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*"It's like reading and responding,"* An exploration of the appearance and functioning of mentalising in the relationship between key adults and young people with Social Emotional and Mental Health needs in the primary school setting.

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**Abstract**

Using a narrative approach, this piece of research aimed to explore the research question : How does mentalising appear and function in the role of key adult, when supporting young people with Social Emotional and Mental Health needs in the primary school setting?

A Narrative Orientated Inquiry methodology (Hiles and Cremack, 2008) was used to firstly interview participants and gain their voice about different facets of mentalising. Participants were recruited from two different UK primary schools. A five-step analysis was then used to analyse the data and explore the research question.

Findings showed that the process of mentalising appeared to be an important part of the key adults’ daily work and that it was used in a pattern, to interpret a behaviour and then implement a strategy or practice based on the interpretation. It appeared to be done with conscious effort and within different time frames (mentalising about the past, present and future). Findings also demonstrated the level of commitment and complex thinking that is involved in the role of the key adult.

There were different factors shared that supported the function of mentalising for example, being a mother and being in a team with staff with similar values. Factors that hindered the function of the process, included stress and systemic factors that prevented staff from acting on their interpretations of the behaviour. Findings suggested that mentalising supported relationships, advocacy for young people with Social, emotional and mental Health needs and led to reduced behavioural incidences. The research further highlighted the interwoven nature of mentalising and empathy and how they may be two intersubjective processes that work together.

**Dedication and thanks**

Firstly, to my participants, Betty, Grace and Julia, thank you for sharing your experiences with me, you do life changing work.

Thank you to Penny Fogg, my thesis supervisor, I have valued your enthusiasm and knowledge on my research journey.

Thank you Lloyd and Rose for your love and always making me smile - you keep me going!

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\*Please note, I have presented the quotes from the participants from my research, and those from other studies, in italics.

**Chapter 1. Introduction**

My chosen research focus is to explore mentalising in relationships with key adults and young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs. This has been heavily influenced by my background as a primary school teacher, where I have seen the power that good relationships have in generating positive change for young people.

Throughout my time in education, I have noticed at times, a withdrawal from staff towards children when their behaviour has been challenging. Sometimes this has led to a breakdown in relationships. At these times, empathy and an ability to interpret the child’s behaviour has appeared to be lost. Instead of seeking to understand a child’s behaviour, conformity towards a behaviour policy seems to be expected and following this, when young people cannot comply, they have been excluded.

At times I noticed in my own practice, that when I took the time to reflect on and explore a child’s behaviour, I might find a new understanding that helped me to support them. I was also able to observe staff within school who appeared particularly skilled at working with young people whose behaviour challenged others. I considered what special skill set did they have, that helped them to support young people positively and effectively?

In my work and research as a Trainee Educational Psychologist, I have begun to consider what psychological and intersubjective processes might help relationships to be successful. I became interested in the concept of mentalising and how this might facilitate relational practice and inclusion. Mentalising is an imaginative mental activity that concerns thinking about thinking and involves attending to the mental states of the self and others (Allen and Fonagy, 2006).

My aim in exploring the process of mentalising is to generate new knowledge in the field of supporting young people with Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. This comes from a moral purpose, as I contend young people with SEMH needs are among some of the most vulnerable to permanent exclusion and missing out on educational experiences. In understanding this process better, I hope that there are implications that can be shared with educational settings in order to work with staff to support young people who are at risk of exclusion.

**Chapter 2. Literature Review**

This review will set out the rationale for the current research. I will begin by focussing on the literature around the power of relationships within the education sector and explore the role of intersubjective processes such as empathy within this. I will then explore some of the issues around researching empathy and consider the link between cognitive empathy and mentalising to narrow the focus of the research. From this I will then explore the concept of mentalising, consider the literature around mentalising and relationships and mentalising in education settings. This will provide further rationale for the purpose of exploring the role of mentalising in the support of young people with SEMH needs.

**2.1 Introduction**

The impact of good relationships between children and young people (CYP) and teachers is widely researched (Michael and Frederickson, 2013; Hill, 1997; Lloyd and O’Regan, 1999; Hattie, 2009 Cornelius-White, 2007). This body of research highlights that good relationships can facilitate positive outcomes for CYP that can be both emotional and academic (Micheal and Frederickson, 2013; Lloyd and O’Regan, 1999). This research is supported by a large-scale meta-analysis which has revealed that encouraging positive teacher–pupil relationships is central to improving learning (Hattie, 2009). Learning can be said to be a social process (Vygotsky, 1978) and therefore relationships can be said to be central to learning. For students who risk failing academically, the importance of the teacher-student relationship, “cannot be overstated” (Downey, 2008, p. 57).

Improved teacher closeness with pupils is linked to less aggression from students, as well as improved behaviour (Meehan, Hughes and Cavell, 2003). High quality relationships with pupils have also been found to have positive effects for the teacher (Wink, Larusso and Smith, 2021) including feeling more joy and less anger in the classroom (Hargenauer, Hascher and Volet, 2015).

How to foster and understand the relationship between staff in education and the pupils, who can be the most challenging to teach, is of interest to the Educational Psychology sector. These CYP are referred to with what the literature terms as having challenging behaviours or behaviour difficulties (Greene, 2018; Fitzsimmons, Trigg and Premkumar, 2021). Teachers can struggle with the emotional demands of maintaining good working relationships with challenging pupils (Fitzsimmons et al., 2021). Within this area of research, how to improve relationships with young people with these needs has begun to be explored (Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Hill; 1997; Lloyd and O’Regan, 1999).

Research such as Pomeroy’s (1999) study stated the significance of a positive student teacher relationship for excluded pupils, highlighting that the ideal student teacher relationship has listening, talking, positive care, respect and a focus on pastoral needs, not punitive approaches. This may highlight that good student teacher relationships are humanistic in nature (Fitzsimmons et al., 2021). A key facet of a humanistic relationship can be said to be empathy. Rogers (1975) states that empathy is one of the most powerful factors for creating change in the client therapist relationship. It is interesting to consider the role of intersubjective processes in relationships in educational settings and how different psychological processes impact positively on them. Intersubjective processes are shared between minds and are concerned with the psychological relationship in a dyad. Empathy can be seen as an intersubjective process. If empathy is a factor that can promote change and create good relationships in therapeutic settings, perhaps this can be extended to consider staff and pupils in education. Searches within literature indicate that empathy is an intersubjective process that can support teacher and student relationships, especially when relationships may be under strain (Wink et al., 2021; Tettegah and Anderson, 2007; Greene, 2018).

Teacher empathy and its role in supporting relationships between pupils and teachers, is a growing area of interest, which has a limited field of targeted research.

**2.2. Empathy as a concept**

Empathy is seen as a valuable social and emotional tool that is favourable in interpersonal interactions (Eisenberg, Spinrad and Morris, 2014). Hojat (2007) defines empathy as, “*the projection of feelings that turn I and you into I am you, or at least I might be you*” (Hojat, 2007 p.7).

This highlights the link around thinking about how others feel and how you might feel. Empathy can be said to be a complicated intersubjective process that is comprised of many different skills (Swan and Riley, 2015). Empathy can be considered as a multifaceted and complex phenomenon that has emotional, cognitive, behavioural and moral aspects (Mercer and Reynolds, 2002). However, it must be considered that empathy could be perceived as a social construct that has cultural differences in how it is perceived and experienced. From the many different definitions of empathy within the research, it could be argued that it is a tautological concept because there are many ways to explain and describe empathy that may mean the same thing.

The literature outlines that there are two types of empathy; cognitive and affective (Wink et al., 2021; Blair, 2005; Hogan, 1969; Reiners, Corcoran, Drake Shrayne and Volm, 2011). Cognitive empathy is seen as being able to take someone else’s viewpoint and to go into the role of another person, taking their perspective by imagining their thoughts and interpreting their experience (Davies, 1980). Affective empathy is feeling and experiencing similar emotions to the person that feels them (Parchomiuk, 2019; Meyers, Rowell, Willis and Smith, 2019). Davis (1980) states that these two types of empathy are distinct, but they are related.

**2.3. Empathy in education**

Empathy is seen as essential in the medical and legal professions (Tettegah and Anderson, 2007) and empathy can be seen as a key attribute for educators, for positive interactions with CYP (Tettegah and Anderson, 2007). Swan and Riley (2015) state that as social beings, understanding the internal states of others and their aims and goals is imperative. Education can be seen as the site of social relationships between school staff and CYP and therefore this understanding of internal states and sense making, could be seen as important in the classroom for interactions and social connection (Swan and Riley, 2015). When teachers cognitively and affectively empathise with CYP this impacts on their behaviour towards them (Meyers et al., 2019). Meyers et al. (2019) state that teacher empathy affects teacher behaviour, even positive emotions from students can still impact how a teacher behaves. Increased empathy towards pupils appears to have reciprocal effects, in that it can protect against stress and burnout in teachers (Wilkinson, Whittington, Perry and Eames, 2017).

Teachers with an increased psychological load (that is stress, depression and emotional exhaustion), are less able to manage their own feelings and are more likely to punish pupils (Buettner, Jeon, Hur, and Garcia, 2016). Some school-centred interventions for children with challenging behaviour have started to focus on staff’s attributions for the behaviour, to promote positive outcomes for pupils (Greene, 2018). Key to this has been teachers being able to appreciate and understand students’ personal histories, perspectives and emotions and this can be seen as empathy (Wink et al., 2021). Tettegah & Anderson, (2007) suggest that perspective-taking and feeling, is key to the process of empathy, this also highlights that the cognitive aspect of empathy may be key in educational settings.

The ability to perspective take and to engage in this imaginative activity around what others may be thinking, can be seen as comparable to mentalising. Mentalising is the ability to recognise the goals, emotions and intentions of both ourselves and others (Bateman and Fonagy, 2013). It is an imaginative mental activity that concerns “holding the mind in mind” (Allen and Fonagy, 2006) and involves paying attention to the mental states of the self and others (Allen and Fonagy, 2006). Mentalising helps us to know the difference between others and ourselves and to regulate emotions using implicit mental models (Fonagy, Steele, Moran, and Higgitt, 1991). Shaw, Lanceley, Hales and Rodin (2019) assert that mentalising can be an explicit process, done through deliberate talk, thoughts and motives or an implicit process, which is less conscious and more automatic. Allen (2006) states that mentalising should be written in its active verb form with an ‘ing’ as opposed to ‘tion’, as this emphasises mental activity. In this research I will use the active verb form.

Swan and Riley (2012), argue that it is hard to investigate a complex human process like empathy, since it might be challenging to define and measure. In their 2012 review on cognitive empathy and mentalising, Swan and Riley claim that cognitive empathy is similar to mentalising. This is because the inferring of what others are thinking or feeling is the main goal of cognitive empathy. Cognitive empathy concerns the mental procedures required to understand another person's ideas and feelings and to react to them (Swan and Riley, 2012). According to Swan and Riley (2012), mentalising is an operational form of empathy that offers a framework for the exploration of intersubjective concepts that might otherwise be difficult to explore. Both cognitive empathy and mentalising involve being able to contemplate the mental states of others.

Within the literature there are views that mentalising is one facet of empathy, that is cognitive empathy (Swan and Riley, 2012, 2015). There are also views that empathy is part of mentalising (Choi-kain and Gunderson 2008). These different perspectives and the research behind them may go further to suggest that the two processes are inter-linked. Going forward in this literature review I am building on the ideas of Swan and Riley (2012, 2015) who argue that cognitive empathy and mentalising are parallel concepts. I will consider the literature around both the cognitive aspect of empathy and mentalising, considering their role in intersubjective relationships and their role in the education sector.

