roles or otherwise). In relaying the sort of message that she would wish to give to new teachers, she shows an appreciation of how CTs may at times be uncomfortable with their role in deployment of EAs and the perceived hierarchy that can exist.

Claire:

> *I say to them, 'Look!....I'm not here to judge you, you do what you want to do, I'm here to do what you ask me to do and I'm here to help you, I'm not here to criticise, I'm here to give you the support that will help you do this job easier or better or if there is anything you want to ask me, go ahead.'* (4:931-942)

Differing levels of experience of a hierarchy exist across the participants and different levels of comfort (or discomfort) with such a hierarchical relationship. In spite of this, all of the participants were clear about the fact that they expect to take the lead from the CT and appreciate clarity about how to do this.

Clarity with respect to reasonable and mutually acceptable expectations and role boundaries was variable across the participants. Whether it was felt to be present or not, however, such clarity was always seen as desirable. As detailed above, Thea found that her perception of the expectations of teaching staff was not in keeping with what she felt she could reasonably fulfil and this causes her anxiety. She feels that there is an unspoken assumption that she will be aware of new methods of teaching maths and the lack of clarity of just what is required of her leads her to feel she cannot meet such expectations.

Thea:

> *I used to find I would almost needing time myself to read the worksheet, you know, in order to support the child. There was no time – you just had to come and this is the work and I would think 'oh right' and unless you had sat down and thought about it, you know, because there's different, you know, specific ways of maybe language and we were speaking about chimney sums – I had never heard of them – that type of thing.*(1:479-494)

Siobhan describes how she was not offered much in the way of explanation of her role when first taking her job.

Siobhan:

> *I sometimes feel I'm his teacher, not just his helper, kind of thing, which is fine now cos I know what I'm doing, but when I first started, this was my first job after being at college and I hadn't a clue what to do and the teacher wasn't very forthcoming in giving me the resources.*(3:187-195)

There is a theme running through the interviews relating to keeping within role boundaries. Claire describes how she would be keen to keep the decision making element of classroom management lying with the CT.

Claire:

> *....so I think taking the lead from the teacher because as well, you know, I wouldn't want to go in to a classroom and say, right I'll just go and help this lot over here, you know. I would like to say to the teacher, 'what do you want me to do? Do you want me to sit down or do you want me to help a group?'* (4:319-330)

Claire shows that even when ideas about her own deployment within the classroom come from her, she seeks clarification and guidance from the CT.

Both Claire and Nicola see their role as EA as being very closely joined to that of the CT. They both indicate that they are working not so much *for* the CT, but actually *on*

behalf of the CT. The two roles of CT and EA are so closely fused that the CT is afforded a greater capacity for carrying out work. The CT retains the ultimate decision making, but her will is actualised through both herself and the EA. As stated above Claire describes her role, saying that:

> *It doesn't matter which one was the class teacher and the other the support staff as long as one of you was prepared to take the lead and the other one would follow.* (4:705-711)

A belief is depicted that in all respects, save that of executive decision, the work that is actioned by the EA and CT are interchangeable. Nicola puts forward a very similar perspective.

Nicola:

> *I suppose an extra pair of hands and eyes for the teacher. You just take your lead from the teacher.* (6:162-166)

Nicola also sees the two roles of CT and EA as being closely linked, with the EA enabling a greater capacity for work from the CT.

Other participants described a greater distance between the two roles with less sharing of responsibilities and work tasks.

Ruth:

> *There have been odd times where I have had to tell children off in the last school, but they were fine and it wasn't anything major. I didn't have to put them out, just tell them to be quiet, cos I sometimes feel that I don't want to encroach on the teacher either.... cos obviously I'm new to this as well. When the kids are being a bit.........when I'm in the classroom I don't feel its........I feel it's over stepping the mark to say, when I know the teacher is sitting there, so I don't do that. I know some of them do, but I don't feel comfortable doing that.* (2:689-717)

Ruth is disinclined to reprimand children in the presence of the CT. Her use of the phrase *'over stepping the mark'* implies that she feels her and the CT's roles have boundaries around them and that moving into the wrong area would be seen as inappropriate. She also uses term *'encroaching'*. This suggests that certain areas of practice would be received by the CT as an unwelcome movement into a domain that is not hers.

For some participants the relationship with the CT seemed to bear upon how much perceived agency and personal empowerment they experienced within their role. Thea uses language that implies she feels obligated to work and behave in a way with which she is sometimes uncomfortable. She uses phrases such as:

> *You've got to find something that will get him out from under the table* (1:66-68)

> *You had to stand back otherwise he would go for you* (1:196-198)

> *they insist that somebody with packed lunches sit with the packed and somebody with the school lunches sit with the school lunches* (1:285-288)

Her use of language changes and has a more positive sound to it when she talks of situations in which she has felt a sense of agency. That is, when she carries through her own ideas and employs an element of creativity in her work.

Thea:

> *I have just made up a pirate ship game – he sails on the pirate ship and looks for treasure. That's been the carrot has maybe got him through a few work jobs you know that if he has good behaviour that I will play the pirate game with him at the end of the day or the end of the morning, whatever. So that sort of incentive sparks his imagination.* (1:110-122)

For Ruth, her apparent general low level of agency within her work seems linked to her relationship with the CT and a certain fear of reproach. As detailed in a previous example, Ruth makes observations of elements of her support with the young person and education of that young person that are less than satisfactory. This includes her

mention of having to support the child repeatedly in the same games with which he is 'bored'. Below, she gives an example of supporting a child in learning from an educational DVD. She gives reason for her opinion on the task, but explicitly states that it '*is not my place to judge*'.

Ruth:

> *After a while he got bored of it. He has things that he gets bored of too, but I don't feel it is always my place to say, because I've not any experience or qualification to judge on any child, but from what I can see there are certain things that I do think he does get bored with and because of that his attention span disappears.* (2:906-922)

It seems that in addition to a lack of forum for liaison with the CT, there is the additional barrier for Ruth of feeling that making judgements on learning and teaching falls outside her role remit. Her role perceptions inhibit her agency, in spite of her claims that teachers seeing themselves as superior is 'water off a duck's back'.

As clearly comes through the transcripts, Claire and Nicola appear to have a different sort of experience in terms of how they perceive their role in relation to the CT, the respect that they feel and their sense of agency and empowerment at work.

Claire:

> *But if you went in to a classroom and the teacher said, ' Just mingle about! Just help whoever needs help!' then you feel very differently in that class, maybe a slightly more relaxed atmosphere and maybe you thought more was expected of you.* (4:309-318)

Claire describes positively the experience of CTs having high expectations of her. It is interesting that she teams the expectations with a relaxed atmosphere. It would seem that a CT having a narrower view of the EA's remit would lead Claire to feel more hemmed in at work, perhaps hampered in terms of meeting what she saw as her potential or maybe would lead to an anxiety that her actions did not fall outside her role remit.

Nicola also experiences a sense of autonomy in her work and makes references to this. Like Claire and unlike Ruth, Nicola's perception of CT and EA roles does not inhibit her agency at work.

Nicola:

> *Just sharing information, the teacher lets you know what she wants you to do and you make it quite clear to them any problems or if you are trying a method of some kind to try and get someone to learn to do something and if it's not working and you think of another strategy.*(6:306-315)

Her discussions with the CT are reciprocal in nature and include an active contribution from Nicola to planning processes. She explains that she can try new strategies in supporting children. She seems to be indicating that it was her in the first instance who made the decision that the initial strategy was '*not working*' and felt able to adjust her support as she saw fit, only later conveying this to the CT.

Nicola:

> *A lot of it I think what we do in the class is really just common sense. Once you know the day to day routine in the class you can....I think when you come in and you're new you kind of feel like a spare part, cos you're not sure what you're meant to be doing but after a while you pick up on what's happening and you can work away on your own initiative. Like..... if the children are sitting in a corner and talking about what their job is going to be, you could maybe get stuff ready for the teacher.* (6:166-182)

Nicola explains that following a period of adjustment to her role and the class routine, direction from the CT is not always necessary and she is able to work under her own initiative. She suggests that it is her own '*common sense*' that guides her in deciding what to do much of the time in the class. Perhaps this notion of EA work as being *common sense* offers a partial explanation for why communication is either ad-hoc or not present. There may be an interpretation from those not involved directly in the support that there is nothing to discuss.

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Communication was interpreted as being of huge importance to all participants in this study, with clarity of expectations and shared understanding seen as complementing the support of children with additional needs. Variability exists between the experience of participants in terms of the extent to which they feel effective communication is present between them at the CT. There is a notable divide between the experience of Nicola and Claire (working in school C) and the other participants from schools A and B. My presence in school C is of higher profile than schools A and B and this may have fed into the version of their experience that Claire and Nicola felt comfortable conveying. My greater familiarity with teaching staff in school C could mean that EAs would feel ill at ease speaking against the practice of these teachers. They may also have more personally invested in my opinion of them since they would expect to see me again in their school on a regular basis. It is possible that Claire and Nicola chose to omit certain details. However, the opinions offered are accompanied with specific examples, such that a link can be drawn between positive judgements and classroom practice.

Effective communication interacts with interpretations of how the roles of CT and EA are seen to relate to each other. Where there is perceived respect and a shared understanding of roles, participants feel more able to query, clarify and put forward their own ideas. It will become clear how this first theme also impacts upon the other themes analysed

5.3.3 Development of and Outcomes from a Genuine Reciprocal Relationship with the Supported Child

You can't help getting an attachment to them. (3:438-456)

All the participants spend significant amounts of time in contact with a select few children, some spending the majority of their time with just one pupil. As such, the relationship between EA and supported child emerged as a strong theme. It is explored here how a genuine and reciprocal relationship can evolve between EA and

child and how links are made between this relationship and that of a parent and child relationship. The relationship feeds into how the behaviour and response of the EA is affected and the personal emotional gains that this can bring. As a sub-theme, the interaction of the EA with the learning processes of the child is also considered.

Again the version of experience conveyed by EAs to an EP should be viewed with caution. It is important to question the extent to which participants would feel comfortable telling a psychologist that they did not feel positively towards the children they supported. This may have fed into how kindly the children were spoken of at times. I do not interpret the parallels drawn between parenting and in-school support as being heightened due to my presence. I have not been particularly aware of this sort of discourse in schools and would even feel that some members of school staff would find this to contravene a professional boundary.

There is a sense that a degree of emotional support was necessary for the supported children to access their education and that this could be achieved through displaying emotional availability.

Siobhan:

> *And then outside...it's not really keeping an eye on him ...but I think he sees me as a kind of security blanket outside. I'm there, but I'm not with him.... but I'm there if he needs me.... And.. he has sometimes asked if I'm going out today or staying in today and if I'm going out that's fine, but if I'm staying in I think he sometimes thinks, 'oh! what will happen?'. So I'll just say to him, 'Go to Mrs whoever! They are out there if you need any help'...And he goes out quite happy. That's it really.(3:214-228)*

Siobhan finds that she makes judgements as to how to provide the child with the emotional reassurance that he needs in order to be able to feel comfortable in recreation time. She is aware that the relationship she has with the child provides a sense of security to him, *'a security blanket'*, that is present for him even when she is physically not near to him. *'I'm there, but I 'm not with him.... but I'm there if he needs me '.* Siobhan uses the term *'security blanket'* with positive connotations. She views herself as an emotional prop, enabling the child to be more confident in a

variety of settings. She describes how he can appear somewhat upset if he knows she will not be present, but believes his knowledge that he can gain emotional support if he requires it, that support would be forthcoming, allows him to be more confident when alone. The provision of an emotional backdrop for the child speaks to Feuerstein and Schur's (1996) criterion for MLE as requiring emotional safety for effective learning to take place.

Personally, while listening to analogies of themselves as being 'security blankets', I was mindful of my initial construct of the potential for over support and the fostering of dependence. I began to wonder whether emotional involvement with a child could present the danger of over support taking place.

Above, Siobhan has spoken about how she feels the relationship can serve the supported child. She goes on to reflect upon the emotional bond that can develop as a result of so much time spent together with a pupil, including how it affects her, as an adult.

Siobhan:

> *Well, it can be emotionally tying. You do get involved. If it were a class of 20 you were with all the time it wouldn't be so bad, but because you are with one person.... I'm with him more than I am with my own daughter, like, during the day and you do get emotionally involved. You try not to, but it's only human nature. You can't help getting involved and have that.....you wouldn't say, 'Oh I love him!', but you have that fondness and you don't get that when working with a big group. You like them, but when you are working one to one, it's completely different. You either love them or hate them. You can't help getting an attachment to them.* (3:438-456)

Siobhan talks about a genuine relationship that emerges with a supported child. She attributes it partly to the quantity of time spent together and also perhaps the exclusive nature of that relationship, *'when you are working one to one'.* She sees *'getting involved'* with the child as inevitable. Although she talks about *'fondness'*, it seems that her relationship with the supported child is more than this. It has the hallmark of a genuine relationship as she feels emotionally affected by the child. At the beginning

of this paragraph Siobhan says that the work is *'emotionally tying'*. She seems to mean that she is tied emotionally to the child in that she is personally affected by him or her. The fact that she suggests '*You either love them or hate them*' seems to indicate that the amount of close time spent with the child would inevitably cause a strong response to that child.