Within the research, there has been a focus on how empathy may be promoted. Meyers et al. (2019) explored the area of teacher empathy and made three recommendations to increase teacher empathy. Firstly, they assert that understanding a student’s background may lead staff to make non-pejorative explanations for behaviour. Further to this, they suggest that understanding CYP’s personal contexts can help support this. They suggest designing policies that reflect student’s personal situations also supports empathy.

One opportunity where educational staff might get more time to learn about the backgrounds of their pupils and to problem solve around a barrier they are experiencing, might be through consultation. Consultation in Educational Psychology is a wide-ranging concept, within which there are several recognised models. Consultation is viewed as a group process to jointly develop solutions with a team of adults around a CYP, who is experiencing barriers to education (Wagner, 2000). Part of the consultation process, may involve learning more about a CYP’s background and considering how they are experiencing school. It is interesting to consider whether knowing more about a CYP’s personal history, facilitates teachers and school support staff to mentalise and cognitively empathise. Warren (2018) suggests that encouraging school staff to take the perspectives of the CYP they work with, can support the application of empathy and it must be considered whether staff that work with challenging CYP get the opportunity to do this and how they do this. Mentalising about how another person thinks and feels could support the adoption of different viewpoints, which could inform decision-making. It is interesting to consider whether this process does occur and how it impacts relationships and work with CYP.

Turner and Gulliford (2020) examined the role of the Circle of Adults (CoA) (Wilson and Newton, 2006) in behaviour change for school staff. The Circle of Adults (Wilson and Newton, 2006) is a model of consultation that centres upon a sequence of problem solving to improve a group's reflection (Wilson and Newton, 2006). Through the process, it is hoped that there is a positive impact on the relationships and motivation to support a CYP. Turner and Gulliford’s (2020) research focussed on the comparison between the Circle of Adults process for Children Looked After (CLA) and a Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting and the extent that staff felt they had completed actions decided in the meeting. The study used mixed methods and compared questionnaire data with qualitative interviews to see whether participants experienced changes in causal attributions, their perceptions of self-efficacy, and whether they perceived they had implemented actions following the process. Being part of the CoA did not have a significant impact upon causal attributions, however, staff felt they had increased self-efficacy and success in completing actions after the process and were twice as likely to complete the actions. Within the qualitative data analysis, and relevant to my research, increased understanding of the child and increased empathy were apparent themes. It is suggested that empathy was increased by trying to ‘walk in their shoes’ (the CYP). Turner and Gulliford (2020) suggest that empathy can be a key factor in supporting teachers to respond differently through being able to consider the student’s experiences. The CoA process advocates child perspective taking, which could be seen as trying to utilise the cognitive aspect of empathy and/or mentalizing. Turner and Gulliford (2020) explicitly make the link between empathy and mentalising in their research and assert that there is evidence that CoAs can support staff reflection and support mentalising, by enhancing the depth of knowledge around a CYP to facilitate this ability. This piece of research highlights how empathy might be increased and has some useful implications. Within this research, empathy and increased mentalising were identified as themes in the qualitative data. This causes me to consider what richer data may be generated from considering cognitive empathy or mentalising as the focus of a piece of research. It is also interesting to contemplate a different qualitative methodology that focuses in greater depth on understanding the role that cognitive empathy and mentalising has in relationships in educational settings, as well as how staff experience it.

A key piece of current research by Wink et al. (2021), also acknowledges the dearth of research on teacher empathy and seeks to explore the link between teacher empathy and relationships between teachers and their most challenging pupils. This piece of research uses a quantitative methodology (questionnaires and scales) to look for a link between high levels of empathy and positive relationships between teachers and students. 178 teachers from the USA were asked to complete an adapted version of the Questionnaire of Cognitive and Affective Empathy (QCAE) (Reniers et al., 2011) and the Student–teacher Relationship Scale‐Short Form, whilst considering their most challenging pupil. The study found that there was a link between high teacher empathy and their perceived closeness with their most challenging pupil. It must be considered that this is how the teachers perceive the relationship, as opposed to the CYP’s view. However, this research could suggest that teachers with high levels of empathy, as measured by the QCAE, have better relationships with their pupils. This is an important finding and one that could have implications for supporting relationships with teachers and their most challenging CYP. This is because the research outlines that cognitive empathy is an important attribute to have when working with challenging CYP and may impact relationships positively.

Greene’s (2018) model of Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) is an intervention that seeks to support relationships with CYP with challenging behaviour and the systems around them. This research is of interest to my research because it encourages those involved in the problem-solving group, to focus on a new way of seeing problems by actively facilitating staff to think about how the CYP is thinking and feeling (in essence mentalising). A key step in the process is called ‘*the empathy step*’, and this centres on hearing the CYP’s voice and their views on why things are hard for them. This can often be seen as an “eye – opening” moment for adults who work with the CYP, who are then able to gain an understanding of how things feel for the CYP and therefore increase their empathy towards them. Research on using the CPS model has shown an improvement in behaviour. Schools using the approach, reported reduced detention and suspensions rates. Advocates of the approach claim that it works by improving teacher and pupil empathy by ensuring all voices are heard and helps those involved to have a better understanding of each other (Greene, 2018). Greene (2010) states that empathising with a child’s situation is imperative and constitutes a change from what might be seen as traditional approaches that seek to modify behaviour. I assert that Greene’s (2018, 2010) research demonstrates the power of the overt effort to mentalise about another and the role of this in promoting change and facilitating relationships. It must be considered whether this specific effort to understand emotional states, is an important process in the working life of a teacher or professional who works with a CYP with challenging behaviours and I aim to explore this further.

A study by Broomhead (2013) explored how empathy could be increased in student teachers. In this research, a parent with two children with Special Educational Needs or Disability (SEND) shared their personal story with 344 trainee teachers. The teachers were then given a questionnaire to assess whether they now empathised more or less with the parent, whether the training helped them, and whether it made them more aware of issues facing SEND pupil’s parents. A Content Analysis showed that there were themes of greater understanding, increased empathy and implications for their practice. Key to the current research, is that empathy was a prominent theme identified in the content analysis and that this had been promoted by the process of sharing someone’s personal story. This can be seen to link to other research (Turner and Gulliford, 2020 and Greene, 2018) in that all have a focus on hearing the stories of others and this increases empathy. It must be considered whether teachers or educational staff having a knowledge about a child’s home life or personal story, is something that impacts on the ability to mentalise about a pupil. It will be interesting to consider if hearing personal stories is something that is identified as facilitating mentalising in my research. Broomhead’s (2013) research seeks to address a gap between theory and practice and has some useful implications for supporting parent and school relationships. However, I feel there is a need to focus on a direct relationship between a member of staff and a CYP. It is interesting to consider the impact the lack of a direct relationship between the parent and teacher in Broomhead’s (2013) research could have. Without a direct relationship, it could be easier to have empathy towards a CYP or their parents. It may be more challenging for staff in education to feel empathetic towards a child who they have been struggling to support. It could also be harder to empathise without a direct relationship and these are salient points that can be considered by exploring current, direct relationships.

Broomhead (2013), Wink et al. (2020) and Turner and Guliford’s (2020) work are all based on self-assertions of empathy and self-reported data, therefore the reliability of these studies may be questioned because social desirability may impact on the participants’ responses. Keen (2006) suggests that empathy is notoriously difficult to measure. This consideration may present a problem with many studies that focus on self-measured empathy as it can be seen as a desired moral objective (Hojat, 2007). However, this self-reported information still provides important insights into a concept that is challenging to explore (Broomhead, 2013). Further to this, as previously stated, there are many wide-ranging definitions of empathy. This may affect the participants’ responses if this concept has not been clearly defined for them. This strengthens the argument further for why exploring the role of mentalising as an intersubjective process, may provide a new way to consider concepts akin to cognitive empathy. Also, being a lesser-known concept in the educational sector may go some way to address some issues with social desirability.

When considering the focus of the above studies, many of them involve the effort to think how someone else thinks and how this can impact a relationship positively. I assert that Swan and Riley (2012; 2015) have created a new way to explore interpersonal concepts such as cognitive empathy through highlighting the relatedness of mentalising and cognitive empathy. I consider that throughout the research discussed so far, what is described as cognitive empathy mirrors, or closely aligns to, definitions of mentalising.

**2.4 What is Mentalising?**

Mentalising is a psychoanalytic concept that describes a group of mental processes (Shaw et al., 2019). Fonagy, Target, Steele and Steele (1998) suggest that the history of the concept originates from the work of Freud (1911) and the concept of ‘Bindung’, which relates to the physical working out of internal processes of ourselves and others. Alongside this, other theorists in the psychoanalytic world such as Klein (1945), described the Depressive Position which was the ability to recognise suffering and hurt in others, as well as one’s own role in this. Winnicot (1962) continued to take these ideas further and acknowledged the important role that caregivers' psychological understanding of an infant has. Winnicot (1962) suggests that not having this psychological understanding of your child could have a detrimental impact which means that a child does not have the psychological structures to become the “viable self” (Winnicot, 1962). Baron-Cohen (1995) looked at "*mindreading*". Baron-Cohen (1995) argues that people mind read constantly, and this process can be automatic and unconscious. Baron-Cohen (1995) argues that it is the way that mental states are ascribed to others and that social behaviour may be predicted and interpreted.

Over recent years, the concept of mentalising has gained attention from various professions from therapists, to neuroscientists, geneticists and child development researchers (Bateman and Fonagy, 2013). In each of these sectors, it has been found to be useful (Bateman and Fonagy, 2013). It is thought of as a process to make sense of ourselves and those around us. As humans, we tend to shape beliefs about others’ mental states and alter our own behaviour accordingly (Bateman and Fonagy, 2013). Allen and Fonagy (2006) state that mentalising can be seen as an overarching term that encompasses a range of different abilities. Rogoff, Moulton-Perkins, Warren, Nolte and Fonagy (2021) state there are distinct dimensions within mentalising. For example, it can be about the self or the other and it can have cognitive dimensions that include theory of mind and metacognition (Greenberg, Kolasi, Hegsted, Berkowitz and Juris, 2017). As well as this, there are also affective dimensions that are concerned with attachment relationships and emotional regulation. The cognitive aspect is concerned with our own and other’s ways of thinking (Greenberg, et al., 2017). The affective aspect is concerned with intersubjective relationships and includes the concept of reflective functioning, where caregivers mirror in response to a child’s emotional state; this can form part of a co-regulatory process (Greenberg et al., 2017). However, Greenberg et al. (2017) state that due to the various characteristics of this psychological process, it is difficult to define the construct's boundaries.

Mentalising is seen as important for many reasons, for example, without some grasp of the mental states of others, communication would be limited (Fonagy et al., 1998). Alongside this, it can support the appearance reality distinction (Fonagy et al., 1998). This may have a protective function, for example, if someone behaves in a negative way towards another, it could be perceived by the wronged person that they are worthless, or it could be interpreted as reflecting the emotional state of the other person at that point. Of prominence in research around mentalising, has been exploring mentalising in the parent and child dyad. The process of mentalising here can be seen to be protective of the attachment in the parent and child dyad, in that through mentalising the parent can meet a child’s needs (Fonagy et al., 1998). This is because if a parent or carer is perceptive about the internal mental states of their child and the relationship to their emotions, they can meet their needs by mediating the environment in some way (Fonagy et al., 1998). Further to this, Slade, Grienenberger, Bernbach, Levy and Locker (2005) found a relationship between the parents’ ability to mentalise and the security of their attachment with their child. Considering that the ability to mentalise can impact positively on the parent and child relationship, I feel exploring the capacity to mentalise in a relationship between a child and an adult whose role it is to be an additional attachment figure in school, would be interesting and worthwhile. This area is also yet to be researched.

Within the current educational context in the UK, Teaching Assistants are employed for a range of duties. These may include, supporting small group learning, supporting CYP’s pastoral needs, working in a one-to-one capacity to support a child with SEND with learning, or as part of a ‘key adult’ approach. This may be for a shorter period of time, for example as part of an intervention, or as a longer-term package of support linked to provision outlined in an Education, Health and Care Plan. An Education Health and Care Plan is a legal document that outlines the targets and provision for a CYP with SEND, including those young people with SEMH needs.

Bomber (2008) writes about the ‘key adult’ within school and how they support a CYP. The role of the key adult is aimed to support children who may have faced trauma or have attachment related needs. As part of this role, Bomber (2008) shares that staff should be an additional attachment figure in school who the CYP can have a special relationship with. This relationship will provide an opportunity for ‘second chance learning’ to challenge the child’s internal working model, that may be negative about the self and the world based on their trauma or life experience (Bomber, 2008). Geddes (2006) suggests that attachment patterns may be created in infancy, however they can be moderated by later important relationships which may go some way to correct earlier adverse relational experiences. Through a range of approaches, the aim of a key adult is to build a relationship with a CYP where they can support them and help them to develop and grow (Bomber, 2008). One of the ways key adults can do this is through attunement to the CYP and building relative dependency (becoming a person who meets their needs and that they can depend on). Bomber’s (2008) work discusses the different ways in which this can be achieved. One of the ways is attending to the child, which encompasses wondering aloud about their mental states, feelings and motivations. This can be said to relate to the process of mentalising, although this is not directly referenced. It will be interesting to consider whether this process is employed by the participants in my research, and to directly explore mentalising in the role of the key adult. Bomber’s (2008) book ‘Inside I’m Hurting’ is a practical guide to support young people with attachment related needs that I believe is important in bridging the gap between theory and practice. I hope my research may contribute to this field of knowledge that aims to directly support the work of adults in school.

Mentalising is also seen as important because it supports deep connections with others that could be said to make life more meaningful (Fonagy et al., 1998). It can also be argued that the absence of the ability to mentalise and make these connections with others, can be a key aspect of certain psychological disorders (Fonagy, 1989; 1991; Fonagy and Higgitt, 1989). A large body of research has explored mentalisation in the clinical context (Fonagy, 1989, 1991; Fonagy and Higgitt, 1989, Baron-Cohen, 1995; Snowden, Gibbons and Blackshaw, 2003; Brunet-Gouet and Decety, 2006). This research has particularly focussed on neurological conditions, such as Schizophrenia (Brunet, Sarfati, Hardy-Bayle, Decety, 2003; Brunet-Gouet and Decety, 2006), Autistic Spectrum Condition (Baron-Cohen, 1995), Frontotemporal Dementia (Snowden, et al., 2003) and borderline personality disorder (Fonagy, 1989; 1991). Whilst the individuals with these conditions are all different, it can be said that these conditions all exhibit a shortfall in the function of mentalising. This may contribute to challenges within interpersonal relationships (Snowden, Gibbons and Blackshaw, 2003; Brunet et al., 2003; Brunet-Gouet and Decety, 2006; Baron-Cohen, 1995). I assert that much of the research in mentalising is deficit based and linked to pathology. Because of this, I feel it would be interesting to explore the positive impact that the process of mentalising could have within a non-clinical setting. Within my research, the focus is not to pathologise, but to gain an understanding of the role mentalising has within relationships in educational settings in the UK, whether this ability is apparent, how it functions and whether it is perceived to have an impact. This is to begin to have an understanding of how mentalising may support relationships in schools.

There is some research that shows how mentalising and its implications, have been used positively. This has been done in the clinical sector where its role has been as part of therapy to support thinking within individuals and to support relationships. Mentalising Based Therapy is being used and researched within different groups and relationships, such as with people with personality disorder (Bateman and Fonagy, 2011), within family therapy (Asen and Fonagy, 2011). Mentalising and its impact is also being explored in schools on a systemic level (Tremlow et al., 2005a and 2005b).

Tremlow et al. (2005a and 2005b) considered the role of mentalisation in schools, specifically within the social systems of secondary schools in the USA. The schools chosen for the research were those where violent incidents were high. Tremlow et al. (2005b) suggest that social systems that are compatible with violence and coercion have lost the ability to mentalise (2005b). Tremlow et al. (2005b) assert that social systems require support to be reflective and to think about the mental states of themselves and others. The Peaceful Schools Experiment is an intervention that requires a change in the philosophy of a school to consider the importance of interpersonal dimensions and the mental states of others. The programme works by giving those in the system time to reflect on the root of behaviour in themselves and others, whilst shifting language used to challenge and problem solve around coercive power dynamics. The intervention also incorporates physical education around self-defence and the implementation of peer and adult mentoring to provide additional support (Tremlow et al., 2005a). The impact of the programme was that violence was decreased within school and academic attainment improved (Tremlow et al., 2005a). Interestingly, the intervention focussed solely on interpersonal dynamics and not upon the academic side of school, however the experiment had a positive impact on attainment. These findings highlight the importance of understanding the power that mentalising and reflection can have. Tremlow et al.’s (2005a) research focussed on the power of systemic change on a whole school level. My research seeks to gain a deeper understanding of how mentalising may manifest within a dyad without intervention. It will be interesting to consider how the system may impact on the ability to mentalise and this is something that will be considered as part of my research.

More recent research has begun to consider how mentalising may be supported in children and young people (Lombardi, Valle, Bianco, Castelli, Massaro and Marchetti, 2022). The “Thoughts in Mind Child” project has been developed due to the link that can be seen between mentalising and good relationships (Lombardi et al., 2022). This is because the ability to consider and be reflective of the mind of the self and other, are related. Furthermore, this knowledge may help to explain behaviour in others and regulate behaviour within a person (Lombardi et al., 2022). Lombardi et al.’s (2022) research sought to bring awareness of mentalisation and its impact to the educational sector in Italy. Their research considered whether they could improve children’s knowledge around metacognition and their own thoughts and knowledge of emotional regulation strategies. They did this by sharing stories around the concept of ‘thinking about thinking’ and using language around mental states in class discussions. It was found that this did increase children’s metacognitive knowledge and knowledge of emotional regulation strategies against a control group (as measured by a series of tasks designed to assess metacognition and emotional regulation). However, it must be considered that this intervention appeared to measure the knowledge gained in an intervention as opposed to exploring mentalising and how it is applied in the educational context.

The field of mentalising is dominated by the work of Peter Fonagy, and he has contributed a great deal of knowledge to the understanding of this concept. However, it is important to consider that this is a psychoanalytic concept that is said to work on an unconscious level, however much of the previous research treats this concept as if it is something that is definite, quantifiable and measurable, as is consistent with a realist or positivist ontology. An example of this is in the Reflective Functioning Manual, Version 5 (Fonagy et al., 1998), whereby a manual has been created to rate and measure examples of mentalising in transcripts, giving a person a numerical score that rates their mentalising ability from low to high.

It could be argued that it is hard to define or measure a mental process.  Therefore, it could be suggested that elements of Fonagy’s work are inconsistent in terms of his ontology and epistemological approaches. For example, outlining the unconscious nature of mentalising (defined as a psychoanalytic concept) and then seeking to measure and quantify this in a scientific way. Taubman (2012) makes a request for: “*teacher, analyst, patient, and student to recognize their own psychic complicity in what they claim to know and what they ignore*.” (Taubman 2012, p. 28). This quote from Taubman may be relevant to the research in the field of mentalising in that it needs to be considered what can be known, and also what is ignored about the concept of mentalising. I feel it is important to continue to engage in criticality to reflect on and consider our own understanding of the world and the position we take as a researcher. Burman (2016) argues that the form developmental psychology has taken, has been driven by the need to create technologies of measurement, which is consistent with the work of Fonagy et al. (1998). Furthermore, ideas around measuring a research subject, has linked to developmental psychology’s claim to be scientific by linking to biological and social ideas that are “*replayed and legitimised*” (p.5, Burman, 2016) in the research. However, selecting a child or parent as “*objects of developmental psychological enquiry*” (p.5, Burman, 2016) negates the wider contexts that the child is part of.

Within this research, I would like to explore mentalising in a way that acknowledges that it is a psychoanalytic concept. I am seeking to understand this concept better in the context of a primary school, whilst recognising that mentalising may be hard to directly measure or observe.

**2.5. Does the ability to mentalise change within a relationship?**

Shaw et al. (2019) state that mentalising is a relational concept that occurs between two people. They suggest that because of its relational nature, the capacity may fluctuate due to the relationship between two people, their affective states and the context that they are in. Further to this, Bateman and Fonagy (2013) argue that short-term breaks in mentalising are illustrative of typical functioning, being able to mentalise at stressful times, and a quick recovery from a break in mentalising, all indicate ‘robust mentalisation’. Of significance for my research is exploring how the ability to mentalise may fluctuate and what effects it (context, affective state or relationship). Assuming that mentalising might be supportive of relationships, it is important to have a greater understanding of how to increase the capacity to mentalise and repair the ability when it is impaired in schools.

If we consider that cognitive empathy and mentalising are concepts that are similar and related, it is interesting to consider the research about when empathy is reduced. Some researchers have sought to consider why there may be less empathetic feelings from teachers at specific times.

Hanko (2002) questions what opportunities teachers have to provide empathy and a nurturing environment, when teacher workload is an issue and there are complaints of teachers doing too much “*social work*” (Hanko, 2002). This may suggest that workload and time impacts on teachers’ ability to be empathetic. Greene (2018) states that teachers in the USA report that zero tolerance discipline policies and inflexible testing procedures have caused the job of teaching to ‘lose its humanity’. This could highlight that the systems in which a relationship exists, may impact upon empathy and mentalising. It would be interesting to consider these interpersonal concepts in the current educational climate in the UK. Key to my research, is being able to explore mentalising with those staff that have capacity to work pastorally, and whether these same pressures apply to them and what might impact on their ability to mentalise.

Kidger, Gunnel, Biddle, Campbell and Donovan (2010) shared that teachers working with CYP with challenging behaviours reported being emotionally drained and at times could be unwilling to work with students, as this meant a failure to look after their own needs. This may suggest that there are active choices involved with empathising and mentalising with a CYP to protect oneself at times of stress, and it will be interesting to explore this in my research. Fitzsimmons et al. (2021) suggests that maintaining care and empathy can be extremely challenging when confronted with distressing and challenging behaviours, and this provides further rationale for why it is important to have a greater understanding of relational processes such as mentalising in the educational sector.

**2.6. This Research**

After completing a review of the relevant literature, I conclude that there are gaps in the research that seek to explore intersubjective processes such as cognitive empathy and mentalisation in the education sector. The concept of empathy has been explored through quantitative data and scales (Wink et al., 2020), which although providing a valuable insight into how teacher empathy impacts relationships, does not explore how this happens, or gain the educational staffs’ lived experience.

Furthermore, the research around the intersubjective process of empathy as a body of research can be questioned due to the tautological nature of empathy of a concept with no fixed definition. This may suggest that each piece of research that explored empathy in the education sector, may have explored different meanings for different people.

In other research, teacher empathy and mentalisation has been discovered as a by-product of other pieces of research and has generated some useful information that show how EP practice might increase empathy and mentalising (Turner and Gulliford, 2020). Other studies may have explored intersubjective concepts more directly, however they have used stories from people that are not currently in a relationship with the participant to explore this (Turner and Guliford, 2020; Tettegah and Anderson, 2007; Broomhead, 2013; Ashworth, Tapsak and Li., 2012).

Tremlow et al. (2005a and 2005b) and Lombardi et al’s. (2022), research demonstrates that mentalising has begun to be researched in the educational sector as a tool for intervention to support relationships and emotional regulation. Their research findings have shown its efficacy in this setting. However, this research does not consider the organic functioning of mentalising in a dyadic relationship and whether this is supportive of young people with behaviour that challenges others.