Siobhan also says that '*you try not to*' (get involved). This concern over whether it is appropriate to be emotionally involved with the children is echoed by Nicola. Nicola works with a greater number of children and seems less attached to any one child. Nonetheless, she talks of

an ambiguity over whether a genuine relationship and emotional availability for a child is positive.

Nicola:

> *I think as well... some of the children do have difficult family lives and difficult family circumstances. You have really got to put that aside and just be there in a professional capacity.... but then again.... you have to make yourself approachable , they might want to confide in you.*(6:819-828)

Nicola has an inner conflict between a belief that emotional distancing is 'professional' and a feeling that emotional availability is what is required in order to do the job. As stated above, emotional distance as being 'professional' is a discourse that is familiar to me within schools and perhaps one that is also familiar to Nicola, Siobhan and other participants. It is possible that a willingness to verbalise this discourse may have been increased by my presence. Participants may interpret me as being somebody likely to hold current politically correct perspectives.

Nicola starts off by stating that awareness of home circumstances should be put aside in working with a child, then goes on to back track on this, perhaps sensing that what she has said is not in accordance with what she believes. Nor does the setting aside of home circumstances fit with her experiences of children confiding in her and of her feeling concerned about children's home lives and of her providing emotional support and reassurance to children

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Nicola:

> *She is a really nice wee girl. She came on a lot as well....But some days she came in to school and she just couldn't be bothered.... but I think a lot of what was happening to Adam, with him going into foster care, although she didn't outwardly show it, I think it obviously affected her somehow, cos sometimes she couldn't be bothered but you knew she could do the work, and I think her home life had a lot to do with it. No one took the time......to do what you normally do with children- like read stories and just normal run of the mill kind of things. But she was a really nice child to work with. I thought she needed quite a bit of support, socially as well. But sometimes she would take folks stuff, pencils and rubbers... nothing big. I think problems at home, late nights and just some of the stories she would tell you ......oh so and so's friend was staying last night and Charlie had to share my bed and stuff like this and I think it was just........sometimes she would come in and she was obviously just that tired that she wasn't able to learn.(6:663-698)*

Nicola indicates that she does not actually put aside a child's home life and difficulties in the interests of acting in a professional capacity. Rather, her availability, listening and taking on of a child's life allow her to respond more appropriately to the child.

Like Siobhan, Ruth feels that she is able to offer a background of security through the child's awareness of her presence. Unlike Nicola, Ruth has no apparent opinion that a genuine relationship is unprofessional. She appears to actively encourage an attachment, seeming to directly link this to the security it can foster. In the passage below, Ruth uses the term '*backdrop*' very similarly to how Siobhan uses the term '*security blanket*'. She sees herself as offering an assurance to the child that emotional support is available.

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Ruth:

> *I've built up a bit of a rapport with him. He comes, he tells me his news, what*
> *he's doing and he trusts you. He'll come up to me. That's something you have*
> *to build on. He comes up and says, 'You're my friend Mrs....., aren't you?',*
> *'Of course I am and you're mine too, aren't you?' and he'll go away and just*
> *play with his friends..... and he'll come back to you....But he always knows that*
> *he has a backdrop.*(2:343-361)

Parallels were frequently drawn between the relationship of EA and supported child
and that of parent and child.

Claire:

> *It's not rocket science. You don't have to have a degree to help a child out just*
> *as a parent with children would do at home. Sometimes they just need.....a lot*
> *of the kids at this school, as you will appreciate, just need a bit of nurturing,*
> *just need a grown up to be near them to help them feel comfortable and happy*
> *in this environment.*(4:182-194)

Claire puts across her belief that supporting children in her role as EA is akin to the
support that a parent would give to a child at home. So much so that the nature of the
support does not require a great deal further explanation as 'acting as a parent'
describes the role so well.

Ruth also feels a strong link between her role as an EA and her role as a parent. In the
passage below she begins by talking about being child oriented and enjoying her job
and then skips straight into talking about being a parent. It is as if she finds the two
roles so similar that talk of parenting is of direct relevance to talk of the EA role.

Ruth:

> *...but if you like your job and you put everything into it you maybe see results*
> *coming out the other side. That's what I feel anyway. I think that if you enjoy*
> *it, it shows how much you can give to them, ' cos if you didn't enjoy children*
> *you're in the wrong job. Cos they're all very different, I've got a variation of 3*

(of my own children), *so I know the age groups how different they can be but I think you have to be able to be part of....enjoy that cos if you haven't got that element than I don't think you can be in tune with them either. That's what I think anyway.* (2:465-491)

In a subsequent passage, Ruth is talking about her own children and then skips back into talking about her interaction with children at work.

Ruth:

> *She* (my daughter) *done it on her own and it gives them a real, you know, and she'll want to go and do something else. Not necessarily with baking it could be something with school, or anything, even the playground if they're skipping or playing with ....basketball last week one of the boys had a go at basket ball with him , one of the little boys in the class and he was really funny. He was really good.* (2:591-611)

Ruth puts forward the possibility of being child oriented without being a parent, but also believes that being a parent is what brings child orientation to many EAs.

Ruth:

> (Child) *orientated.... well not..... but I'm saying that, but I suppose it's easier to say ' cos I'm a parent, but I suppose it doesn't necessarily mean you have to be a parent to be child orientated. But in tune with the way they are too and from the different ages and stages they are.* (2:539-544)

Her suggesting that she '*supposes*' one could be child oriented without being a parent makes it sound as though this possibility is only now occurring to her and that her automatic assumption would be that child orientation would develop in response to parenting.

Nicola suggests that it is parenting that can furnish an EA with the ability to empathise with children and the ability to nurture them.

Nicola:

> *I think if you have children yourself you....how can I put this.....I think you can empathise with children if you are a mum yourself and you can.....I don't know what I'm trying to say, but......you have to sort of.... I don't know, what's the word I'm trying to look for?.....you've got to sort of nurture them along.* (6:860-870)

She feels that being a mother fosters the necessary ability to encourage children through empathy and nurturance. Below, Nicola is clear about her feeling that the origin of her abilities in interacting with children at work is her experiences as a mother.

Interviewer:

> (Clarifying what Nicola has just said) *Being caring is important? And showing that you are human is important? And you mentioned being able to empathise with the children?* (6:892-896)

Nicola:

> *Yeah, I think that just comes from when you have children of your own... just sort of... life experience.* (6:897-900)

The development of a close, almost pseudo-parental relationship can bring emotional gains for the EA. The closeness of the relationship can give EAs a sense of vicarious achievement of the pupil work and at times, co-achievement. The emotional involvement with the child can afford EAs a sense of fulfilment in seeing the child develop. They feel happy *for* the child. Perhaps in a similar way to how parents emotionally 'will on' and feel happy for their own children.

The participants' interpretations of professional experience are clearly influenced by experience as a parent. Likewise, my interpretations as a researcher are likely influenced by my own experience of being a parent. At least some of the participants will have been aware that I was also a parent. This may have led to a belief in us having a shared understanding of what it means to be a parent and the sense that it

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presented a useful analogy for me understanding their role. My interpretation above, relating to parents feeling happy *for* their children is likely to have occurred as it was something that I could readily identify with on a personal level.

Thea:

> *And ehh... I enjoy her imagination and she can give a lot – surprisingly a lot, you know, em, to that kind of task and I just... you get something back from her learning as well. You know, you can see her progress and I do her reading with her and things like that so you can see a progression, although it's small steps.* (1:233-245)

Thea suggests that the closeness to the learning process enables her to witness the tiny steps in progression that make up the learning process, affording her a sense of satisfaction. This is perhaps less visible to a CT who may have less contact with an individual child.

Below, Ruth feels personally proud that she is able to play a part in the pupil's achievement.

Ruth:

> *....so I said, 'Write down exactly what you've said to me on your paper and start.' So he started and I went away and I'll come back.....He actually finished that sentence on his own and I was really chuffed.* (2:967-977)

She indicates surprise that her words have been enough to encourage the child to finish his sentence. Enabling a child to progress in their task or learning provides Ruth with a feeling of warmth and well-being.

This sense of vicarious pride and achievement is an element that is present in the interview with Siobhan.

Siobhan:

> *It's been really rewarding. When I first started with him he couldn't count. He could do writing, but he couldn't count.... And then last year in P4, I started*

with him in P3, and then last year at the end of P4 he passed his Level A in maths which I found quite rewarding. Knowing that I had helped him do that. When I first started with him he couldn't even add one plus one. So that's high points, seeing him do that and seeing him go up a stage.(3:38-50)

The achievements and progression in learning of the child seem to be received almost as personal achievements for Siobhan herself. She feels that it has been '*really rewarding*'.

Attachment to and from a supported child is largely interpreted as inevitable by the participants. Most participants drew on their experiences as parents in their work and for some the relationship itself had elements of a parent-child bond. Since a close relationship can form and EAs have a close physical presence to the child's learning, a sense of gratification can arise as the child progresses in his or her learning.

The emotional implications and facets of a close relationship with a supported child have been explored. The nurturance and security afforded by this relationship was seen, by some participants, as providing the emotional climate necessary for some children to be able to learn. Some participants also touched on how cognitive processes might be supported through actions such as prompting and scaffolding and explaining.

Ruth:

> *....I help him along with what he's doing, but it's encouraging them as well because if he gets something wrong.... 'I can't do it, I can't do it', but I'll say to him 'come on! You can do it!' and I'll give him a little bit of help and he will finish it and he's done it and I say, ' see! you can do it!' and he'll go away with a smile on his face.*(2:165-181)

Ruth provides an example to the child of someone who believes in his learning ability. She provides him with messages about himself that are intended to counteract messages that he gives to himself regarding his ability. She offers him an alternative version of himself to believe in. At the end of this passage, Ruth uses his success with a task as evidence for him that her messages were correct. In turn, the child going

away *'with a smile on his face'* is evidence to Ruth that he has taken on this alternative message about his learning ability.

Sallie also describes how she aims to promote task-related confidence.

Sallie:

> *I am not there to do their work, but it's prompting, it's praise. A lot of these*
> *boys work on praise. If they think they are doing good, it's fantastic, they're*
> *off..... But there are times when they are stuck and find it too hard and that's*
> *it! The bad air has come down. So..... 'but you're doing a good job', 'I think*
> *that's great' and ... 'You can do this a wee bit more'......a wee bit of praise*
> *goes a long way with these boys.*(5:132-146)

Like Ruth, Sallie gives messages to the children she supports that are aimed to replace the judgements that they may have already formed of themselves and their learning potential. She shows her interpretation that the boys put up emotional barriers to learning tasks they perceive as too difficult by describing it as the *'bad air'* coming down. The *'bad air'* seems to be a sense that the emotional atmosphere changes in some way, perhaps similar to a fog, in that the boys find it difficult to see past it without help and guidance to suggest that there is a way forward.

This construct of adults offering messages to children that they can internalise has roots in the two verbatim excerpts above from Ruth and Sallie. My perception of it as a construct stems from an exposure to an interest in social learning theory (Bandura 1977) which suggests that young children can take on patterns of behaviour through observation of others. Since I began reading about this theory when my first child was quite young I have been mindful of it in my own parenting and have seen how some of the exact phrases that I have used when speaking with my children have been voiced by them. This theory has, therefore, become a regular feature of my personal experience and so would be unlikely to escape my attention if I felt it was being talked about by participants.

Further practical elements were also discussed by participants, tying in with the question of whether EAs can effectively support children through their zone of

proximal development (ZPD). As outlined in the literature review, the ZPD relates to the area between the cognitive tasks that a learner can manage independently and those which can be managed with support from a more able individual (Vygotsky, 1978). Because of the amount of close working with the child, participants seemed to have gained a perception of the appropriate level and nature of input for the learning process. As considered important from a constructivist perspective on learning (Wertsch, 1997), the unique needs and starting point of the learner are believed to be understood by participants. The hope would be that this unique appreciation would enable the adult to successfully support the construction of new learning. The presence and engagement of the EA often seem intrinsic to the learning processes of the child. This perception ties in with some of the participants feeling a sense of personal achievement when the child progresses in their learning.

Sallie describes how she feels in touch with what sort of support is required for a pupil, saying that in working with children '*you do get tuned in*'. This expression suggests that there is a short period of adjustment in which an EA might monitor their own understanding of a child's learning needs, altering it in response to their observations of the child's progress and learning abilities This description links in with a construction of an EA supporting a child through their zone of proximal development by on-going adjustment of support in response to progress.

Sallie:

> *But you do sort of get tuned in to the children that you are working with quite quickly. You know what sort of levels they will be at.* (5:602-606)

She also talks about the different ways that she might intervene.

Sallie:

> *One of the boys, he just needs to be kept on task, if he's doing a maths task, which he is very clever at, he would do maybe 3 or 4 and then he would sit and (whistle).... it's just an elbow really to keep him busy. Sometimes if it's a harder task I would have to sit and go through things, break it down if it was maths or whatever..... But they're at different levels. There are 2 boys that I*

work with who are still working in hundreds, tens and units and just taking the blocks and counting....we are even at that stage with some of them, P7 boys that are still doing that........... instead of doing a whole writing piece, break it down into sections, ask.. ' What would you do?', have a scrap piece of paper and then get them to write, break it down so it's much simpler for them.
(5:525-561)

She describes her aim to give the minimum support necessary, encouraging a child to things for him or herself. Initially, she talks about how a prompt and a reminder are sometimes adequate. At other points, Sallie shows that she tries to encourage the children to think for themselves '*What would you do?*' or chunks tasks so that it is presented to them in more manageable sections , '*so it's much simpler for them*'. These are examples of scaffolding techniques.

Siobhan also feels she offers sensitive support by adjusting the level of support offered to promote child ownership of the learning.

Siobhan:

But as regards to the actual work with him, I sit with him doing writing and maths and I used to scribe for him but I think that was a lazy way for him, ' cos he just copied, so now he has to say the word and I'll say, ' what does that start with?' and he'll write that down and if it's a tricky one I'll spell it, but I won't write it. I'll say the letters so that he has to think how it's written, 'cos if he sees things written ....Like his writing, before he would just copy it, but he wouldn't have a clue what he was writing, but now because he has to think what letters make the words he has more of an understanding of what he is writing, so I do that for him. (3:69-87)

Siobhan notices the response of the child and the effect that the nature of the support have on his learning and understanding. She alters her support according to her observations. She sensed that over-support was causing the child to not understand what he was writing. For this reason Siobhan supports him in writing the work himself, rather than scribing for him.

Some of the participants talk about 'giving the child time'. It seems unclear just what is meant by this as they are not suggesting that the actual amount of time available for a task increases. Perhaps, going back to adjusting the emotional climate to enable learning, the participants are talking about supporting the children in feeling that they will be allowed the length of time they require to complete a task.

Thea:

> *Em, in number work, it's just encouraging him to count, waiting for him, you know, to sign it 'what's the number?' you have to wait and em, then let him count. So it's just giving them time and being there to give them time till the task is through.* (1:344-352)

Thea talks about 'giving' the child time. The 'giving of time' could be more of a reminder to herself not to be inclined to hurry the task along. Many of the children being supported would require a longer period of time to complete a task than other children in the task. The 'giving' of time may

about the EA not being tempted to hurry the task to a point where it is completed earlier, but not understood.

Nicola and Claire seem to have a greater emotional distance between themselves and the children, with less familiarity. They do not give as many of the sorts of examples as other participants about being intrinsically interlinked with the child's learning processes.

Claire's interview does not give any examples of the intensive support given by some participants. She talks about some younger pupils as being emotionally needy, but not in a way that means she is tightly linked with their learning.

Claire:

> *P1 is certainly the most demanding of your time just because they are very needy and they just need someone all the time and obviously if their maturity levels were not that of an average 5 year old, then you're just there to do a bit of nurturing as well, you know the whole package whereas further up the*

school you are demand a bit less so you tend to oversee things from a slightly

different angle and only help out in what you need. So yeah. (4:83-101)

Claire goes on to talk about how her role is more about overseeing than it is about being ever-present and working closely with any particular pupil.

A close relationship with a supported child is felt by some participants to afford the child the emotional security to learn as allowing the EA to become 'in tune' with the learning needs of the child. This being in tune is seen as enabling an EA to appropriately judge the nature of the practical support that should be offered.

5.3.4 Judging the Appropriate Level and Nature of Support

'....he needs to learn to be able to think things for himself without me always stepping in and doing everything for him. But that's it, that's my role.' (3:125-134)

In judging the level of support given to a child, some of the participants mention exercising self-restraint and sensitivity with respect to 'over-support'. This sensitivity can, at times, conflict with a sense of obligation to always be supporting, particularly if there is a perception that the child has a certain number of support hours allocated to him or her. Differences of opinion and experience are seen in how many EAs should support a child. Should familiarity and continuity be maintained as far as possible or should a child gain from a variety of approaches?

A perception exists among some participants that adult support can work to separate a child from the rest of the class. This can result in there being less contact for the supported child with his or her peers and also less contact and planning from the class teacher. On the other hand, some of the participants feel that the nature of their work does support the child in becoming integrated with peers.

There are differences of perspective from the participants regarding the relative merits of supporting a child with a single EA over a long period of time in contrast a variety of EAs working with a child. The advantage of the former can be seen as proving

continuity, familiarity and security for the child while the latter can be seen as being energising for both children and EAs, preventing stagnation.

Although Siobhan works exclusively with one child, she feels that constant support for the child would not be appropriate and would hamper his developing independence.

Siobhan:

> ....*probably if it was suggested* (to the parent) *I would go to everything with him* (the parent would agree), *but we feel that he does need a bit of independence without having a shadow behind him all the time.* (3:23-28)

Siobhan uses the word '*shadow*' to describe her own presence. This indicates that she views her support as taking place in constant close proximity, without a sense that the child might operate independently while she is in the room. She goes on to describe her competing feelings about encouraging independence and providing constant support.

Siobhan:

> *I try as much as possible to let him be a bit independent so that he is learning to do stuff on his own and I'm not doing everything for him, ' cos I'm not his mother and he needs to learn to be able to think things for himself without me always stepping in and doing everything for him. But that's it, that's my role.* (3:125-134)

There is a conflict between what Siobhan feels is appropriate – encouraging the child to work on his own where possible – and how she perceives the remit of her role. She seems to be saying that although it is not helpful for her to be '*doing everything for him*' while some level believing that she is supposed to be doing just that, '*..that's it, that's my role*'.

Sallie talks about using her judgement to determine when she feels she needs to intervene to support the children she is working with and when she needs to

encourage independent working. She relates her judgement to her familiarity with the children.

Sallie:

> *I'm with them all day so I know what they are capable of and I know where*
> *their abilities are and I know where I need to help them and when to stand*
> *back and just let them get on with things.* (5:57-64)

There is a perceived obligation to support certain children in particular, those that have support time 'allocated' to them. This perception runs counter to her sense that she provides sensitive, restrained support. At times she does help other children, but with a sense that she is not legitimately able to do so.

Sallie:

> *But they are very independent* (the two boys with support time allocated to
> them), *very good, but they do need help and there is children in that class that*
> *don't get any support time, who definitely need support time. I'm only there*
> *specifically for 2 boys, but there is a group of 7. You get stretched, my time is*
> *supposed to be with these 2 boys but you get pulled in all different directions.*
> (5:631-643)

For Sallie, there is tension between a belief that support time should rightly be spent with children for whom a time allocation has been made and what appears to be a moral sense of obligation to other children that she perceives as having additional support need. Sallie's use of phrases such as '*get stretched*' and '*pulled in different directions*' seem to apply negative connotations to supporting a range of pupils within the class. She implies that she sees the optimal scenario as being specific adults working with a limited number of named pupils. This is different from the way that Nicola and Claire in School C appear to view support.

Nicola:

> *An auxiliary is a really good thing for a teacher to have in the class. As I say,*
> *you are quite often getting things ready for the teacher or working in other*

little groups or a specific child struggling that just needs that wee bit more help.(6:227-235)

Nicola has no dilemma of feeling she should always be supporting specific children. She shows that she does, at times, support individual children, but is comfortable in supporting groups of children or preparing resources. She sees her position as being that of support for the teacher '*An EA is a really good thing for a teacher to have in the class*', rather than support specifically for particular children.

An awareness was conveyed by some participants of how there can be separation between the supported child and the rest of the class and even CT.

Thea:

> *Yes, yes. I think if teachers address Alfie, you know, if they speak to him then, then yes, that makes things a lot easier because he wants to be part of the class. He wants teacher time. Now if teacher is sitting working with him, he will do his work 10 times better.* (1:624-633)

Interviewer:

> *Really? Okay* (1:634)

Thea:

> *Which, it very rarely happens, but it did in Primary 3, em, sometimes the teacher did sit with him but Mrs W comes through and works with him and he likes that. He works well for her, you know, and he likes that.... that attention.* (1:635-643)

This passage illustrates how Thea feels that Alfie (the child she supports) only very rarely has time in contact with the CT. She suggests that contact with the CT is something that is beneficial for Alfie and something that he very much desires. She implies that for Alfie even to be addressed by the CT is noteworthy. Thea believes that the reason he seems to respond so well to being addressed by the CT is '*because*

he wants to be part of the class'. There is an implicit message that Alfie is not really part of the class.

Ruth is torn between feeling that her presence supports inclusion while also being a potential barrier to inclusion.

Ruth:

> *I think I'm there for, to be, to keep him up with the rest, being part. 'Cos you don't want to feel that because I am there with him that he is different to everyone else. You want him to feel part of the whole thing, not that you're this part and they're this part you've got to try and keep them ... 'cos there is nothing worse than one child feels out-with.* (2:1372-1380)

Ruth is uncomfortable with the idea that a child should feel excluded. I detailed in the '*Participants as Individuals*' section that Ruth is particularly keen to maintain an appearance of normality for the child. There is the indication here that it would be possible for support presence to make the child feel different from his peers. Her aim is to use her presence to support him as being part of the group, although there is the danger that the reverse could occur.

For some participants, the experience of supporting children involves forming an exclusive relationship. This relationship can be viewed as the basis from which productive learning to take place. The continuity, familiarity and security of the EA-child dyad is seen as positive to Ruth.

Ruth:

> *So, I suppose from that extent it helps keeps Dennis up to what he's doing, as I suppose the one- to- one and the continuity. You're always there in the day and he gets to know you and I get to know what he likes and he's not keen on. Just the support that I give him it's just.... and it's just for him.* (2:200-214)

Ruth feels that continuity of exclusive support allows Dennis to 'keep up'. Her continual presence affords him the familiarity that he needs to be able to work effectively with an adult.

Both Claire and Nicola work in a more varied way, supporting groups, a number of individuals and preparing resources. They both feel that variety in the EAs working with a child energises the learning process and prevents negativity from arising in the EA-child relationship.

Claire:

> *I'm not with the same kids day in, day out. Not only for us is that beneficial, it's also beneficial for the children as well. 'Cos they're not getting fed up with the same person saying to them,..... ' No, that's not how you do that!' I think for them it's good they are getting a variety of adults. So their experience is getting enhanced 'cos we all give something different to the children, all of us. There is no way that everybody gives the same to the children, so the children are going to pick up something different from everybody and that will help them as well through their education, through their life really. If they are learning nice things from us or caring things, that they are not always learning elsewhere then hopefully they will take a little bit of that when they go. (4:588-616)*

Claire goes as far as to suggest that a variety of EAs is beneficial for the child not just in the present in school, but as they go through their life. She views such an experience as engendering into children a set of complementary life skills that they can take with them on their life journeys. As Claire regards the home lives of many children as falling short of equipping them with appropriate life skills, *'they are not always learning* (nice things) *elsewhere'*, she seems to view her role holistically in terms of educating the whole child for life, not just supporting with the academic task in front of him or her.

Thea works largely by offering exclusive support to a child, with very little mention made of her own direct interaction with other children. She has mixed feelings about this approach.

Thea:

> *Perhaps maybe with Emily you know maybe she needs a break, you know, it's*
> *that sort of thing. So if you are working, erm, long term with the children, you*
> *do get to know them, but there is a down side to that.... ' cos if you are with a*
> *child that's very very challenging.... and I often find that behaviour is*
> *associated with you, then it can be really draining, very draining, and you're*
> *glad of respite.(laugh).* (4:409-423)

Thea begins by talking about a benefit of continuity and familiarity as being that she feels able to tune in to the child's needs more easily. She balances this by talking about some disadvantages. A high level of contact with challenging behaviour is draining and she is clear to emphasise this point, *'really draining, very draining'*. It is worth considering *what* Thea feels is drained from her through working in contact with challenging behaviour. My assumption is that her energy and motivation are sapped during this type of work, possibly with implications for how able she feels to engage herself intellectually in her work. Thea suggests that the child could associate the presence of the EA with behaving in a certain way. Rather than working to reduce the signs of negative behaviour, her presence would make it more likely to occur.

All the participants want to feel their work is valued and that what they do benefits the development and education of children. Perhaps this is why EAs working in different set-ups want to attribute progress of the child in part to the work that they carry out. Although Thea points out a drawback to the approach, where EAs work solely with one child, it perhaps supports the participants view of the work as beneficial if they believe that individual and exclusive support enables an effective working relationship that is the basis of good learning. Where a variety of EAs support a child, holding the perspective that variety is energising to the learning process can contribute to participants feeling their work is worthwhile. It would also be difficult for participants to draw comparison with different models of practice if they have little or no experience of alternatives.

It is worth noting that there have been significant similarities between my interpretations of the perspectives of Nicola and Claire and differences between these two participants and the other four. Nicola and Claire work in the same school and

both feel able to self deploy and support across the class, even where 'hours' have been allocated to particular children. This is in contrast to the exclusive support predominantly offered by Thea, Sallie, Siobhan and Ruth. The other ways in which Nicola and Claire seem set apart are that they feel greater mutual respect with teaching staff, more effective communication and more autonomy at work. It would be difficult to speculate about any causal relationships between these factors, but they do seem intertwined. It would make sense that perceiving greater respect from the CT affords EAs the confidence to try out new ideas and it seems likely that loosening the exclusive bond between child and EA would place them both in greater contact with other children and the CT, decreasing the possibility of alienation.