I assert this highlights the need to directly explore intersubjective concepts such as mentalisation, through gathering qualitative data from educational staff. My research will focus on relationships where educational staff are directly involved with a pupil, differing from other research where there is no direct relationship between the participant and the CYP. The aim of this would be to explore how they experience mentalisation in their role as a CYP’s key adult.

My research will specifically use Fonagy et al.’s (1998) definition of mentalising to gain a deeper understanding of this capacity within relationships with pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. By using Fonagy et al.’s (1998) definition of mentalising I hope to avoid any ambiguity about what is being explored, *“Mentalising refers to the capacity to perceive and understand oneself and others in terms of mental states (feelings, beliefs, intentions and desires)”’* (Fonagy et al., 1998, p.6).

The definition of *SEMH need*s has been chosen in order to continue to further shift views of a problem beingwithin a child, that terms such as ‘behavioural problems’ may perpetuate. Gus, Rose, Gilbert and Kilby (2017) state that using this term instead of Behavioural, Emotional, Social difficulties contributes to schools taking a different perspective to view behaviour. The SEND code of practice (2014) defines SEMH needs as:

‘*Children and young people may experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in many ways. These may include becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. These behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained. Other children and young people may have disorders such as attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder or attachment disorder*.’ (SEND code of Practice, 2014 p.98).

As mentalising can be considered an ‘umbrella construct’ (Lombardi et al., 2022) that encompasses many different processes, my research will aim to explore one facet of mentalising. That is the aspect of mentalising about the other (that is the key adult considering the thoughts, feelings and motivations of the CYP that they work with).

From gaining an understanding of how mentalising appears and functions in these relationships and what factors influence the experience of this, I hope that I can provide implications for supporting the relationships with staff who work with CYP with SEMH needs. My research may also provide implications that influence staff supervision practices in educational settings, for example, allowing staff to have time to mentalise and reflect about their time with a CYP, may support the relationship. Furthermore, gaining an insight into staff experiences of mentalising and the skills involved with this, may also have implications for EP practice when an EP may be asked to support a young person where a relationship is under strain.

**Chapter 3. Methodology**

**3.1. Overview**

This chapter will outline how my research question and aims, guided me towards my chosen methodology.

My research question is;

**How does mentalising appear and function in relationships between ‘key adults’ and children with SEMH needs?**

**3.2. Ontological and Epistemological position**

The overarching aim of my research has been exploratory and interpretive - to consider how mentalising appeared and functioned in relationships with key adults and young people with SEMH needs. I listened to the stories and experiences of staff who worked with CYP and how they experienced mentalising in their daily work, therefore this has been a piece of qualitative research. These aims around wanting to complete qualitative research and listen to and interpret the stories of the participants, were in alignment with my ontological and epistemological position as a researcher.

Ontology concerns beliefs regarding the nature of reality (Lincoln and Guba, 1986). There is a continuum of philosophical beliefs from Realism to Social Constructivism (Willig, 2008). According to Realism, there is one objective truth that can be observed and measured. Conversely, social constructivism holds that there are numerous subjective truths that are all valid and formed by people's perceptions, social constructions and interactions with the environment (Willig, 2008).

My stance as a researcher is as a Critical Realist. This ontological position believes that there is value in recognising the subjective experiences of social actors, whilst taking account of independent structures that may constrain or facilitate those social actors within that context (Sayer, 2010). The reality separate of people’s conception does exist, but it is not accessible to direct observation (Bhaskar, 1998). Therefore, this stance allowed me to explore the insights and experiences of key adults around the concept of mentalising whilst also acknowledging that there are multidimensional structures and systems that may impact on the person, that are separate to their experience and not directly accessible to be explored (Bhaskar, 1998; McEvoy and Richards, 2002). Through my exploration of key adults’ insights around mentalising, I sought to promote an understanding of a phenomenon that is complex, as opposed to measuring it or ‘*translating*’ it (Sobh and Perry, 2006).

According to Crotty (1998), epistemology describes how we might know reality, how we might seek knowledge, and the types of knowledge that are feasible. As my ontological position is as a critical realist, my epistemological approach was to observe and interpret meaning in an attempt to explain experiences of my participants and, “*elements of reality that must exist prior to the events and experiences that occurred*” (Wynn and Williams 2012, p. 793).

**3.3. Quality in research**

For qualitative research to have impact and be thought of as credible, it must be considered how it can be trustworthy, rigorous and of good quality. Throughout this chapter, I have referenced Tracy’s (2010) Eight Big Tent Criteria for Quality in Qualitative Research, in regard to different decisions I made.

Ideas around quality in qualitative research can contrast with those within quantitative research which focus upon objectivity, reliability, validity and generalisability (Winter, 2000). The idea that qualitative research must also meet these same standards is consistent with methodological conservatism (Denzin and Giardina, 2008) and the view that quantitative research is preferable to those in positions of power within government, who may not be prepared to evaluate qualitative research (Lather, 2004). Tracy (2010) argues that creating and using a framework for quality in qualitative research can aid in communicating value in research to different audiences.

Tracy (2010) suggests that qualitative research can and should make a significant contribution in different ways. This could be by improving practice, generating further research and extending knowledge. Qualitative research can offer novel understandings that may offer insights into aspects of social life that can be transferred to different contexts (Tracy, 2010). I hoped that the stories and experiences from key adults would offer insights into how mentalising might support educational practices which could be shared to support CYP in educational settings.

Through my research I have sought to shed light on a *contemporary problem (*Tracy, 2010) that is the way schools and systems support (or do not support) CYP with SEMH needs. As outlined within the literature review, I assert that exploring the impact and function of mentalising in the education sector, between key adults and CYP with SEMH needs, is a *worthy topic* (Tracy, 2010). That is because it has a moral purpose and an aim to support those who, I feel, are most vulnerable in education. Graham, White, Edwards, Potter and Street’s (2019) research highlighted that out of the four areas of SEND need, CYP with SEMH needs are the most likely group to be excluded. This demonstrates a clear reason to focus on the support of these CYP in education. It has been my intention to focus on the power of relationships, and that which was supporting successful relationships between key adults and CYP with SEMH needs. I hoped focussing on what supported the key adult and CYP relationships, would be a positive way to conduct research, aligning with my personal values.

Through sharing the participants’ stories and experiences, I hoped that this research would have *Resonance*. Tracy (2010) shares that resonance in research considers how the written form of the research will resonate with the reader. For example, will it ‘effect’ the reader and will it help them to have empathy for the participant and their experience (Tracy, 2010).

Resonance may also encompass generalisability. Tracy (2010) asserts that qualitative data can still be generalisable and useful to other populations or settings and that it is more useful to consider the term *transferability*, in qualitative research. Transferability can be reached when a reader feels like a story told in the research is similar to a previous situation they have experienced. Instinctively, they will transfer the story to their own experience.

**3.4. Choosing a methodology**

This section of the chapter will focus on the different ways mentalising has been explored and my consideration about the appropriateness of these methods for my aims in my research, and my ontological and epistemological stance.

Shaw et al. (2019) consider the ways that mentalising has been measured and explored in the clinical sector. The Reflective Functioning Questionnaire is a self-reported scale-based questionnaire that seeks to measure Reflective Functioning (the psychological process that underlies mentalising) in clinical populations. Self-report questionnaires can be seen as easy to administer and efficient. However, scoring may be impacted by social desirability and scales do not fit with Tracy’s (2010) ideas of ‘rich data’ that can be gathered through listening to stories. Holloway and Jefferson (2008) argue that scale-based measures, can also fail to connect with real life contexts. I decided that a scale based methodological approach did not fit with the exploratory and ‘real life’ nature of my research.

Therefore, I required a way to gather the data that would allow participants to share their experiences more richly than a scale. Considering interview styles used in qualitative data, Holloway and Jefferson (2008) go on to suggest that certain types of interview, can sometimes mean that the interviewer still sets the agenda through their questions and the order that they give them. They suggested that this is not dissimilar to scale based measures and does not allow the interviewee the space to convey their own meanings. Therefore, to reflect a potentially complex intersubjective process such as mentalisation, the methodology needed to allow me to make space to gather rich data.

I decided to use a semi-structured interview to provide participants with the chance to discuss what they felt was relevant and important. I had some ideas for questions but tried to remain flexible and open in the interview process, I wanted to allow detailed participant-led stories to emerge (Willig, 2008). This was crucial, as the participants in my research had relationships with CYP and the daily-lived experience of working with them, and I wanted to connect with this.

Mentalising has been researched using semi-structured interviews and transcript analysis. Fonagy et al. (1998) sought to measure mentalising in the parent and child dyad by analysing transcript data from semi-structured interviews. Through the transcript, the aim was to assess someone’s capacity to mentalise. The Reflective Functioning Manual (Fonagy et al., 1998) provides detailed examples on how reflective functioning may appear in a transcript, as well as guidance on how to allocate an overall score for Reflective Functioning (Shaw et al., 2019). When I considered this approach to collecting and analysing data, I felt that this system of measurement would not be appropriate for my research. This was because using a scoring system to measure mentalising could be another way of demonstrating ‘*methodological conservatism’* (Denzin and Giardina, 2008).Trying to assign a number to someone so that they can be measured, is consistent with a positivist epistemology. I contend that this could have reduced a complex intersubjective experience to a number and that I needed to use a different method of data analysis. I thought it may be unethical to share with a participant that they had a low or high ability to mentalise, as this could impact on their self-esteem in the workplace. It could also be said that this approach is not transparent and could make participants feel uncomfortable, for example, if they were given a low score and they were not sure how this had been assessed.

Based on considering different ways mentalising has been researched previously, I decided that my research needed to take a new methodological approach to exploring mentalising. I decided to conduct a Narrative Orientated Inquiry (NOI) (Hiles and Cermack, 2008) which is an approach not previously used to explore mentalising.

It was my aim that the NOI method would allow me to consider how my participants made sense of the experience of mentalising, and how they positioned themselves in their role. I aimed to draw out themes that would provide useful insights into whether mentalising is important in primary schools and if this process was something that was apparent in the daily work of key adults. As this is a multi-step analysis (Hiles, Cermack and Chrz, 2008), I hoped it would allow me to explore the participants’ narratives in depth.

**3.5. The Narrative approach**

Choosing a narrative approach aligned with the aims of my research, that is to explore and interpret key adults’ experiences around mentalising and what factors may impact on the appearance and function of this. I hoped that NOI would provide me with a methodological approach to data collection and analysis that would prioritise stories and insights and that could be flexible, both in the data collection and analysis phase.

The term narrative, has many different meanings across disciplines but the term is often interchangeable with ‘story’ (Reissman, 2008; Reissman and Quinney, 2005). Bruner (1986; 1990) states that storytelling is a natural impulse across the globe. According to Reissman (2008), when we tell stories to one another, the speaker arranges and connects the events in a way that will be important for subsequent action and the meaning they want to transmit to the listener. Kim (2015) suggests that narrative researchers attempt to find meaning through the analysis of plot lines, themes and social and cultural allusions that can support researchers and their audience to have a greater understanding of human existence (Polkinghorne, 1988). In asking participants to share their stories, I wanted to gain a greater understanding of their experiences.

Reissman (2008) suggests that in narrative analysis, the researcher needs to look below the surface level of the text. Within my research, I required a methodology that would allow me to explore and interpret not only what is said, but how it is said. Josselson (2004) states that, *“meanings cannot be grasped directly and all meanings are essentially indeterminate in any unshakeable way*.” (p. 3). I considered this quote to comment upon the nature of interpretive research not leading to certainties in the findings. This is a feature of narrative research and I believe to be one of the strengths of this approach.