In addition to the question of who or how many EAs should support a child, the extent to which EAs ought to stand back and allow independent working and even failures, is considered. Familiarity and continuity of relationship are at times prized highly and there is the perception of a requirement to be physically present for the hours that a child has been 'allocated'. Difficulty arises from how to balance these factors against sensitively providing just the degree of support that a child needs, rather than holding him or her back.

5.3.5 Fulfilment and Engagement with the Role

I've been wanting to do this for years, ' cos it's what you get back..... (2:380-410)

Through the interviews there is a theme of the participants experiencing a high level of personal engagement with their role and for the most part, enjoyment of the job. It is understood that this study has used a self-selecting sample of volunteer participants. It is also understood that this idiographic study does not claim to be able to form the basis of generalisations for the population of support staff. Nonetheless, in this area in particular it is important to bear in mind that choosing to stay for an extra hour after work (albeit an extra paid hour) may reflect a higher than average engagement with one's job. In addition, it might feel more comfortable for the participants to recount positive feelings about their work to an EP, than negative elements. I clearly cannot be sure of the sincerity of their assertions, but I can give my interpretation based on

involvement in the interview. They *seemed* to be speaking genuinely. Participants were informed of the confidentiality of the study and there would be little to be gained by giving a falsely positive account. There was often emotion in the voices of the participants when they talked of how they enjoyed their work that I feel would be difficult to produce if not authentic.

Participants seemed to be fulfilled in their work and talked about the personal growth and gain, both emotional and intellectual, that they received through their work. There is a belief in the importance of the role and a sense that the work adds real value to the education of the child and at times, the professional experience of the CT. Some participants contrast the experience of working as an EA with other less fulfilling work that they view as being 'just a job'.

Fulfilment and engagement are heightened by a perception of the usually busy and intense nature of the work. There are so many opportunities to add value throughout the day! Participants give examples of feeling stimulated and challenged, feeling that they give all that they have got in their work. At times, however, the opportunity to fulfil the role can feel elusive, with the desire to meet the demands of the role not being borne out.

Siobhan feels personally rewarded by the achievements in school made by the child she supports. The term *'reward'* indicates that Siobhan's feeling that there are clear positive outcomes to her as a direct consequence of the work she puts in.

Siobhan:

> *It's been really rewarding. When I first started with him he couldn't count. He could do writing, but he couldn't count.... And then last year in P4, I started with him in P3 and then last year at the end of P4 he passed his Level A in maths which I found quite rewarding, knowing that I had helped him do that.* (3:38-46)

This 'reward' is aside from any financial gains of the work, existing on an emotional level. Her reward here is the observation that the child has progressed in his learning to an extent that it can be recognised by the passing of his Level A (the first stage in

the Scottish 5-14 curriculum used at the time of writing). It is not quite being pleased for the child that she mentions, but personal reward because she '*knows*' that she helped him to progress. The passing of Level A is tangible evidence of her own success. However, she perceives success to be progress of the child. She talks clearly about what the child could and could not do, seemingly locating the competencies of counting, reading and progress in maths ability within the child, rather than skills within herself. Her reward is real because the result has been progress for and within the child.

Ruth, she speaks of how she used to volunteer in a classroom. This conveys a belief in the importance of the role that she is willing to fulfil the demands of the role without financial return. She sees the role as being something of a vocation.

Ruth:

> *Cos I feel I'm doing more for the child. I'm enabling him to get on with what he can do. I'm helping him to do better and pushing forward. 'Cos when you just do things in the classroom, it's just photocopying, not that there's anything wrong with that. I did enjoy it, but now that I've done this.... you get more out of it and I can see how he does things and how he is in himself......* *I've been wanting to do this for years, ' cos it's what you get back.....* (2:380-410)

Ruth has wanted to work as an EA for years. She gives '*what you get back*' as her reason, going on to describe a similar scenario to Siobhan, in that child progress is emotionally rewarding for the EA. Ruth talks of herself as '*enabling*' the learning process. Like Siobhan, she views the ability to learn and progress as residing within the child and views herself as removing the barriers to this process. The proximity to the child (both physical and emotional) affords the EA the luxury of being able to view firsthand the learning process. She is able to witness the child learning and '*pushing*' forward as a consequence of her having removed obstacles. Although not completely clear, it seems that these experiences are what Ruth feels she actually gets back from her role. The knowledge of having enabled and of viewing child successes, rather than being described as what she 'gives' to the role, are what she perceives as 'getting back' from the role.

It seems that the work they carry out allows the participants to feel good about themselves. As Nicola puts it:

> *I do, I do, I really enjoy it. It's just the variety day to day. It's such a feel good job!* (6:914-916)

The busy days and non-stop nature of the job seem to be a draw for some of the participants. They feel challenged, stretched and fulfilled, with the opportunity to use their skills and abilities. Sallie appears to make a direct link between enjoyment of the job and the busy, tiring nature of the work.

Sallie:

> *I really enjoy my job, I love my job and I love, I like kids..... but there is a different spin on being an EA it's just so fulfilling, it's tiring and there are days when you leave here just mentally* (exhausted) ......(5:8-14)

In addition to loving being with children, the experience of being an EA is seen as fulfilling and mentally draining. The way in which Sallie describes her role suggests elements of what has been described by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) as 'flow'. This concept of 'flow' encapsulates the sense of emotional well-being that can be gained through a person feeling fully involved in an activity to the extent that all conscious processes are absorbed. Sallie seems engaged with her work in a way that leads her to feel that the challenges of the role are met proportionally by her own abilities and competencies, leaving her with a sense of actualisation. Her abilities are not left unused or wasted. She feels that the role draws on her in a way that capitalises on her potential. As an individual, she has given everything she has got.

There are also indications of 'flow' within Claire's transcript. She starts out by detailing a wide range of tasks that she carries out through her role, ending this section with *'So it's a huge thing that we have to do'*. She then goes on to suggest that she finds it difficult to articulate the extent of what happens during the course of her days.

Claire:

.....it's hard to think individually what, a lot of the time, we do. ... 'Cos a lot of the time you are just so busy you don't think of what you are doing, you just do it automatically.... with the little ones anyway.(4:201-208)

There is little space for conscious thought during the day, only action. Because of the level of absorption in the work, there is no room for meta-cognition. The interaction of demands and personal competencies flow together.

Nicola talks of the level of stimulation she finds through her work. In addition to emotional gain, Nicola describes being intellectually stimulated.

Nicola:

...and it was really interesting being in the class. I learned a lot in the first while about working in a school and I think you do every day you are still learning. (6:61-66)

Interviewer:

You found it interesting? (6:67)

Nicola:

Very interesting, yeah. The days just fly past, there is never a moment where you think what I'm I going to do now. It's always a busy, busy day..... (6:68-73)

Interviewer:

So what sort of things was it that you found interesting? (6:74-75)

Nicola:

Just being in class in general. Working with the children and listening to the children when they were telling you about things.... and just doing work and their opinion in things. If you were doing different topics how 2 children can

be working on the same topic but have totally different ideas. I just found it
really, really interesting and the variation of the job as well. (6:76-87)

Nicola begins in a similar vein to Claire and Sallie in that she finds little time for conscious thought during the course of the day because of the high level of activity. She goes on to talk about how interesting and intellectually stimulating she finds the work, indicating a level of meta-cognition in relation to her work. She eludes to a sense of wonder and awe at the learning processes of the children. She describes herself as being fascinated by how the children approach the same piece of work from different angles. Nicola places the location of the learning within the child, describing how they go about learning tasks differently. Her proximity to the learning allows her to observe how it takes place.

Unfortunately, there are some perceived barriers to fulfilling potential. Some participants had attended recognised training courses, while others had received no recognised training. In addition to a patchiness of recognised training, there was, for some, a near absence of induction and explanation of roles and tasks when in school. This paucity of preparation is discussed by Thea. For her there is an absence of adequate training and preparation for her role and so sees herself, at times, ill equipped to meet the perceived requirements of her job.

Thea:

> *So I found that* (supporting an unfamiliar method of teaching maths to older
> primary aged children) *quite daunting actually. And it would have been good*
> *to actually have the time and preparation or understanding of what was*
> *expected of you, as well. Em, but even in handling and moving. I have never*
> *been trained in that but you know there are times when you have to do these*
> *tasks, or assist. I wouldn't say that I would do it on my own, but I still have to*
> *assist. But also, there is still quite complex needs you know, with children with*
> *autism and I think..... you know..... we did have in-service recently on autism*
> *which was very beneficial and so training, you know, to understand the*
> *conditions you are dealing with. (1:514-537)*

Thea has a desire to learn more about the various additional support needs of children. She also has a desire to plan and prepare for her daily tasks. She feels, however, that she is not even able to gain *'an understanding of what was expected of you'*. For Thea, this means that she can have a certain reticence about tasks at work. She is *'daunted'* by them because she feels ill-prepared.

All participants spoke of high levels of engagement with their work and conveyed feelings of being emotionally affected. For the most part, very positive feelings were described, although not feeling equipped to fully meet the demands of the job was seen as a frustration. Participants generally felt challenged in their work and had a belief that theirs was an important role, the results of which could be seen in the progress of the children they felt close to.

The Four main themes arising from the interviews have been detailed:

- Communication, interface and role perceptions between class teacher and education auxiliary
- Development of and outcomes from a genuine and reciprocal relationship with the supported child
- Judging the level of support
- Fulfilment and engagement with the role

These themes were found to resonate with each of the participants and have been illustrated here with verbatim excerpts from at least two participants. Although the same broad themes were found across the interviews there were differences in how the participants were affected by these themes.

5.3.6 Analysis Conclusion

The experiences and interpretations of each of the six participants in this study are unique. Some themes were felt strongly by some individuals and barely mentioned by others. As such, the analysis section began with some consideration of each participant as an individual.

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The main body of the analysis covered the four strongest themes that emerged from the transcripts and were seen across the data. The ways in which participants described themselves as being affected by the themes revealed both similarities and differences in experience and understanding. All participants valued strong communication, but for some it was a daily reality, while for others it was just a desire. Productive relationships between EAs and supported children were viewed as important. Some participants believed children were served best through support from a number of adults, while others rated continuity and familiarity more highly.

DISCUSSION

The four main themes arising from the analysis are discussed here in relation to the literature. Much of the material links in with topics covered in the literature review, while some unanticipated material is also examined. The four themes are:

- Communication, interface and role perceptions between teacher and EA
- Development of and outcomes from a genuine and reciprocal relationship with the child
- Judging the level and nature of support
- Fulfilment and engagement with the role

The discussion ends with a short section on IPA as a vehicle for the research.

6.1 Interaction between the Themes

The first theme discussed, that of *communication, interface and role perceptions between teacher and EA,* is the most important theme to emerge. This was a strong theme for all the participants and is of such significance because it impinges on all the other themes. Those who experienced what they saw as positive levels of communication viewed it as being crucial to effective practice. Open lines of communication enabled on-going reflection and modification of practice. Those participants who felt that communication was lacking in their experience viewed this as a barrier to their practice. Without on-going dialogue between the two members of staff there is no discourse around pedagogy, appropriate ways to support and scaffold pupil learning. Supporting children as part of a group and being able to work on one's own initiative is precluded.

6.1.1 Communication, Interface and Role Perceptions between CT and EA

Within this theme there was a sense that communication between CT and EA was often ad-hoc in nature and frequently unsatisfactory. Variable levels of clarity were seen in terms of role boundaries, time given over to preparation and training and professional expectations of EAs. Some EAs placed the onus of responsibility for communication squarely with the CT, while others felt there should be joint responsibility.

Some EAs felt a hierarchy to exist solely with respect to professional roles, while others felt it permeated into how they were viewed as people. Where it existed, reticence to instigate communication appeared to tie in with greater experience of a hierarchical relationship between the EA and CT. Where participants perceived a sense of personal agency in their work it was always viewed in a positive light. This was a regular part of some participants' work, while others saw their role as more passive. Agency for EAs also co-existed with a perception of mutual respect between CTs and EAs.

Perhaps the strongest theme in this study, communication with the CT was also found by Blatchford et al (2004) to be the primary reason for job satisfaction put forward by TAs through questionnaires. The paucity of communication with the CT experienced by some participants in this study was seen as detrimental to job satisfaction. Poor communication was linked to a perception of wasted learning opportunities, inefficient use of time and a verbalised desire for discussion and joint planning time. Indeed the literature on workplace learning (e.g. Eraut, 2007) suggests that wasted learning opportunities would exist not only in respect of the child, but also in respect of the EA. A lack of communication with and support from the CT have indeed been seen by participants as hampering pursuit of challenge and motivation.

This notion of less wasted learning opportunities echoes some of my initial concerns that EA views of desired learning outcomes might not be in keeping with CT opinions of desired outcomes. I had felt initially that sometimes EAs were particularly keen to see a task completed, rather than focussing on the learning processes. My tentative assumption was that this came about because EAs and CTs were not clear with each

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other about learning goals. Although this specific point was not prominent in the transcripts, other examples of how paucity of communication led to less than optimal learning were given. Thea described how she did not get the opportunity to learn how to carry out her role or about specific areas of subject knowledge (e.g. maths strategies with the older children). Bearing in mind social constructivist assumptions of learning, comparisons can be drawn between the relationship between EA and child and the relationship between EA and CT. Minimal interaction between CT and EA hampers both such learning relationships, thereby impeding not only the learning of the child, but also of the EA. EAs are not afforded the opportunity to learn about and reflect upon pedagogy and so construct new understandings of how to support.

Looking at the body of transcripts, there is the suggestion that useful communication could be in two forms. One being ring-fenced time (not experienced by any participant), given over to a meeting in which ideas were shared and briefing on the forthcoming lessons was given. The second being communication throughout the course of a lesson (experienced by two participants) to ensure that effective joint work takes place and to provide real time feedback on appropriateness of support and learning needs. As indicated by the Cremin, Thomas and Vincett (2005) study, wherever there was a plan in place for thoughtful support staff deployment, greater pupil engagement was observed. This held true, irrespective of how the support staff were deployed. The conclusion could be drawn that some thoughtful discussion, agreement and clarity over support staff tasks led to more effective and engaged working.

The absence of mutual planning, preparation and liaison time seen in this study is in keeping with the findings of many other studies (Blatchford et al., 2004; Alborz et al., 2009; Schlapp et al. 2001; Wilson et al, 2002), although contrary to that documented in O'Brien and Garner (2001). The model of joint working described as 'reflective team-work' by Cremin, Thomas and Vincett (2005) might alleviate much of the concern raised by participants and much of the concern that I felt in response to my interpretations. A short period of joint reflection and planning would enable EAs to gain a greater awareness of the lesson format and material. It would also provide a forum in which EA views and observations were not only permitted, but were

required. This should pre-empt the likelihood of supported children being asked to complete inappropriate work, as was experienced by Ruth.

Alborz et al (2009) made the recommendation that teachers should be trained in team teaching and collaborative working as part of their initial training. For some participants, unwillingness on the part of the teachers to interact with and give thought to joint working was experienced and verbalised in interview. For others, this was implicit in the transcripts. A lack of seeking views from support staff would seem to suggest that more thought could be given in initial teacher training to joint working. Likewise, the low EA comfort level in instigating communication alongside a perception that to do so would be 'overstepping the mark' suggests that similar thought to joint working in support staff training would also be appropriate.

Reasons for variable levels of communication during the course of a lesson also warrant consideration. Those participants who felt able to converse with the teacher, ask questions and offer opinions felt more comfortable about their role and position. This tied in with how they experienced the school ethos and the respect that they felt. Where participants did not communicate effectively throughout the lesson, there was a sense that they felt 'it was not their place' to do so. Information sharing and feedback was hampered by the participants' perception that their input was not viewed as worthwhile by teaching staff. As questioned in the literature review and reflected upon in the analysis, the benefits of EAs gaining greater understanding of the needs and experiences of children are diminished by a lack of facility to communicate with the CT. This means that the understanding cannot be used to inform task appropriateness, as is recommended by Applebee (1986) for effective scaffolding of learning. Without learning activities that are appropriate to the needs of the child, most of the qualities that Feuerstein and Schur (1996) put forward as important would be difficult to attain. Where tasks are not appropriate to the learners' needs, they could not be seen as meaningful or that the adult can intend to use the tasks to bring about cognitive change.

Productive communication may feed into greater variety and more appropriate deployment of EAs. Those participants who experienced robust communication also spoke of feeling that they worked on behalf of the CT, enabling more work to be carried out. There was a sense that they understood what work the CT would like to

see being carried out in the class. Where poorer communication was experienced, roles seemed to have tighter boundaries and distinct from the work of the CT, with less mutual understanding.

Perception of a professional hierarchy may impact not only on a willingness to communicate with CTs, but also the level of agency and empowerment that the participants experienced in their role. Agency was viewed as contributing to job satisfaction and allowed participants to work more creatively, bringing their own ideas to their work, rather than passively waiting to be told what to do. Seligman (2002) proposes that when people utilise what they believe to be their strengths in the work place, work will be brought more finely in tune with the capacities of the individual and so a greater state of engagement or 'flow' will ensue, which will yield greater job satisfaction. Through a sense of agency, participants feel more able to put some of themselves into their work and to be able to use the personal strengths that they have more creatively. Without a working climate that supports EAs in contributing ideas it seems likely that a range of skills will go untapped.

As much as there being a perceived hierarchy, I wonder if sometimes a level of alienation develops between teaching staff and support staff. It seems that poor communication and alienation between teachers and support staff perpetuate each other, since without interacting with 'the other group' something of an 'us and them' situation could emerge. Before this study I had been more accustomed to hearing views from the teacher perspective, both when I was a teacher and subsequently through conversations with teachers in my role as EP. These opinions have included perceptions of EAs as being very knowledgeable on particular pupils (which has led to some teachers feeling unable to direct EAs) and also opinions that EAs did not support children effectively (which teachers may not know how to approach). Such experiential awareness has contributed to me feeling that ring-fenced time, even in small amounts, would be likely to contribute to more effective joint working within the classrooms. It was heartening to hear from some participants that good informal communication could exist. I would be hopeful that ring-fenced time for liaison and planning would afford some shared understandings of pupil need and effective support. Shared understandings and joint planning might support relationships and increase the likelihood of informal communication also taking place.

For some participants the inertia with respect to communication interacted with a feeling of being viewed as inferior to teaching staff and of their contributions being unwelcome. This perspective seems to place the responsibility with teachers to seek support staff opinions and feedback. For other participants, Nicola and Claire in particular, the onus of responsibility for communication was felt to be shared by CT and EA. Benefits may be seen from increased clarity and recognition that there is not only a right for support staff to communicate with teaching staff, but also a responsibility.

6.1.2 Development of and Outcomes from a Genuine and Reciprocal Relationship with the Child

Talk of the relationship between EA and supported child indicated it was often perceived as more than just a professional relationship. There was also emotional involvement. Participants drew parallels between the relationship of EA and supported child and that of parent and child. Mention was made of how experience as a mother (all participants were female) contributed to the skills and attributes that participants were brought to the role of EA. In some cases, a strong and trusting relationship was credited with affording the child the emotional climate necessary for learning to take place. It was also seen as enabling the EA to tune into the specific learning needs of the child and allowed support to be tailored accordingly. This tied in with EAs being able to tune in to the child's zone of proximal development, thereby scaffolding the child as he or she constructs new ways of understanding in a manner that less familiar adults would not easily be able to manage.

For most participants, emotional involvement and reaction to supported children was seen as inevitable. The amount of time in exclusive contact with a child meant a strong response to him or her would follow. Generally, a strong relationship was viewed positively. The opinion existed that children benefitted from increased emotional security and reassurance. Some believed that emotional security could not be gained in the family home. For others, there was a sense that a supported child had low self-confidence in their ability to learn.

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Some participants felt discomfort in allowing or encouraging emotional attachment. There was a sense that it was not wholly 'professional', although the voicing of this opinion may have interacted with participant opinion on what I might have perceived as being 'professional'. For others, an attachment with the child was actively fostered. The prevailing opinion was that emotional security grew from a genuine relationship between children and staff, necessitating a level of emotional availability on the part of the EA. This ties in with the principles of nurture groups and indeed School C does have a nurture group. Nurture groups are small in-school groups of up to 12 pupils in which support is tailored around the emotional and developmental needs of the children (Boxall, 2002) with a view to helping them reach a place where they are more readily able to learn. The emotional availability of staff is crucial to the development of positive relationships that enable children to gain a restorative experience of early nurture. Staff in nurture groups aim to offer predictable responses and positive regard in the hope that children will grow in trust and confidence.

I was the EP who supported the formation of the nurture group in School C and carried out some initial training with all staff. As such, I would be keen to hear that nurturing principles were being employed within the school and would be sensitive to overtures of this. Nonetheless, I was glad to hear that the principle of providing emotional security was available to conscious thought and evident across the participants group. Several of the participants aimed to offer a similar kind of reliable and responsive presence to that described of staff in nurture groups. They believed that this behaviour would benefit the learning process. For some this was for the same sorts of reasons as children may attend nurture groups. Other participants supported children for whom there was no reason to assume that early nurturing had been interrupted. Possibilities for why this sort of behaviour was felt important may include the child appearing younger and more vulnerable than their peers. This may prompt nurturing and parental behaviours in the EA. Examples were also given indicating that some supported children may have low confidence in learning and so trust and reassurance may be seen as necessary and appropriate.

In terms of promoting security and well-being in a child, the natural flip side of this is the danger of over support and smothering of a child's independent development. These are some of the concerns raised in the 'Helping or Hovering' paper (Giangreco

et al., 1997). Examples were given of a sense that security could be afforded to a child by simply knowing of the whereabouts of the EA. There was also concern that an adult 'shadow' could hamper a child's inclusion in a peer group. One participant talked of her observation that some other children occasionally noticed differences in the child she supported and this hurt her, perhaps in the way that a parent would be hurt if they were aware that their own child had been mocked at school. Again, this raises the question of whether intense and exclusive relationships could lead to over-support or over-protection on the part of the supporting adult. In discussing the promotion of positive emotional adjustment and well-being in children, Seligman (2002) highlights the importance of allowing children to try out their abilities and master new skills by themselves. He warns that this will necessarily include failure at points in order for children to gain real life feedback about their actions. If adults remove too many elements that they found worrying in a child's endeavours, the small failures that promote personal creative strategies may not be built.

For some participants, emotional support and encouragement included positive affirmations and praise. The assumption seems to be that liberal praise will improve a child's approach to and performance in learning tasks. Indeed, the goal would appear to be to provide an emotional safe space for learning and would be in congruence with Feuerstein and Schur's (1996) criteria for an effective MLE. In my role as EP, I have often encountered the argument from school staff that some children do not respond appropriately to praise. This usually causes me to question the manner in which praise is relayed to the child. Seligman (2002) suggests that the well intended promotion of self esteem within schools has led to a 'flooding' of children with bland and inappropriate praise. He recommends that real praise is offered in response to a genuine opinion about an actual achievement or event. In this way the child can recognise that it is real, deserved and non-patronising. Seligman likens self esteem to the speedometer in a car. It tells people how well they are doing, but just as altering a speedometer does not make a car go faster, trying to directly alter self-esteem, would not necessary improve well being or performance. He argues that giving children unwarranted praise can be counter-productive and is likely not to be believed by children. The argument here is not that high self esteem is intrinsically problematic, rather that attempts to directly adjust self esteem are likely to be less successful than efforts to support the causes of self esteem. That is, through positive experiences of

self efficacy, such as succeeding in a challenging task, self esteem with respect to the area of success should follow. If praise is perceived as unwarranted, then it is pretence. What may have a better chance of enhancing well being and performance is providing children with opportunities to learn skills and to succeed. In addition, removing opportunities for small failures, to accept criticism and to learn from one's mistakes are important in building the resilience of young people and are life tools.

I suggest that a question to be posed is whether there are elements of over protection arising from intense and exclusive relationships that may strip children of tools for real and independent learning. I acknowledge that the reason many children are afforded additional support in the classroom is because the extent of their struggle might be so great as to counteract any positive effects of independent learning if they were not supported. However, in light of the above arguments, 'sensitive support' would seem to be more than deciding when to step in and when to stand back. It might also be about considering how praise and encouragement can both support and undermine and how, at times, an awareness that a small failure or mistake was about to be made might also be a reason to stand back, rather than step in, if it could provide a useful learning opportunity.

During the writing of this discussion I attended a course on dynamic assessment and as such, have spent time reflecting on the benefits of mediated learning. The suggestions of Seligman (2002) above highlight an area that would require particular sensitivity in terms of support. Enabling a child to construct their own learning through their own efforts and with elements of managed failure would have to be balanced against the risk of task avoidance ensuing in response to frustration. It would be important that the tasks presented to a child are pitched at the right level to provide this balance. This can occur if an effective 'feedback loop' exists between the EA and CT setting the tasks. If an EA is able to gain subtle and detailed appreciation of the child's learning needs, this must be communicated to the CT to avoid the presentation of tasks that would lead to either boredom, 'too much' failure or the necessity for excessive support which would not facilitate independent mastery on the part of the learner.

An example was given by Ruth of aiming to counter the negative self-talk of a child with more positive messages about his ability.

Ruth:

> ....*I help him along with what he's doing, but it's encouraging them as well because if he gets something wrong.... 'I can't do it, I can't do it', but I'll say to him 'come on! You can do it!' and I'll give him a little bit of help and he will finish it and he's done it and I say, ' see! you can do it!' and he'll go away with a smile on his face.* (2:165-181)

These messages seem more appropriate than bland praise as they are fairly specific and promote a sense of belief in the child's ability that is in sync with what is possible. Ruth seeks to dispute the child's self-talk and possible cognition, offering alternative messages. In the example above, the child's self-talk of 'I can't do it' is counteracted with the message 'You can do it', accompanied with evidence of the completed task.