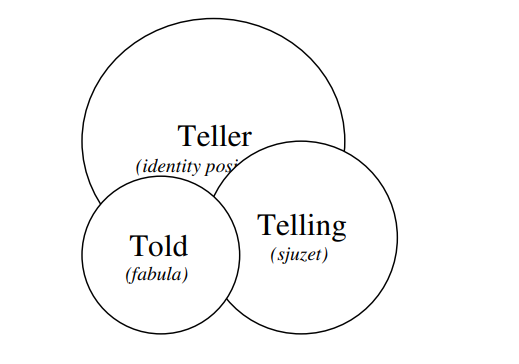
Ricoeur (1970; 1981) argues that the hermeneutic interpretive position can be thought of in two different ways. The first position is aimed at restoring the meaning from the text, which centres on an inclination to listen and to try to be true to the message in its given form. This type of hermeneutics centres around faith. Conversely, hermeneutics which are characterised by an approach of demystification and scepticism, whereby the meaning is thought to be disguised within the text, centres on suspicion. As transparency has been important to me in my research, I hoped to explore underlying meanings, not as an act of Hermeneutic Suspicion (Ricoeur, 1970; 1981) but as a way to consider underlying meanings that may go unnoticed (Kim, 2015). I considered NOI to be a methodology that would allow for this.

Narrative Orientated Inquiry (NOI) is more than a way to analyse qualitative data, it draws upon paradigmatic assumptions that Narrative is paramount in most human activities (Hiles and Cermack, 2008). Hiles and Cermack (2008) suggest that narratives influence discourse, and that they are central to cultural processes that organise experiences and actions.

Hiles et al. (2009) state that NOI is a “methodological approach” and to use NOI as a process, you must first begin with a research question. NOI centres upon an inquiry that does not make predictions, or test hypotheses, but is an inquiry that is exploratory, and driven by data (Hiles et al., 2009). This has been consistent with the aims of my research. Hiles and Cermack (2008) suggest that there needs to be an approach to interview that allows for a reciprocal exchange of views (Kvale, 1996) and that the interview does not need to be an interrogation (Hiles and Cermack, 2008) and that it can also allow for narratives to be co-produced (Silverman, 2001).

The process of NOI allowed me to look at the relationship between the teller, the telling and the told (Hiles et al., 2009) (see figure 1, p. 31). Hiles et al. (2009) draw on the work of other techniques in narrative analysis by Lieblich, Tuval- Mashiach and Zilber (1998) and Emerson and Frosh (2004) that allow the researcher to explore the content and form of each narrative, the themes that may emerge across the interviews and how the teller positions themselves.

Hiles and Cermack (2008) suggest that stories are told in a certain way. The *Fabula* are the fixed events in the story and the *Sjuzet* is the way the story is told or retold. This method of analysis means that a story is not just reduced to its themes (Fabula) but that there is also a focus on the subtleties of the way it is told, and the way the person positions themselves in the story (the Sjuzet and the identity positioning). Hiles et al. (2009) have created a six-stage dynamic model (see figure 2, p. 37) that allows the researcher to select what aspects of the framework they would like to use and explore. I decided this approach would support my research.



*Figure 1.* The relationship between the teller, the telling and the told (Hiles et al., 2009, p.9).

**3.6 Design and procedure**

***3.6.1 Participants***

Wells (2011) shares that, in narrative research, the number of participants is influenced by the main aim of the research, the methodology used and the amount of detail in the stories produced. It was my intention to have a pilot study and three participants that I would interview three times each. However, after the initial interview with my pilot study participant, I decided to recruit her for further interviews due to her passion and enthusiasm. In working with this number of participants, I was able to conduct what I thought was a detailed, thorough analysis in the time constraints. Within Tracy’s (2010) framework for quality in qualitative research, it considers has enough time been spent gathering significant and interesting data? My approach to gathering the data allowed me to revisit the participants three times across a half term (three interviews for two participants and two interviews for one participant, see Table 1). I explored the relationship over a period of time, and this allowed me to explore whether mentalising fluctuated, changed or developed within the relationship and what factors helped or hindered mentalisation. I also re-listened to each interview recording and took notes to enable me to structure my next interview and follow different lines of inquiry.

Tracy (2010), also questions if the context and sample align with the aims of the study. Participants in my research were adults that work in a mainstream primary school. This is a ‘real life’ context where staff are supporting CYP each day. They were a CYP’s ‘key adult’, which Bomber (2008) defines as someone who can be an additional attachment figure for a CYP in school, who has the capacity to be there for the CYP physically and emotionally and to co -regulate with them.

To explore an established relationship, the key adults I interviewed had worked with the CYP for over a half term. The CYP they supported were also on the SEND register for SEMH needs.

***3.6.2. Recruitment***

The participants were recruited through a purposive sampling method because I wanted participants to meet a certain criterion. I made links through Special Educational Needs and Disability coordinators (SENDcos) that I worked with. I used these SENDcos to aim to select certain ‘key adults’ within their setting that they reported were highly skilled with CYP. Thinking in a solution-oriented way, I wanted to be able to focus on what was helping these relationships to be successful, what was leading to positive change for the CYP and if mentalising was part of this.

I recruited participants from different schools. This was to explore whether there were differences in the school systems' impact upon the capacity to mentalise. (Betty and Julia were from school A and Grace was from school B)

The participants were volunteers who gave their full consent, after being given a full outline of the research aims. This information was shared using participant information sheets and a face-to-face talk. (For copies of participant and parent information and sample consent forms, see appendices 16 - 20)

***3.6.3. Ethics***

As part of applying for ethical approval, I carefully considered the potential ethical issues and aimed to take the utmost care to protect participants.

As part of seeking participants' consent, I hoped to be transparent with them and discussed, in detail, the risks and benefits of my research. I also considered the wider impact of my research and how it could potentially affect those around the participant. I made the decision that I needed the permission of the parent of the child who the key adult would be discussing. I felt this was important because a parent might raise a complaint or become upset that their child had been talked about in my research without their agreement, even though the CYP would be being discussed anonymously and would not be personally involved. I decided that as this has been a piece of research exploring relationships, I needed to prioritise preserving them. I made it clear, in my participant information, that I would use discretion in the publication of my research and would be sensitive to the risks of harming relationships. Therefore, this impacted what aspects of the transcripts and analysis procedure I shared in the appendix.

(For full ethical application see appendix 14 and for letter granting ethical approval see appendix 15).

***3.6.4. Interview Questions***

My questions aimed to explore the participants’ experiences and the facet of mentalising that concerns thinking about the thoughts and motivations of another. Therefore, I asked participants questions about mentalising with the child that they work with.

The interview questions developed were led by my research question, the literature and the definition of mentalising. As my research question is about how mentalising appears and functions, I wanted my interview questions to reflect this. Therefore, my questions asked for examples of times when participants felt they had mentalised, how they did this, what factors helped and supported them within themselves and within schools, also what factors possibly hindered them within themselves and within school. My line of questioning then explored what they did after mentalising and what impact they perceived this to have. Alongside this, I wanted to have the flexibility to let participants respond to the questions and take the interview in the direction they wanted (for interview schedule and prompts, see appendix 21). I also made notes during the interview process to add an extra level of detail to my analysis to help with the interpretation of the transcripts (for a sample of this for Grace, see appendix 23).

When considering my interview questions and having informal conversations about them, I reflected that mentalising is quite a specialised concept that may not be totally accessible to those not working within psychology as a profession. This led me to create a handout to share examples of what mentalising might look like, that the participants read before the interview (see appendix 22). I created some examples and also used some from the Reflective Functioning Manual (Fonagy et al., 1998). I considered that this might lead the participants to certain types of responses, however, I felt that scaffolding the concept helped the participants to be comfortable and led to a clearer understanding and greater confidence around this concept. I considered it was important to balance participants' feelings of confidence to discuss a concept, and to allow them to be able to shape the discussion and share what they thought was important.

***3.6.5. Reflexivity***

Tracy (2010) discusses *sincerity* in qualitative research. This aspect of the framework considers the ability to be reflexive about biases as a researcher, and being transparent about the methodology and its challenges (Tracy, 2010). I considered what biases I may bring to the research. Heidegger (1927) asserted that the preconceptions of the researcher can never be fully bracketed, he encouraged researchers to be reflexive and to aim to be aware of what they bring to the research process through their own experiences. As a previous primary school teacher, I had experiences that may have led me to prioritise the value of research in a primary setting. As a psychologist, I also value psychodynamic psychology and how relationships impact on development and I needed to consider how this influenced my interpretation and analysis.

Further to this, I also considered what I brought to the research. I sought to recognise that my presence as a researcher would impact the interviews and data, through the resources I brought and the relationship that I had with the participants during the interviews. Clandinin & Connelly, (2000) suggest, “*The way the interviewer acts, questions and responds in an interview shapes the relationship and therefore the ways participants respond and give accounts of their experience*.” (p.110). Through meeting the participants on a number of occasions, I hoped I built a rapport with them where they felt comfortable with me and with the process

Furthermore, according to Holloway and Jefferson (2008), it is important to take into account the unconscious dynamics between the participant and the researcher.

Holloway and Jefferson (2008) suggest that people's own defences may impact on how they respond to anxiety provoking, or stressful topics of conversation. Whilst the topic being explored was not aimed to be stressful, it must be considered that there may have been other unconscious defences that occurred in the interview, as participants may have wished to defend their role and their decisions as a key adult. This also links to the idea of narrative intelligence, which suggests that people tie things together in a way that makes sense for them (Hiles et al., 2010). Using our narrative intelligence, we choose the aspects of our lives that are important to us and through the stories we tell, we take part in the construction of our identities (Hiles and Cermack, 2007).

Holloway and Jefferson (2008) state it cannot be assumed that the words and language used mean the same to both the interviewer and the interviewee. Because of this, my research has been interpretative and exploratory, and I am aware that whilst I tried to understand the participants' language, my interpretation of this would affect the my findings. In research this is termed *Hermeneutics,* this centres upon making meaning and interpretation in an effort to try and understand someone’s experiences. The researcher’s effort to make sense of the participants’ process of sense making, is termed the ‘double hermeneutic’. Therefore, this is considered a double hermeneutic piece of research.

During the interviews, in the aim of being transparent with participants, I shared some of my own reflections and interpretations, inviting the participant to agree or disagree with me. Whilst I appreciate there could have been a perceived power imbalance in the interview, this was an attempt to share some of what I would report in my analysis. Sharing these interpretations was also aimed to ‘take it back’ to participants, to check that I understood them in the way they wanted to be understood (for transcript excerpts for each participant, see appendix 1,2 and 3). I also kept a reflective diary as part of the process and I have written this up as a separate appendix (appendix 24).

***3.6.6. Pilot study and implications***

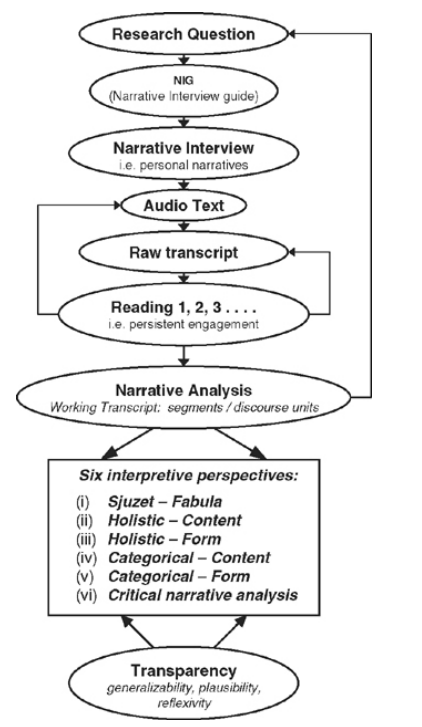
When creating my research proposal, I felt it was imperative to conduct a pilot study. The reason for this was to see whether my interview questions were appropriate to explore my research question and whether they would be accessible to my participants. I considered it important to share the questions (see appendix 21) and the examples of mentalising (see appendix 22), prior to the interview and openly discuss them at the end. For full reflections and details of the pilot study, see appendix 25.