A complementary way of adjusting self-talk might be 'modelling' by the EA. Social learning theory (e.g. Bandura, 1977) uses the idea that observational learning can be translated into a personal repertoire of behaviour. This is how children learn to speak, by imitating what they observe. Observational, or social learning, is particularly strong in young children. This would be helpful for adults supporting the youngest children to be aware of. That is, as well as questioning the self-talk of a child, modelling alternative self-talk that results in success would also be advantageous.

The last element of this section considered is how the development of a close and familiar relationship can feed into the learning processes of the child. I have discussed how the nurturing presence of an adult may alter the emotional climate for learning. In addition, the detailed awareness of a child's needs should allow an EA to offer appropriate scaffolding for the learning and to tap into the child's zone of proximal development. As stated in the literature review, Lev Vygotsky's definition of the zone of proximal development is:

> *'the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers'* (1978, p.86)

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It was suggested in the literature review that EAs, with their high level of exposure to the children's learning could be well placed to support their move towards their potential development. Responses from the participants concur with this idea since they did appear to feel they were 'in tune' with the children. Since EAs would seem well placed in this respect, thought would appropriately be given over to training in the principles of scaffolding and mediated learning. The use of open questions and sustained shared thinking would be sensible topics for support staff training. Blatchford et al (2004) recommended consideration of Robin Alexander's (2000) analysis of pedagogical functions in training for support staff and there could be some sense in this. While participants described feeling in tune with the child's learning, there was no real mention of scaffolding techniques as an actual construct. Some worthwhile pedagogical functions may well take place, but since ideas around ZPD, SST, MLE and scaffolding seem not to be available to the participants as constructs in their own right, it seems likely that there is negligible discussion of such ideas in training, preparation and liaison. Where such constructs do take place, they may largely result from the participants pre-existing skills and intuition. Frequent mention was made of how the experience of parenting equips a person to support young people. Raising the level of awareness of pedagogical functions may encourage those supporting adults with existing strong skills to capitalise on their intuition and would educate those for whom careful scaffolding is not an intuitive skill. The interviews held by Blatchford et al (2004) with head teachers yielded responses pointing to a greater interest from head teachers in the personal qualities of support staff than in the training they had received. This connects with participants in this study feeling that interaction with supported children is largely a skill they come ready equipped with.

There is also the likelihood that the course of engagement or flow during interactions with young people reduces the participants' meta-cognitive awareness of specifically what they were doing. However, if scaffolding, SST, MLE or ZPD (albeit perhaps not with these names) existed as constructs available for conscious discussion, there would likely be an awareness that this is what they would be aiming to do during interactions and as such would have made more mention in interview.

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In the literature review I raised the possibility that an ability to successfully scaffold the learning process of a child may be diminished by the fact that the person setting and adjusting the learning tasks and environment (the CT) is different from the person gaining feedback about the child's performance in response to the tasks. This concern seems vindicated by the often minimal or absent communication between the EA and CT. Mention was made in the interviews of continuation of inappropriate learning tasks being set because of very little feedback from the EA to CT about child performance and response to tasks.

It seems that the absence of significant conversation of scaffolding and the often poor feedback to CTs answers some of the initial questions that I had after reading Anke Konig's study of interactions in German pre-schools. On reading about the levels of SST in these settings I had started out wondering about the possibility of a similar study for EAs and supported children. The interview process does seem to have tapped into this area and as a result I would feel that further awareness raising of pedagogical functions among supporting adults would be beneficial.

Unfortunately, the presence of EAs may, at times, further separate a supported child from his or her peers. This was felt by some participants, while others perceived themselves as supporting children as part of a group. If separation was experienced then this would surely reduce the chances of a child being able to reach their learning potential 'in collaboration with more capable peers' (Vygotsy, 1978, p.86). This is a particularly important factor to consider in terms of observational learning as a similar aged peer would be more easily emulated than an adult.

The participants experienced what they perceived as definite advantages and disadvantages of the rather familial relationships that can arise as a result of supporting children in class. A close, pseudo-parental relationship may bring nurturance that will enable a child to trust and to feel encouraged in their learning. This is in keeping with the principles of nurture groups in which attachment between children and staff is viewed as advantageous (Boxall, 2002). Drawbacks occur if a desire to support leaks into over-support and over-protection. A yearning to bolster a child's self-esteem may undermine real independent learning opportunities, learning

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from one's mistakes and mastery of new skills that can be attributed to the child's own efforts.

Detrimental self-talk on the part of the child can usefully be interrupted by an EA and this should be encouraged, along with modeling of alternative self-talk. Close working can also aid the child moving through their zone of proximal development, although this may be offset against few opportunities to work alongside and learn from more able peers. Supporting a child as part of a group should be encouraged where possible.

6.1.3 Judging the level and nature of support

The view existed among participants that support should be offered to children in a sensitive manner. That is, it would be advantageous to a child's learning if EAs aimed to encourage independent learning, only offering help when necessary. This ideal interacted with the belief that certain children were 'supposed' to be supported for a given number of hours and that it was the role of the EA to be helping at all times during those hours.

It was talked about that EAs would prefer to see supported children as an integral part of their class and some believed that their work supported inclusion. There was also the feeling that being supported by an adult could hamper a child's integration with their peers. In addition, support from an EA may reduce the interaction between the child and the CT, perhaps because the CT viewed the child' s learning needs as being largely catered for via the EA.

Some participants supported one or a very small number of children. Where this was the case, the continuity of EA and the familiarity that this brought was generally seen as positive. Other participants supported a greater number of children. This meant that the supported children experienced a wider number of EAs working with them. In this case, variety in supporting adults was viewed as benefitting the learning process by energising it.

On one level there was the belief among participants that sensitive support is beneficial. That is, supporting sensitively by judging when to step in and offer assistance and when to stand back to allow a child to move forward independently. This is what was recommended in the Alborz et al.(2009) meta-analysis. Sensitive adult support can facilitate pupil engagement with learning and social activities. Of the participants who offer predominantly exclusive support to one or a very small number of pupils, several mentions were made of promoting independence in the children. There was also an awareness of when to stand back due to a perceived thorough knowledge of the child's strengths and abilities. This promotion of independence interacted with a contradictory belief in the role of supporting adult being to support everything. This seemed to be a particular struggle if children had been 'allocated' a specific number of hours of support. Some participants felt they could not legitimately support other children during time that was designated for particular named pupils. This relates to a strong personal concern that allocating specific amounts of time for the support of a child can lead to unhelpful perceptions around how the child should be supported. I have felt that it can lead to inflexibility in practice and the reluctance of staff to promote independent working, lest it lead to the allocation of fewer hours in future. As such, I was keen to hear any opinions in relation to the perception of time allocation and am keen to promote further discussion around this practice.

Within the funding authority, there is the assumption among many education officers, some school staff and most educational psychologists that when additional resourcing for EA support is assigned to a school because of a particular child, that support is for the class. The understanding being that the class as a whole would require additional adult support because of one or more pupils having a high level of need. This did appear to be the assumption held by some of the participants, namely Claire and Nicola. They felt comfortable working wherever they saw help was required. For the other four of the six participants, this was not a message that came across. For them, their time was allocated specifically and exclusively to certain pupils and this meant that they felt no legitimacy in self-deploying elsewhere in the class, however sensitive they instinctively felt their support could or should be.

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In terms of how the presence and support of an EA might affect the child's position with respect to the class, there was some reason to believe that greater distance did ensue. It would be difficult to determine to what extent this was due to EA presence per se, as opposed to other factors pertaining to the child's additional support needs. Giangreco et al. (1997) interpreted the presence of a supporting adult as hampering the interactions between the supported child and the class teacher. Ruth gives examples of inappropriate work set by the CT that appeared not to be monitored, while Thea suggests that interaction between the child and CT only very rarely happened, despite the child desiring this and her sense that his behaviour was more appropriate when it did occur. A deference of responsibility, by teachers, to the supporting adult was also suggested by Giangreco et al. (1997) and the accounts of some of the participants point to this happening at times in the funding authority. This tendency to defer may be amplified by a possible lack of certainty on the part of the CT as to what the EA's competencies are and a full sense of what their role should entail. Wilson et al. (2002) documented that teachers generally felt unsure about how to allocate supporting adult time within the classroom. This notion was clearly put forward by Thea when she described her impression that, due to time constraints, CTs did not seem to engage with a real consideration of what her role was and where her strengths and abilities might lie. Misconceptions around role remits and levels of expertise feed back into problems associated with paucity of communication and alienation between teaching and support staff.

Again, a split in experience existed between Claire and Nicola and the other participants. Claire and Nicola described their roles as being an extension of the CT. They talked very little of supporting individual children, explaining how both they and the CT interacted with a range of pupils. The way that they talked about their work seemed more along the lines of Alborz et al.'s (2009) recommendation that supporting adults should not generally work in an exclusive one-to-one relationship and that support should usually take place within the context of a group, so as to maximise learning potential.

Giangreco et al (1997) also noted that dissociation from peer groups could be attributed to a supported child having an adult 'shadow'. This term was also used by Ruth and there was a sense that adult presence could have the effect of reducing peer

interaction. At other times, participants felt the distance between the supported child and their peers to be more largely due to the child's additional support needs and how other children responded to those differences. As in the cases of Ruth and Thea, the participants sometimes felt helpless and with a sense of sadness in the face of perceived social distance from peers. At other times, as in the cases Claire and Nicola, participants viewed it as their role to support children socially where they found element of difficulty with integrating.

Two separate ways of working were described by participants as has already been noted. Ruth, Thea, Siobhan and Sallie all offered predominantly exclusive support. Claire and Nicola, who work within the same school, offer support to the CT so that more work can be carried out in the classroom. This included working alongside children with a higher level of need at times, but deployment was far more flexible. Participants who engaged in exclusive support valued the continuity and familiarity that they could offer to the young people. Reasons why such familiarity could well afford benefits to the child have been discussed above and include; offering the security to move forward in their learning, the adult having a strong sense of the child's needs and an enhanced ability to support them through their zone of proximal development. These are advantages that were perceived by the participants and are backed up in the extant literature.

Drawbacks to exclusive support have also been highlighted. These include the possibility of reduced engagement with the CT, less contact with peers and over-reliance on adult support. It seems that exclusive support can have negative consequences that reduce benefits gained through familiarity and continuity of support. Although it may seem intuitive that EAs should be well placed to mediate a child's learning, poor communication with the CT can mean that the person gaining the in depth understanding of the child's learning (the EA) does not link into the planning and moderating of the learning environment as tasks are often still set by the CT.

Claire and Nicola both held up support through a variety of EAs as being beneficial to the child through its energising nature and relief of the stifling nature of exclusive relationships. This is an additional set-back to the exclusive support model that was raised by Thea. She felt that the child she supported had come to associate behaving

in a challenging manner with her presence. This 'variety as energising' discourse is not one that is clearly documented in the extant literature and so warrants consideration. There is the reasonable possibility that increased energy might be experienced by the child through working alongside a variety of adults and peers, in that different styles of working would be practised. Claire and Nicola both felt that the energising element was present for them as well as for the child and interacted with their perception of personal agency at work good team working with the CT. Greater energy and enthusiasm at work would be likely to bring further benefits to the child in terms of increased effectiveness in their work. Thought should be given, however, to whether greater variety in work for the supporting adult did always accrue benefits to their child and was not to the detriment of gaining a clear understanding of pupil needs. It is possible that through working with a greater number of pupils, the supporting adult would gain further awareness of appropriate groupings for children and helpful pairings in terms of peer teaching and support. Using a reflective team-work model of collaboration with the CT, observations and reflections could be shared that would inform future planning for the needs of all the pupils.

In response to concerns over exclusive support and over-support to children with additional support needs, Giangreco et al. (2007) compiled a check list for use in schools to determine whether over-support is taking place. If such a tool were used by schools, sensitivity would be important. O'Brien and Garner (2001) have expressed concerns over the negligible input that support staff in schools have over the direction of their work. It would probably be more productive if teaching staff and support staff worked collaboratively in the planning stages to decide the level and nature of support. This may decrease the likelihood that discord due to a perceived hierarchical relationship between teachers and support staff would result.

Sensitive support has been advised by Alborz et al (2009) and has been experienced in varying degrees by the participants of this study. It would also be endorsed as a consequence of this study. Supporting sensitively should involve careful judgement as to how best to enhance a child's learning and development. Awareness of the pitfalls of exclusive support and over-reliance on the part of children may help adults to make informed decisions about scaffolding and allowing independent and peer working. Acknowledgement of the benefits of providing support across a class and supporting

as part of a group may increase EA confidence in terms of making executive decisions about their own deployment, while practise of this model could inject further energy into the learning processes of the child and working day of the EA.

6.1.4 Fulfilment and engagement with the role

Participants generally talked very positively about their work, viewing it as being hugely worthwhile for both the children and CTs. The ability to see children make progressive steps forward in their learning appeared to be an important reward, as did the ability to remove obstacles to the child's learning and contribute to their being able to move forward in their learning.

The day-to-day work was described as being relentless and of a high intensity. This was tiring for participants, but also appeared to be a dimension of the work that was intrinsic to the participants' job satisfaction and something on which participants thrived.