The participant was recruited in the same way as my other participants, and she chose the pseudonym of Betty. During the interview, I had my prepared questions and some further prompts. I noticed that I adapted questions and used more prompt questions than I had anticipated. I reflected that this might be due to the nature of the topic we were discussing. I also tried to support Betty’s confidence by summarising and checking what she had said, and then probing further into the details. This led me to consider a more conversational approach to the interview, as without this structure, the interview may have felt uncomfortable and inaccessible. I felt that this was something I needed to be really open about in my analysis and results, and that this may be a feature of other interviews, based on the concept being explored. The process felt like a co-construction of knowledge and I wanted this to be incorporated into my main interviews as well. As earlier discussed, the interview did become more of an exchange of views (Kvale, 1996) which enabled co-construction of knowledge through a more conversational approach.

Based on Betty’s interview and enthusiastic approach to the research, I decided to invite her to be a participant for my research. Whilst completing my pilot study, it became clear that my participant’s identity was a core aspect of the way she told the story. This helped me to consider that NOI was a method of analysis that would also help to explore how someone may construct their identity through narratives they tell, which is done through the Critical Analysis phase of NOI (Hiles, 2007).

**3.6.7. *Transcription and Analysis - The Narrative Orientated Inquiry Methodology***

The stages of the NOI analysis and how I completed them will now be shared. Hiles et al. (2009) share that the researcher should choose what aspects of the process fit with exploring their research question and in line with that guidance, I used aspects of NOI that were most useful to answering my research question. I have created a modified analysis structure and diagram that can be viewed in figure 3 (p. 43). For my analysis, I used each of the stages apart from Holistic Form (stage 3, in figure 2, p. 37), however I will still share what this aspect of the analysis focuses on and why I considered it not to be relevant.



*Figure 2.* Six stage Dynamic Model of NOI. (Hiles and Cermack, 2008, p. 10).

**Stage 1**

Following the process of NOI, the first part involved the transcription of the interview and repeated engagement with the text and interview by rereading and relistening. I also made relevant notes during the interviews around body language and paralinguistic devices that I also used to supplement my analysis process (see appendix 23). I used the Otter AI app to transcribe my interviews.

The transcripts were then organised into ‘moves’ or episodes, each move or episode is roughly a self-contained unit of story (this is labelled on the transcripts and recorded as a number, for example 1.3 would mean, interview 1, move 3). The text was organised to the left with a large margin on the right so that it became a ‘working transcript’, in line with guidance from Hiles et al. (2009).

The next aspect of this stage of the analysis is said to be vital (Hiles et al., 2009). The transcript was separated into two “underlying and inter-related components: into Sjuzet and Fabula” (Hiles et al., 2009, p.7). The difference between Sjuzet and Fabula, can be thought of as the ‘unbounded’ and ‘bounded’ aspects of the narrative, as defined by Herman and Vervaeck (2001). Hiles et al. (2009) assert that the Sjuzet, is made up of the unbounded aspects of the story, that can be altered (within reason) without compromising the events of the story. Therefore, the Sjuzet is the “way” in which the story is being told, with the person’s reflections, asides and emphasis to particular parts of their narrative (Hiles et al., 2009). The Sjuzet is said to be of particular importance in understanding how someone positions their identity within a story, and actively engages in the meaning making of their experiences (Hiles et al., 2009). Often the convention is that the Sjuzet is underlined and this was done as part of my analysis.

The Fabula is seen as the bounded parts of the story, that is, those parts of the story that if they were changed, would change the events of the story (Hiles et al., 2009). It could be said that there is some subjectivity around the Fabula and the Sjuzet, however Hiles et al. (2010) state that if the Fabula is read aloud, it would read like a flat retelling of the story (for stage 1 of the analysis process see appendix 1, 2 and 3).

**Stage 2 Holistic Content**

An important aspect of NOI that differs from Thematic and Discourse Analysis is that it focuses on the whole story, not just the parts that make it (Hiles et al., 2009).

Holistic–Content is the first part of the approaches put forth by Lieblich et al. (1998) and it is concerned with exploring and establishing links across the whole of the story. This stage allowed me to explore major themes and the core narratives that ran within each participant's narrative. I looked for a global impression of the narrative (Lieblich et al., 1998) and considered the focus of the story. I then drew out a sentence that I considered summarised the global impression of the story.  As part of this stage, I made notes in the margin around recurring themes and how they manifested across the story (see appendix 1,2 and 3).

**Stage 3 Holistic Form**

Holistic–Form is concerned with the type of story and the form that the plot takes. In this aspect of the analysis there is a focus on the fabula (fixed events) and the narrative typology is taken into consideration (Lieblich et al., 1998). Classic typologies may include comedy, romance or tragedy (Hiles and Cermack, 2008).

Because my interviews became more of a co construction of knowledge and a conversation, they were not a ‘monologue’ and the sections of transcript from the participant were punctuated with my questions and reflections. Therefore, I considered exploring the holistic form stage would not be relevant to my analysis, because the narratives were composed of short stories and episodes, and they were not an extended monologue with an overall story structure or form.

**Stage 4 Categorical–Content**

Categorical–Content is an exploration of the ‘self-contained areas of content’. At this point I subjected the narrative to a thematic analysis where major categories and subcategories were found (Hiles et al., 2010).The sorting of the categories can be selected either by using predefined theory to determine categories, or by being open to categories that emerge when reading the transcripts (Lieblich et al., 1998).

I decided that doing a combination of these approaches would work well in my analysis. This was because as I continued to engage in the data, I saw how my interview questions shaped the data (as I directly asked about certain aspects of mentalising, and the questions were based on some of the theory around mentalising). These became my overarching categories and a common framework for this aspect of the analysis, which has helped me to explore my main research question. This framework centred around;

* factors that helped and supported them to mentalise within themselves and within schools,
* factors that potentially hindered them and limited the capacity to mentalise within themselves and within school,
* practices that were associated with mentalising,
* what they understood the impact of mentalising to be.

Within each participant, I also tried to be open to new emerging subcategories, that is information and perspectives that they shared with me that they had not been directly questioned about. For example, an overarching category was ‘f*actors that support the function of mentalising*’ and then for each participant, I explored what subcategories emerged for them individually. The identification of 'subcategories' allowed me to acknowledge the distinctiveness of the participants’ stories, while the ‘overarching categories' helped me to keep the research questions in focus. I adapted and interpreted this aspect of the analysis to gather further information when thinking about my research question.

I decided to complete this phase within each participant and across the whole data set at the end, to see if there were links between subcategories for each participant. Lieblich et al. (1998) suggest this is done by careful repeated reading of the transcript, identifying subcategories and working in a circular way to create and amend subcategories identified. I used a key to highlight themes and categories that emerged for each participant, I then added to this for each participant and created a master key (see appendix 7). After this, I used a virtual tool (Google Jam Board) as part of the process to sort subcategories into overarching categories (appendix 9), as well as a summary table to help my thought process at this stage (appendix 8). (For excerpts of categorical content analysis see appendix 4, 5 and 6).

There are further different variations in reporting this stage of the analysis. Lieblich et al. (1998) suggests that this can be completed with an aim to be objective and focus on the quantity of categories. It can also be done in a way that is more hermeneutic and qualitative, focussing on the significance of a category. Lieblich et al. (1998) suggest there is no set way to do this, but the main guidance is that it should be in alignment with the research goal and method (Lieblich et al., 1998).

At this stage of the analysis, I decided to explore both ways suggested by Lieblich et al. (1998). I did this by looking at how often a category emerged and grouping this information in a table. I then used this table to select quotes for each subcategory (see sample table for Betty in appendix 10). I acknowledged that the choices I made around principal sentences was an interpretative process (Lieblich et al., 1998).

It was my aim that this stage of the analysis would be useful for drawing out themes or categories that support and hinder the process of mentalising for key adults. I hoped this would help me to draw out some of the practical implications from my research.

**Stage 5 Categorical–Form**

Categorical form requires a careful analysis of the Sjuzet and looks at how certain aspects of storytelling may strengthen the impact of the narrative told (Hiles and Cermack, 2008). This stage of the analysis allows for a detailed examination of smaller sections of the transcript and a focus on something beyond the content (Lieblich et al., 1998). The aim of this is to glean information from the transcript that may not have been highlighted if content alone was focussed on. It allows an exploration of linguistic devices that may offer emphasis in the retelling of an event (Hiles and Cermack, 2008). Lieblich et al. (1998) outline that a focus is selected for analysis, and it is then explored in detail looking at certain features.

I selected paragraphs for each participant that conveyed, what I interpreted as, an example of mentalising. I then used a list of different devices from Lieblich et al. (1998) to consider what different linguistic features may have occurred. This list includes devices that are said to show emotionally charged narratives and that may indicate psychological processes. Some relevant examples include;

* The use of mental verbs, which encompass the words that someone uses that suggest they are thinking or have thought about something e.g. *I think that, I reflected that*.
* Direct speech, which might be used to represent what someone has said or is emblematic of what they might say.
* Intensifiers, including *very* or *really* or de-intensifiers that may include statements like ‘*a bit*’ and how they appear in the narratives.
* Repetitions, this could include (words, phrases, syllables) that may indicate a strong feeling.

I also drew on ideas from Potter (1996) to help me explore the linguistic devices used. I relistened several times to the selected section of the interview and made further detailed notes about the paralinguistic devices used, such as pauses, emphasis or laughter, to add to this stage of the process (see appendix 11,12 and 13 for my stage 4 of the analysis which is Hiles and Cermack’s stage 5).

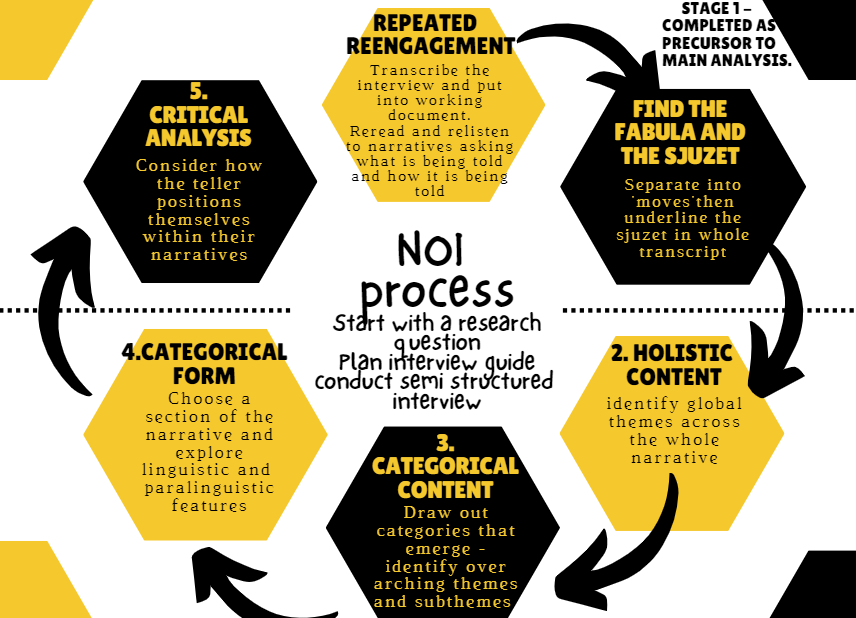
**Stage 6 Critical Analysis**

The final aspect of the dynamic framework is the Critical Analysis (Hiles and Cermack, 2008). This is concerned with what sort of narrative a participant gives and how they position themselves within it. This aspect of the framework builds on Emerson and Frosh’s (2004) work by highlighting that identity developed in a narrative is constructed around a collection of interlinked identity positions (Hiles, 2007). Within this, the analysis of the Sjuzet is particularly important in exploring how someone constructs their identity and situates themselves within a narrative (Hiles, 2007). Hiles (2007) shares that this stage of the analysis is best completed after the other aspects have been completed.

In order to complete this aspect of the analysis, I particularly focussed on the Sjuzet and returned to the transcript with these questions to help me consider how participants used their narrative to construct their identity;

1. How do they position themselves within the narrative?
2. What sort of narrative are they constructing?

Notes and ideas pertaining to this phase of the analysis can be found in appendix 1, 2 and 3.



*Figure 3.* Adapted NOI structure for my research.

**Chapter 4 - Analysis**

**4.0. Overview**

Within my analysis chapter I will work through the multi-layered analysis for each of participant’s data individually, using different aspects of the NOI process to answer my research question;

**How does mentalising appear and function in relationships between ‘key adults’ and children with SEMH needs?**

Findings will be presented in the following way for each participant;

1. I will begin with a pen portrait of each participant,
2. I will then present the Holistic Content of each narrative with an interpretive overarching statement and a summary of themes that span across the whole of the participant’s narratives,
3. I will move onto presenting the findings for Categorical Content for each participant with a diagram. I will then explain and expand on the overarching categories and subcategories, choosing what I interpret as illustrative sentences that exemplify each subcategory.

The narratives shared by participants were shaped by the interview questions which aimed to explore different aspects of mentalising within the key adult role. Therefore, within the categorical content aspect of the analysis, four overarching categories were selected, and these were based on the interview questions and were the same for each participant;

* Factors that support the function of mentalising,
* Factors that limit the capacity to mentalise,
* Practices associated with mentalising,
* Impact connected to the process of mentalising \*

\*It is important to note, that I am not suggesting a direct causal relationship between mentalising and the impact on the CYP as there will be many other factors not explored in this research that could have an impact. I am hoping that by asking participants questions, I can explore what they understand the impact to be.

For each participant there is a table which shares examples and the frequency of quotes pertaining to the subcategory (an example of this completed for Betty can be found in appendix 10). However, within the analysis chapter, I will focus on the prominent subcategories with principal sentences used as quotes.

1. I will then present the Categorical Form for each participant, which will explore linguistic and paralinguistic features of a section of participants' narratives. For each participant I have chosen relevant, prominent linguistic features using Lieblich et al’s. (1998) work as a guide. I will also pay close attention to paralinguistic devices within these extracts, for example, tone of voice and pauses.
2. Finally, I will present the Critical Analysis and consider how the participant positions their identity within their narrative, drawing out quotes that I feel reflect this.

Within each pen portrait the participants' professional and personal experience in relation to children is mentioned. This is because this was mentioned in each of the participant’s narratives. Within the extracts, the numbers used represent the interview and the move. The ‘move’ is an episode or unit within the narrative. For example, 3.2 would mean interview 3, move 2.

**Table 1**

*Interview schedule for participants*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name of participant, school, and role.** | **Interview 1** | **Interview 2** | **Interview 3** |
| Betty – school A  SEND support Teaching Assistant – key adult for Belinda. | 22.6.2022  Duration – 37 minutes | 30.6.2022  Duration - 33 minutes | 14.7.2022  Duration – 40 minutes |
| Grace – school B  SEND support Teaching Assistant – key adult for Jenny. | 1.7.2022  Duration – 35 minutes | 8.7.2022  Duration – 43 minutes | 15.7.2023  Duration – 28 minutes |
| Julia – school A  SEND support Teaching Assistant – key adult for Barry. | 8.7.2022  Duration – 35 minutes | 19.7.2022  Duration – 37 minutes | ill with COVID-19 |

**4.1. Betty**

Betty is a key adult that works with a young person in year five - Belinda. Belinda has an Education and Health Care Plan with a primary need of SEMH. Betty has had over 15 years’ experience of working in educational settings. Betty had worked with Belinda all academic year and more intensively (on a one-to-one basis) since January 2022. Betty also supports other CYP within school. Betty is the mother of two sons, one with a diagnosis of Autism. I was able to interview Betty three times across the second, summer half term.

***4.1.1 Holistic content***

The global message and overarching impression that was taken from Betty’s narrative is -

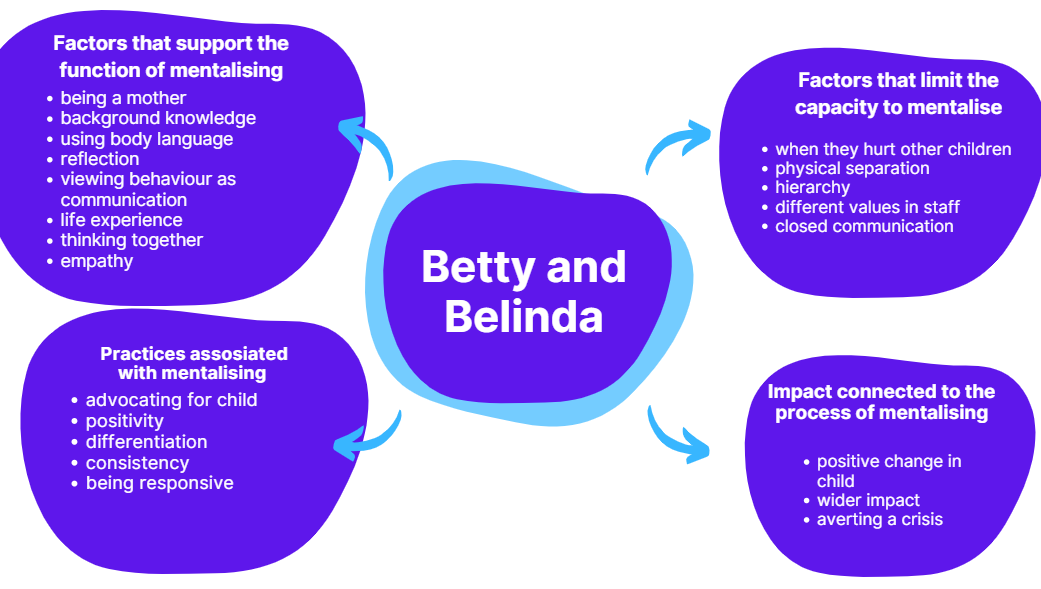
***Children come first.***

Betty’s narratives share her passion for working with children and young people. They share that through a child centred, nurturing approach children can make progress. Across her narratives, Betty speaks with empathy for Belinda, Belinda’s mum and other children in school. Betty’s stories share her learning from a hard time in her life supporting her two sons. These and other life experiences, have also helped her to be calm and not to be afraid of any situation that arises in school. Through her narratives, it appears this experience makes her a valuable member of the school team who is frequently called upon to support dysregulated CYP. Betty’s narratives consistently interpret behaviour as communication in children, and this is a phrase she frequently uses. The language Betty uses across her stories, shares her moral purpose for giving CYP sustainable skills for life. Betty’s narratives are consistently positive about her relationship with Belinda, and she consistently describes a positive change in Belinda.

Betty’s holistic content describes the positive change that has occurred within their relationship, which may demonstrate how she understands the impact of her support of Belinda. This support includes mentalising to interpret behaviour and then responding to this. Her ethos that children come first means that she works to consider how Belinda might be thinking or feeling. Betty appears to be constantly working to understand and deduce the thoughts and feelings of Belinda. Therefore, mentalising with Belinda appears prominently in her daily work. A consistent thread throughout all her narratives, references how her life experiences have supported her with the functioning of mentalising, and these life experiences have given her practice with using this process (for Betty’s transcript excerpt and this stage of the analysis see appendix 1).

***4.1.2. Categorical content***

The diagram (figure 4) below demonstrates the overarching categories and the subcategories for Betty. Within the analysis, subcategories will be discussed and illustrative quotes will be provided. (For further examples of each subcategory, see appendix 10).

****

*Figure 4*. Diagram illustrating Categorical Content categories and subcategories for Betty.

**Factors that support the function of mentalising.**

This overarching category explores all the different experiences or resources that support Betty to mentalise with, and about Belinda. These factors mainly utilise her life experiences and how she draws meaning and skills from them. For Betty, being a mother is a prominent subcategory in her narratives. In her work with CYP, she makes use of this frequently to help her to make sense of their behaviour and use strategies to support them;

*“I think I'm quite good at doing this mentalising because for one of my sons being autistic, high functioning, as it were, you're always anticipating behaviours, you're always anticipating triggers and you're looking for what might happen in certain situations.*” 1.3

Betty’s life experience as a mother of a son with Autism, is shared across all narratives and has been drawn on to help her to work in a range of different situations at school. This experience appears to have given her skills to support CYP and to have empathy with them. There seems to be an overlap in her skills as a mother with her role at school, primarily as a child’s advocate.

Betty references how her life experiences have made her resilient and this is another subcategory that was found to be prominent for Betty. Betty draws on this experience and uses this to help her to mentalise, this is supported by her view that behaviour is communication. This is a really prominent subcategory for Betty, firstly in the amount of times that it is mentioned but also in how important it is for her to do her job. I believe this illustrates just what a highly skilled job supporting a CYP with SEMH needs is. The conscious effort to do this, and the belief that behaviour is communication, appears to help with the practice of mentalising;

*“So because they shutdown, and I'm aware of that, and I try and keep that type thing at forefront of my mind, rather than “their naughty they’re doing this and it's not right”. The way I look at it is right, that behaviour is trying to tell me something it’s communicating…..I need to keep that in the forefront of my mind.” 1.3*

When Betty describes Belinda’s behaviour and what this is communicating within her narratives, at times she gives voice to what a CYP’s behaviour might be saying or what they might be thinking. This is linked to empathy and Betty demonstrating her effort to 'be in their (the children's) shoes’. This also might suggest the link between empathy and mentalising and how they relate to each other, and that Betty may use empathy to mentalise and interpret the behaviour of Belinda or vice versa.

Betty also shares how having background knowledge of the child is important to being able to interpret their behaviour. Within this subcategory, Betty shares her knowledge of Belinda and she uses this to help her elucidate behaviours. For example, she knows Belinda finds it hard to separate from her mum, therefore when it is getting closer to home time, she attributes her behaviour to anxiety around wanting to be with mum and she uses this to adjust her approach;

*“I'll respond to that, rather than just saying ‘shh’ which could be another way of doing it, which wouldn't work very well, because she’d just keep asking you, yeah…... I think, it's having that knowledge of the child and putting yourself in her shoes”.* 1.9

This links to the subcategory of body language, as knowing Belinda well helps Betty to interpret her body language.

Several times Betty indicates that having time to reflect enables her to engage in mentalising. The fact that this is done at home, illustrates the amount of mental effort and commitment that goes into supporting a CYP;

*“However, a long term solution if there's something that is an ongoing issue, and I'm always looking for that solution and thinking right, well, do you think that could be why Belinda's really like that or do you think we should try this to see whether we can help her with this? And I do this…… It's when I'm walking the dogs.” 2.3*

This might demonstrate the emotional labour of the role and that staff are constantly keeping children in their mind. It also may demonstrate that mentalising is done when Betty is with Belinda but also when she is away from her. This is interesting when considering the research question, as it shows that mentalising appears to function in different time frames.

When considering what systemic factors may support mentalising, Betty shares that ‘thinking together’ with the teacher she works with facilitates her mentalising to function. Knowing that she had the member of staff's support to act on her thoughts and interpretations, helped her to be able to support Belinda;

*“I mean, you know, in our class I've got a good relationship with teacher. I think that helps because we work together and we're able to then try and work out (what’s happening*)” 1.7

**Factors that limit the capacity to mentalise.**

This overarching category considered what factors may impact on the function of mentalising, specifically what might hinder or prevent this. It appeared for Betty that mentalising was prevalent and important in all aspects of her work. However, it seems that it might become difficult to act on mentalising if the working relationship was not there with the teacher, or the senior team, and that hierarchy may make it more challenging to act on mentalising;

*“I think that makes a difference because the thing is, the issue you've got is it's like, if you, if you think you've got a good idea and then you go to ‘em, some teachers would consider it as you undermining them and their ability or whatever,....You know what people are like…. I think (at) our school there's a lot of sort of equal respect.” 2.4*

She also references that it can be a barrier when other staff have different values and think differently about children’s behaviour. She shares how she supports them to consider the child’s needs in an alternative way;

*“Well, some people don't get it. Some people do get it. But some people just don't. And it's like “let's get everybody in. Let's get big guns in. Let's get come onnnnn” but it’s like, like actually you know, “it's a 10 year old. Let's just put it into perspective and start just trying to deal with this, it’s all right. It's gonna be alright. It's not that bad.’’’ 3.9*

The above quote and staff thinking differently, does not appear to impact on how Betty mentalises with CYP, but may make it more challenging to go against how other staff view behaviour. This may impact on how Betty is able to act on mentalising within the system.