I was genuinely surprised by the positivity that was conveyed by the participants about their job. It was not uncommon for participants to talk about how they 'loved' their work. As indicated in the analysis, there is the possibility that my presence as an EP may have interacted with the 'version' of their perspective that the participants chose to recount. I acknowledge this, while also interpreting their positivity as being sincere. I had been aware of the possibility of the theme of a hierarchy existing between teaching and support staff following conversations in passing and the pilot interview. Because of this I had expected to find a greater degree of dissatisfaction and feelings of being underappreciated. These initial suspicions were backed up by reading through the literature. The Valuable Assets Report (2006) saw support staff describe being 'exploited' in their work. Both Schlapp et al (2001) and Blatchford et al (2004) documented low job satisfaction for support staff. Some of the reasons for the discontent were fragmentary deployment that led to a disjointed nature to the work, lack of time for planning and feedback, disagreements with teachers and feelings of being bored or hectic. The notable other exception to this rule is the accounts of support staff themselves as compiled by O'Brien and Garner (2001). This

study also finds participants describing how they love their work and feel great fulfilment through daily challenges that stretch their abilities and allowed them to witness children making steps forward in their learning.

In common with the above findings, the participants in this study often felt they had little or no time for planning and preparation and this was indeed bemoaned. The suggestion of being 'bored' was almost negligible, while feelings of busy-ness were viewed as a desirable element to the job. There were differences in the level of variety of work, but no indication that participants felt their deployment to be fragmentary. They all appeared to know with which teachers and pupils they would be working on a day-to-day basis.

Perhaps the difference for the participants in this study, compared with the findings of Schlapp et al (2001) and Blatchford et al (2004) was a subtle distinction between feelings of work being hectic and fragmented to a point of not feeling able to complete valuable work and feeling busy and stretched, but being able to make a worthwhile contribution. The manner in which participants talked about their busy, but fulfilling days had, for me, much in common with the concept of 'flow'.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) proposes that a feeling of 'flow' exists where a person is in a state of total concentration and complete absorption with the activity in hand. This is described as a positive state and one about which people tend to feel particularly positive following the event. During the state of flow itself a person loses self-conscious thought as awareness merges with action, with no meta-cognition remaining to contemplate how one actually feels about what they are doing in the moment. Flow encompasses a sense of intrinsic motivation as a balance exists between a person's skills and abilities and the challenge of the task. Fulfillment can be felt as engagement in the task takes a person to the highest edge of their abilities, but does not surpass it.

Flow can apply to any number of activities that allow a person to become absorbed and have their skills meet the challenges at hand. Flow is an area that I have found of interest for a number of years, initially following the reading of Martin Seligman's book entitled 'Authentic Happiness' (2002). It is a construct that I found I personally identified with. I noted that when I reflected on certain experiences that had given me

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a particular 'buzz', perhaps a very engaging conversation, a piece of successful training to staff in schools or supporting one of my children in learning a new skill, it had elements of 'flow'. For the participants in this study the activities involved were those that were believed to enhance the learning potential and progression of children. This provided added gratification to the participants. On reflecting about their daily work they were not only able to recall intrinsic enjoyment, but also feel positively about themselves as individuals. Participants talked about feeling that everything they did was valued, that they were valued by the CT and trusted, liked and looked up to by the children.

The qualities of flow were found in participants' descriptions of feeling constantly busy and challenged throughout the day, coupled with a feeling of having 'loved it' at the end of the day. Claire mentions finding it hard to describe what actually takes place during the course of the day because of being so engaged with what happens. This implies a reduction in conscious awareness during the day, which would be in accordance with a feeling of flow. Nicola describes how she feels fully engaged in her work with a sense that it takes everything she's got. It seems that what is experienced is a match between her skills and the tasks in front of her. For Thea, the feeling of flow is more elusive. She seems to have a sense of what the tasks involve and also a sense of what skills would be required to meet the demands of her job. Unfortunately, she feels unable to fully meet the demands as she feels ill-equipped in terms of skills. Csikszentmihalyi (1998) suggests that where one feels their skill level to be significantly lower than the challenge of an activity worry or even anxiety can ensue, which does seem to be the case for Thea.

In addition to absorption and engagement at work, participants described a sense of gratification because of the closeness to the learning process. Perhaps due to the strength of the relationship and familiarity between EA and child, participants could empathise with child progress and achievement to the extent that this achievement was experienced personally. The close relationship and exposure to learning progression seems to illicit a sense of vicarious achievement in participants. Some participants made comments referring to the fact that they felt the child's progress to be a personal achievement.

As stated in the analysis, participants felt that being able to help children and see, first-hand, the progress made were direct benefits to themselves. This dimension interacts with the pseudo-parental nature of some EA-child relationships. In a similar way to how a parent might feel happy 'for' their child, so too did some of participants for the children they supported. The reward to the participant lies in the combination of feeling that she has enabled the learning process to take place while also being able to have a close view of that very learning process.

Fulfillment and engagement at work was a surprising theme from this study and one that sits at odds with much of the extant literature, although it is understood that the largely self-selecting nature of the participants may have contributed to this. Although planning and liaison were often viewed as unsatisfactory, elements such as fragmentary deployment was not mentioned. Participants generally described a high level of engagement with their work which seemed characteristic of flow, allowing them to meet the challenges of the work with their personal skills. Enjoyment of the work was heightened by a feeling of being highly valued as well as feeling happy for children and personally experiencing progress in learning. It seems important that any interventions aimed at altering the practice of support for children with additional needs does seek to preserve the enthusiasm of EAs.

6.2   IPA as a Vehicle for the Research

I discuss here how the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) resonated with me as a methodology for this study.

The decision to opt for an open and qualitative form of research came as a result of believing that there would be elements of the support process that I would miss through observation as I was not personally *part* of the support process. I wanted to take a look inside the perspectives of EAs themselves to understand how they interpreted the experience of support. This interest draws on a symbolic interactionist standpoint (Blumer, 1937) in that I was keen to gain an insight into how meaning was invested into the process of support by the actors in the support themselves – namely

the EAs. The resulting interview transcripts and interpretations thereafter should not be viewed, however, as a direct insight into pre-existing perspectives and investment of meaning by the participants. Through reflection, relaying and discussion with an external party (myself as researcher), the participants will have come to construe and make sense of their experiences in a way that would be in some way different to their constructions of their experiences prior to interview.

In order to get closer to the perspective of participants a strongly idiographic path was chosen to try to make out how different factors interplayed in a unique way for each participant. IPA has enabled me to do just this. It has been a method of engaging with the participants' subjective accounts of their own experiences (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005).

A qualitative and idiographic research route has meant putting aside aims of more traditional quantitative research. A small sample size means that generalisation to a wider population is not appropriate. Universal truths are not sought. However, themes cutting across all or most of the participants indicates elements of common. An aim has been to raise questions, rather than confirming and definitively answering questions. Some of the themes that have emerged from the interviews I could have anticipated, such as the level of communication between EA and teacher. Some themes were unexpected, such as the high level of engagement with the work. If I had begun the research with a hypothesis to test I may not have come into contact with the points that were real and of most importance to the participants themselves.

My own interactions with the participants have been the research medium. This has meant that a wholly objective stance and data that is free from researcher effects has not been possible, nor necessarily desirable. As raised by Flick (2006), research in the social sciences that seeks to remove all everyday confounding variables is likely to yield findings that are divorced from everyday questions and problems. The final interpretations and presentation of themes are subjective. They are my own sense making of the presentation of the sense making of the participants. The accounts offered to me by the participants are not direct windows into their experience. They are largely those elements that are available to conscious thought and that they have chosen to disclose. However, through detailed analysis, certain elements that were

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out-with the participants' consciousness will also be brought to light. My own interpretations have been made with the aim of being grounded in the verbatim accounts of the participants. The sense that I make will, nonetheless, be influenced by all my pre-existing understandings, theories and assumptions. I have included those initial researcher assumptions and my personal views that seemed of most relevance to my interpretations so that the reader can make their own sense of how my personal opinions have interacted with the data. The analysis is backed up with verbatim extracts, with the intention that the reader can clearly trace the process of interpretation from the words of the participant, to my interpretations and through into the discussion. This was a task that required discipline and honesty to ensure that the participants' words were not edited to conveniently fit my theories, but rather my arguments directly arose from the transcripts.

The use of IPA has not been without difficulties and the goals of more traditional methodologies could not be met by these means. It was harder than I anticipated to emulate Kvale's (1996) traveller who wanders along with the locals, asking questions that encourage them to tell their stories. Yet, it has felt an appropriate and honest investigation into a relatively under-researched perspective.

6.3   Conclusions

The claim by Blatchford et al. (2009) that supported children make an average of one year less academic progress than their peers sits alongside McAnea's assertion (as cited by Marley and Bloom, 2009 in the TES) that schools have been more concerned with bodies in classrooms than they have with ensuring effectiveness. Both suggestions are worrying and make thorough scrutiny and reflection of the support process from all angles imperative. This study does not seek to answer these concerns in their entirety. However, there are elements raised within the interviews pointing to steps that may lead to more effective practice.

The initial research questions for this study were:

1. How do EAs interpret the different aspects of their role?
2. What do EAs regard as influencing their professional
practices and how?
3. How do EAs make sense of the experience of supporting children with
additional support needs?

Interpretations of the different aspects of the role are revealed through the analysis and discussion of the four main themes. Likewise, perceived influences on the professional practices of EAs weave through the themes. Effective communication and mutual respect with the CT has been seen as having a significant influence on how EAs go about their professional practices. Participants also strongly regarded their experience as parents as affecting the way in which they interact with the young people they support. All participants seemed to make sense of the experience of supporting children with additional support needs by interpreting the work they do as being hugely worthwhile. This held true whether they offered exclusive individual support or support to a number of children. All of the participants seemed to put a great deal of effort into the role and perhaps had a motivation to believe their work as being of benefit.

Communication, Interface and Role Perceptions between Teacher and EA

This theme can be viewed as an overarching master super-ordinate theme that has a bearing on all other themes. A perception of effective communication and interface with the teacher facilitated what I interpret as positive practice in all the other areas.

The level of communication between CT and EA was variable. For two of the four participants good communication existed throughout the lesson in which feedback could be exchanged and EAs felt able to reassure themselves that the CT was content with the work carried out. This ease of communication facilitated the EAs in feeling greater freedom and agency in their work. For the other four participants, a paucity or even absence of communication existed. Indications were given that this contributed to wasted learning opportunities and inappropriate work set by the CT.

The sense of a professional hierarchy was mentioned by all participants. For some this was confined to their professional roles and was accepted as creating clarity in roles and expectations. For some participants there was a leaking of the hierarchy into how they felt they were perceived as people. This deleteriously influenced emotional well-being at work. It also inhibited confident communication between CT and EA, creativity and responsiveness to pupil need. For no participants was any time given over specifically to liaison and planning. Those participants for whom communication occurred naturally throughout the course of the lesson were comfortable with the communication levels. Participants who did not experience ad hoc communication felt that some liaison would be beneficial.

Development of and Outcomes from a Genuine and Reciprocal Relationship with the Child

The relationship between the child and supporting adult was described as having similarities to that of a relationship between parent and child. Participants generally felt strong emotional responses to the children with whom they worked. This relationship was felt to provide the emotional climate necessary for children to learn and thrive. There were links between the ways that participants viewed this element of their work with the principles of nurture groups. The closeness of the relationship between child and supporting adult may lead to feelings of bereavement on both sides at the point of transition, which should be handled sensitively.

The concern with regards to the close ties between child and supporting adult is that it may lead to over-support and over-dependence. Further consideration of promotion of independent working and confident approached to learning may be helpful.

Adults supporting in mainstream classes are well placed to support children in moving through their zone of proximal development. Mention was made by several participants of feeling 'in tune' with the child's needs and abilities. There was little indication of training or conscious thought having been given to the specifics of how best to support children. Such specifics may include SST, scaffolding, MLEs and other pedagogic functions such as open questioning.

Judging the Level and Nature of Support

There were perceived benefits to familiarity and continuity of support. There were also assumed advantages to a variety of adults working with a child, in terms of energising the learning support process. These two facets should be weighed up when a plan is put in place for how a child should be supported. Through reflective communication between teaching and support staff, consideration should be given to the level of continuity or diversity that would support each child.

There is some confusion within the funding authority as to how support should be used within a class. Further clarity and agreement on how support should be deployed would be helpful. This should include the relative benefits of spending time supporting a child individually as well as supporting a child as part of a group or supporting other children in the class while the teacher worked with children that included the supported child. In a culture that overtly claims to believe in inclusive education, as is the case in the funding authority, care should be taken that support for children with additional support needs goes beyond enabling their physical presence in the same room as their peers. It should be borne in mind that there is the potential for exclusive support to increase alienation between the supported child and their peers and class teacher.

Fulfilment and Engagement with the Role

The participants in this study felt generally very positively about their work, often talking about how they 'loved' their work. The work of supporting adults in mainstream classes seems to be undertaken for more than financial reasons. The work is perceived as gratifying in its own right. The positive feelings stem from regular episodes of 'flow' in their work. This affords a sense of active engagement with the work whereby skills and abilities neatly match the demands of the tasks, giving rise to fulfilment. Well-being is enhanced by the feeling of their work being valued by

teachers and valuable to children. Participants felt personally challenged throughout the day and proud at the end of the day that their work has been of benefit to others.

Proximity to the child learning process offered participants feedback about their work and the achievements of children to whom they had become emotionally attached. This was gratifying for participants and at times afforded them a sense of vicarious achievement.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1   Final Reflections

As I come to the end of this study I find myself reflecting on my initial aims and hopes for this piece of work at the onset and what I would like to see happen following this research. I began this work because my observations as both a CT and EP had led me to feel that more thought should be put into the process of supporting children with additional support needs. As an EP I strive to minimise the barriers to education of children and young people. Too often it has felt to me that additional adult support has been viewed as an end in itself, that in 'giving' the child more support, their additional needs could be seen to be met. My first thoughts were to observe more closely the nature of adult support. After further deliberation I felt that a detailed analysis of the perspectives of EAs would offer a different insight that would not be afforded by observation. As Langdridge (2007) has suggested and as I spoke of in the methodology section, an intention of phenomenological psychology is to use detailed and subtle understandings of individuals to make a difference to the lived experiences of people. I have now documented my interpretations of the sense makings of EAs of their experiences in supporting children and so turn to what I feel should happen next to use these interpretations to make a difference to lived experience. To the lived experiences of EAs, but also to the lived experiences of teachers and most importantly, children with additional support needs.

Within the funding authority in which I practise as an EP, it is usual for EPs to be involved in discussions relating to authority-wide practice in the area of additional support needs. EPs have a key role in supporting the implementation of any recommendations. This could be by way of offering training and being available for on-going consultation to teachers and EAs.

Following reflection on my interpretations of the interviews with EAs, reading of the extant literature and writing of this thesis, I am of the opinion that EPs should be mindful of the possible effects of adult support as we carry out the professional practices of our role. EPs may have, to varying degrees in different authorities, both a formal and informal role in decisions relating to the amount and nature of support that children receive. If our intention is to support the learning and development of

children and young people with additional support needs we need to take care that this is reflected in our written and verbal advice, along with our conversations with other education professionals. A number of factors may bear upon the extent to which a child with additional support needs could construct new and deep understandings including; the level of contact with the CT, liaison between the adult settling learning tasks (usually CT) and adult supporting learning tasks (often EA), nature of praise and encouragement. Care should be taken by EPs that we are conscious of our potential to promote discourses that support effective learning. I believe we should overtly support effective and thoughtful adult support and make thorough discussion of all aspects of support a priority.

I want to be clear in making the distinction that I am not implying that adult support staff cannot have a positive influence on the learning of children with ASN. What this study does strongly suggest is that there is currently wastefulness in the process. There may be the potential for effective practice and a positive influence on learning. At times this potential appears to be realised. Care to adhere to some of the recommendations I put forward below may enable steps to minimise the wastefulness occurring in the processes of supporting children with ASN.

The most significant recommendation is for a vehicle for open communication between teaching and support staff. This speaks to my social constructivist assumptions about learning. Communication would facilitate both members of staff in supporting each others' understanding of how to support children with ASN. It would enable an appreciation of each others' existing pre-understandings and the development of shared discourses around pedagogy and appropriate support.

For each of the four main themes implications I put forward specific implications for the practice of providing adult support to children with additional support needs. I end with suggestions for further research.

7.2 Implications for Communication, Interface and Role Perceptions between Teacher and EA

This is the most crucial theme from the study and the extant literature. Without the planned inclusion of communication between the CT and EA wastefulness in the support of children with ASN is likely to continue. Communication has the potential to aid the learning and professional development of both teaching and support staff, enabling them to develop a shared discourse around what they see as effective support to education. A more effective interface between members of staff is likely to promote inclusion of supported children, increase appropriateness of learning tasks, enhance the motivation and confidence of support staff. I believe the following suggestions should be considered:

a) A vehicle and forum for joint planning, liaison and feedback would be beneficial. This could follow the reflective team-working model suggested by Cremin, Thomas and Vincett (2005). In any case, schools would do well to create and uphold a policy that worked well for them and met the following ends:

- o Confident communication between the teacher and support staff, including discussion around pedagogy.
- o Eliciting of views and feedback from support staff to ensure appropriate setting of work and understanding of pupil responses
- o Discussion and mutual agreement of how support staff would be deployed during the course of a lesson

This first point should be viewed as the most important recommendation for practice as it forms the basis for effective practice in all the other areas. It should not be assumed that teaching and support staff will share beliefs and understandings about pedagogy and effective support. Through effective communication, any tacit knowledge should be shared and form part of planned discussion.

b) Awareness raising in schools of the need for mutual respect and joint responsibility for interaction and communication during the course of lessons

should sit alongside consideration of how to promote agreeable relations between teaching and support staff. It should be acknowledged that the development of a perceived hierarchy that leaks into how people are viewed as individuals can occur and that measures should be taken to minimise this perception and its problematic consequences.

c) Initial training of both teachers and support staff should include an element of team working. It would be useful for some overlap to exist, whereby teachers and support staff who were being trained at the same time could collaborate.

7.3   Implications for Development of and Outcomes from a Genuine and Reciprocal Relationship with the Child

a) Recognition should be given to the warm and intuitive nurturance offered to children by some supporting adults. A sharing of such skills should be encouraged.

b) Concerns relating to over-support and over-dependence should be more explicit. This would involve clarity of such concerns during initial training of both teachers and support staff and where plans to offer additional support staff are made. At the point of agreeing the additional support needs of a child, there should be a plan put in place as to what this support should entail.

c) Support plans should be clarified with all staff involved and parents. As such, supporting adults may feel legitimacy in self-deploying away from a child with allocated support when they feel it is necessary.

7.4   Implications for Judging the Level and Nature of Support

a) Clarity should exist within education authorities as to how to appropriately deploy additional adult support. Policies should include the advantages and disadvantages of exclusive and group support. It should also be made clear that support can be offered to other children either when the class teacher is working with the

supported child, but also when independent working on the part of the child is appropriate.

b) A plan for additional support should be put in place and reviewed at agreed intervals of at least every year. The plan should include recognition of the need for sensitive support, avoidance of over-support, opportunities for the supported child to work with teaching staff and the promotion of independent working from the child.

c) Attention should be given to the role of parental hopes and expectation of support. The constructions and understandings held by parents about pedagogy and support are likely to play into their hopes for support. Review meetings and the writing of support plans could be opportunities to discuss the rationale for support strategies and the details of how children may be supported.

7.5   Implications for Fulfilment and Engagement with the EA Role

Agency and creativity should be encouraged in the work of supporting adults. This is likely to lead to greater engagement with the work and more episodes of flow. Increased enthusiasm and energy at work are likely to benefit children as the supporting adults put more into their work and bring into practice the ideas that they have for supporting education. Positive feelings at work are also likely to support staff retention. Staff retention has not been seen as problematic in the funding authority, although the extant literature suggests that it is in some education authorities.

Supportive relationships and shared discourses with other members of staff (both teaching and support staff) are likely to enhance EA self-confidence in the pursuit of job-related challenges. This adds further credence to the need for planned staff liaison. A protected forum in which EA opinions and suggestions may be sought should increase the likelihood of support staff having an active decision-making role in their work.

I hope to make clear that all the suggestions for what I perceive to promote effective support hinge on my central claim that communication is paramount to the success of supporting children with ASN in mainstream classrooms.

7.6 Recommendations for Further Research

This study employed IPA as the methodological tool and as such, was strongly idiographic in nature. There were points of congruence between the participants and it would be interesting to use the congruent themes to explore to what extent they might generalise to other support staff in the funding authority. It would not be realistic to conduct a study in such depth with a large sample. The themes generated in this study could be used to form the basis of a questionnaire for other EAs who could indicate their level of experience with the themes.

A detailed, idiographic approach was taken as I sought to consider the 'why' and 'how' of EA practice in addition to the 'what'. Observation, I felt, would give me a more thorough appreciation of just 'what' was happening during the time that children were supported by EAs, however to consider 'why' events unfolded as they did it seemed important to talk with the actors in this process. This is not to suggest that there is an ultimate truth to be found as to the real reasons for actions, but that the accounts of EAs would give an insight into how they interpreted the process of support and the sense they made of it.

The perspectives and lived experience of EAs have been explored. They form one significant part of the support process. The experience of both supported pupils and teachers working with supporting adults would further contribute to an appreciation of the support process. The perspective of teaching staff has already been given greater voice in the extant literature. Interviews that took the themes generated here as the basis for discussion with teachers and pupils would add an element of triangulation to how the understandings of EAs matched the understandings of teachers.

A series of recommendations for practice has been put forward. Where recommendations were implemented it would be important to consider the impact arising from such intervention. This may be an area in which a variety of research methods could be of interest. The aims of any evaluation of recommendations should be carefully considered. Detailed idiographic study, such as further research using IPA, could be used to explore how both EAs and teachers made sense of their experiences relating to the implementation of recommendations for practice.

Further studies may usefully explore the perspectives of children with additional support needs in relation to the adult support they receive and their views on their learning. Exploratory interviews with children both prior to and following the implementation of recommendations would offer an alternative perspective. In addition, the experience of EPs working in schools would offer a further view on the practice of support for children.

Educational Psychology Services have a role in reflecting upon their own practice. Protocol, prevalent discourses and the nature of training for teachers and support staff will vary between authorities. The support offered by EPs should reflect this. If changes in support practice occurred, reflection within authorities by EP staff groups should take place relating to formal and informal observations.

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APPENDIX

9.1 Participant Information Sheet

How do Auxiliaries view their experiences of supporting children with additional support needs in mainstream classrooms?

November 2009

➢ You are invited to take part in a research project. Please take the time to read the following information and discuss it with others if you wish.

➢ Ask me if anything is not clear or you would like to know more. Take time to decide whether you would like to take part.

What is the purpose of the project?

➢ Over recent years there have been a number of studies into the work of Auxiliaries in Scotland and Teaching Assistants in England. What might be helpful at this time would be to gain a better understanding of the perspective of Auxiliaries themselves and what the experience of supporting children is really like.

➢ It is hoped that by interviewing Auxiliaries, new light can be shed on how Auxiliaries and teachers can work well together and what things affect the work of Auxiliaries.

➢ Each Auxiliary involved in this study will be interviewed twice for a maximum of one hour each time. It is hoped that the study will be written up by the end of 2010.

Why have I been chosen?

➢ As an Auxiliary who supports children with additional support needs you have an insider's understanding of what this role entails, what you feel works well and what doesn't. You would be one of approximately 10 Auxiliaries in Moray interviewed for this study.

Do I have to take part?

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

that you want to withdraw consent to involvement in the project, any information you have given will be destroyed.

What will happen if I take part?

> ➢ I will meet with you twice so that I can hear all about your experiences as an Auxiliary supporting children with additional support needs. Each interview will last a maximum of one hour and the second interview will probably be shorter than the first.

> ➢ I will then use your views and the views of other participants to look for common themes between the experiences of different Auxiliaries.

> ➢ The conclusions made about the common elements of the views of Auxiliaries may at times seem different to those that individual participants might state themselves.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

> ➢ The interviews will be audio-recorded and later written down word-for-word. The written form of the interviews will be used for analysis and sections of it will be included in the report. Once the interviews have been transferred to a written form the recordings will be destroyed.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

> ➢ The duration of the interviews would probably be in addition to your normal working hours.
> ➢ It is not expected that the interviews would cover anything that may cause emotional upset. If this does happen, however, a period of time for discussion at the end of the interview will be offered that is not recorded or part of the project. You would also be offered the chance to talk to a different psychologist if you would prefer this.
> ➢ If you do not wish to answer a question or would like to change the subject in the interview you are free to do so.

What are the benefits to taking part?

> ➢ Payment would be offered for the interviews at a level equivalent to your normal rate of pay.
> ➢ It is hoped that gaining the perspective of Auxiliaries will be beneficial to the support of children with additional support needs.

What should I do if I wanted to make a complaint about the study?

➢ You can contact either the researcher (Mrs Rebecca Docherty) or the study supervisor (Dr Tiny Arora) if you wished to make a complaint about any aspect of the study. You could also request contact details for the University of Sheffield Registrar and Secretary.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

➢ All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be identified by name in any reports or publications.

➢ It is likely that extracts of the interview conversation will be used in the final report, although these will be mixed up with extracts from interviews with other participants and no personal details are included at all.

➢ If you tell me that something you say is not meant for anyone else to hear, it will not be used in the project.

➢ If you tell me something that suggests that a child is at risk in some way I will follow the Moray guidelines for child protection which will include telling somebody.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

➢ It is expected that the final report of this study will be written up by the end of 2010. It is possible that further reports or publications will be written at a later date, using details from the interviews.

➢ A copy of the report or any data held concerning you will be made available to you on request.

Who is organising and funding the research?

➢ The researcher is a doctoral student at the University of Sheffield. The research is being funded by Moray Council.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

➢ This project has been ethically approved via the Education Department's ethics review procedure at the University of Sheffield. The University's Research Ethics Review Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.