It appears that it was hard to mentalise with Belinda when she had hurt another CYP. This subcategory was only mentioned once, however I interpreted it as important, as Betty often goes to great lengths and effort in order to think about Belinda’s thinking. However, in this instance she appears to find this harder to do. This might be because it is not acceptable in line with the school rules, or even with Betty’s personal values. In this instance this appears to inhibit the function of mentalising;

*“But in terms of sort of trying to think how she, I can't think, I can’t think why she did what she did, she has got a good relationship with these girls and normally they play alright together but there's, it's just how they are into this age, they do fall out”. 3.3*

Within this category Betty also shares how the fast-paced nature of a school means that you cannot physically be with the child that you work with all the time, which in turn means you cannot be there to support the CYP and therefore mentalise about them;

*“But Unfortunately, as you know, sometimes there's situations elsewhere that needed me and I needed to go and help someone else, they was in crisis. So I had to leave the classroom which probably didn't help ……it's just the way isn't it sometimes unfortunately.” 2.2*

Betty also discusses that it can be hard to mentalise when a child doesn’t want to talk about their feelings and is closed in their communication.

*“That’s when I’ve struggled, when she’s just not prepared to, you know, open up about why. Why she's struggling with certain things at school.” 1.8*

Betty often relies on non-verbal information to mentalise however, when Belinda cannot verbally share what she is finding difficult, Betty finds it hard to mentalise. This could be because the verbal information may support or disprove her interpretations of behaviour, this may be a type of feedback that supports her to do her role and know her interpretations are accurate.

**Practices associated with mentalising.**

This overarching category centres around what practices or strategies might be employed by Betty after she has mentalised. Betty uses a range of practices that are sometimes focussed on supporting Belinda directly, and sometimes advocating for her and working with those around her.

Advocating for Belindacomes out strongly in Betty’s narratives. She is child-centred in her practice and she advocates for Belinda. She supports others to have a better understanding of her emotions and behaviour. She shares what she understands about Belinda’s behaviour with staff which she hopes might widen the impact;

*“But I just think awareness of that needs to be communicated around school because…. I don't think everybody sings from the same hymn sheet there all the time. And it's the same in any place that you go. It's like “why should that kid do that? Because he's done that”. And it's like, “well, actually you know, he's got some real, really hard things going on at the minute. He's probably frightened. And, or she, you know, whoever it is, that is probably frightened and they don't know how to deal with that.’’ 3.8*

Betty is part of a team and likes the people she works with, however she gives the impression that she is not afraid to question things with school leadership for the good of the CYP. Betty appears to have the confidence and experience to be able to know what she is doing is right for the CYP.

*“I'll talk to the deputy head. I'll talk to anyone. I'll talk to SENDCo,  I’ll talk to, most of them are really, really quite willing to listen”. 2.4*

She discusses other practices such as differentiation of work for Belinda, in this instance Betty appears to use mentalising and knowing Belinda well to make predictions about her behaviour. This again may show that mentalising functions in different time frames, when Betty is with Belinda and when she is apart from her considering the future;

*“You know, it's just, just being able to notice how she is in her being and think right? Okay….am I realistically going to get this work out of her, is she going to achieve it? Is it going to be too much for her? Is it too hard for her? And I asked myself these questions.”3.4*

Positivity is another key practice that Betty shares in her support of Belinda, in that it is her role to be positive with her and be happy to see her each day.

Despite consistency being a lesser mentioned subcategory, this appears to be important to Betty and what she attributes to some of the positive changes in Belinda;

*“I always fulfil what I'm saying I'm going to do, so I will always be at reception in the morning to collect her and I think it's that, we have got good at that”. 1.1*

Being responsive to Belinda after she has mentalised is prominent in Betty’s work and is frequently mentioned. Betty appears to notice a behaviour or sign, from this she responds to Belinda. This means that often dysregulation is avoided for Belinda;

*“But when it's got to a point where it's just a bubbling situation I'm able to then, normally put things in place that bring it down whether it be it's a bit wacky you know?” 3.8*

**Impact connected to the process of mentalising.**

This overarching category illustrates the impact that Betty perceives there to be after mentalising and a strategy has been implemented. Within Betty’s narratives this impact might be focussed upon the child in the moment for exampleaverting a crisis;

*“It’s important I think in a job like mine, because..it saves the child getting to a crisis point where they can't cope. And then and then it all ends up in a big mess. Whether it be a meltdown, a physical assault, whatever they do, whatever they display, you know. I think if you can anticipate and you can read the signs and understand how that child might be feeling at that time. You can intervene before it gets to a boiling point and bring them back down.”* 1.4

This may illustrate mentalising as part of a mediation strategy in intense, emotional situations. This overarching category also encompasses the long-term impacts and Betty shares the positive change in the child (Belinda)**.** Within all the narratives this theme emerges and highlights how there has been a positive change in Belinda and her engagement with school;

*‘She came in through the main entrance rather than through the reception with all the other children that came in. So that's progress’ 1.2*

Betty’s narratives share that she understands there is a wider impact to her work with Belinda and that through mentalising and anticipating Belinda’s responses, Betty differentiates the work so that Belinda can achieve. This has a positive impact on her and others in the class, as once she has achieved, she can have a sensory break, leaving Betty free to support others. This links to the subcategory around differentiation. It may suggest that one of the functions of mentalising is to anticipate what work a CYP may struggle with so that their day can be adapted.

(For this stage of the analysis see appendix 4)

***4.1.3 Categorical form***

I decided to focus on two linguistic features of Betty’s story that appeared in the extract I selected. These were the use of phrases relating to mental processes and reported speech. (See full extracts and notes in appendix 11).

Throughout her narratives, Betty uses a lot of words around her thoughts and the thoughts of others. I interpreted this to show the amount of mental effort Betty is going to in her daily work to make sense of Belinda’s thoughts and behaviour. The words *think, imagine* and *mind* are used repeatedly in the chosen extract. This is in relation to her mind, and to Belinda’s mind. Later in the extract Betty talks about Belinda’s brain, perhaps demonstrating she is trying to make sense of, and interpret behaviour at a neurological level;

*“You have to bring that child back down to a level where they're going to be responsive because their brains telling them “oh my god I need to choose now am I gonna stay here or I'm gonna run”.’ 3.8*

At other points within the extract that was analysed Betty pauses more;

*‘you know, she's just a bit (pause) it's like an anxious state I’d say’.*

This might also suggest the mental processing that is occurring during the interview, as Betty continues to make the cognitive effort to interpret the behaviour.

In relation to my research question, I feel that this demonstrates how mentalising is a core part of the key adult role, and how much thought and mental effort is required in the work completed by the key adult. These sections show the conscious mental processing that is happening to make sense of Belinda’s behaviour and to think about her thoughts and motivations. Although this is one extract from Betty’s transcript, words used around Belinda’s thoughts are used prominently throughout all her narratives.

The phrase the ‘*Forefront of my mind’* is repeated, this could be to demonstrate the importance of this in Betty’s work, that is, keeping what a child might be going through in her mind, to interpret behaviour as communication and not as ‘naughty’.

Betty uses reported speech a lot throughout the interview and in the extract chosen. Reported speech can be seen as a rhetorical device that may be used to support the factuality of a claim (Potter, 1996). Woofitt (1992) also suggests that this might not be a direct quote but one that is ‘emblematic’ of the kind of thing that people may say.

Throughout her narratives this reported speech might be the child’s voice or the staff’s voice. In the extract selected, when Betty voices what staff might say, or have said *‘they’re doing this and it’s not right’*, her tone of voice changes to be spoken more quickly and abruptly. My interpretation of this is that Betty does this in order to show the juxtaposition of how some people in education may talk to or about a child, or view a child’s behaviour. This is in contrast to her tone which is calm and positive. I also feel this quote might be ‘emblematic’ and might refer to a general group of people who Betty has worked with in her career previously, as opposed to one staff member she currently works with. This is in line with some prominent themes found in other aspects of the analysis, that all behaviour is communication and that children should be nurtured and supported.

Linked to the research question, it could be suggested that Betty is sharing that mentalising does not appear in the daily work of some members of staff within the school. This could suggest she feels they do not work to deduce the mental states of children and do not try to consider their thoughts and feelings. This is an interesting consideration which may highlight some systemic issues within schools that may support or hinder the process of mentalising.

(For this stage of the analysis see appendix 11)

***4.1.4. Identity Positioning***

Across all the narratives Betty consistently positions herself as a child-centred practitioner and that her role is to support CYP and advocate for them;

*“And it's about understanding that kids aren't robots**and sometimes things are, things are bothering them.” interview 3 move 5*

Because of this, Betty also positions herself as someone that will share her views with others in her advocacy for CYP;

*“So I'll just go in and I'll say, This is what I think. And then if they want to listen, listen, if they don't, they don't have to do that. You know what I mean?”  interview 2 move 5.*

Furthermore, Betty describes good examples of team-work and positions herself as part of the team, however her child-centred values mean that she is able to separate herself from the hierarchy when the child’s needs should come first. Through this she positions herself as part of the team but also separate;

*“All I'll say is that if I think something is going to work, I don't really care who I talk to.” interview 2 move 4.*

Betty’s identity position is also rooted in her personal experiences as a mother of a son with Autism;

*“Well, that's quite a lot of experience with situations, you know, like with my son, and I've had like, well. It's 16 years nearly now….. I've lived with really tricky situations where you have had to mentalize to actually survive the day. …… So, from that, I think I've gained quite a lot of experience of using that sort of approach.” interview 2 move 5*

Because of this, Betty positions herself as someone who isn’t afraid, which could be different to other members of staff;

*“And I think a lot of people are fearful and frightened. So I think in themselves they project that onto the kid, they know they know. Whereas I'm not actually frightened of what, what's going to happen, what's the worst that can happen?” interview 3 move 9.*

Her narratives position her as a valuable member of staff, who is often drawn on in challenging situations.

Betty is always upbeat and jocular in her interviews, she often made me laugh. In this regard, she shares challenging stories that she has faced but she uses humour to do this. This might be done (through her Sjuzet) to make it easier for the listener of her stories and in order to help them feel comfortable. It might also be linked to her own personal coping style and making light of the challenges she has faced.

Betty’s identity position can be said to shed light on how mentalising may function and what supports this. Betty shares that it is her life and professional experience that supports her in her role and helps her to understand the value of mentalising. It may also link to how she responds to mentalising. For example, she positions herself as an advocate in response to understanding that children are finding things challenging, and sharing what their behaviour is communicating with other staff. (For notes pertaining to this stage of the analysis see appendix 1),

**4.2. Grace**

Grace is a key adult who works with a young person in year five - Jenny. Jenny has an Education and Health Care Plan with a primary need of SEMH. This is Grace’s first year in this role, and she has supported Jenny from October 2021 to July 2022. Grace’s role means that she supports Jenny exclusively. Grace is the mother of two children. I was able to interview Grace three times across the second summer half term.

***4.2.1. Stage 1 Holistic content***

Overarching statement;

***Being positive can bring positive change*.**

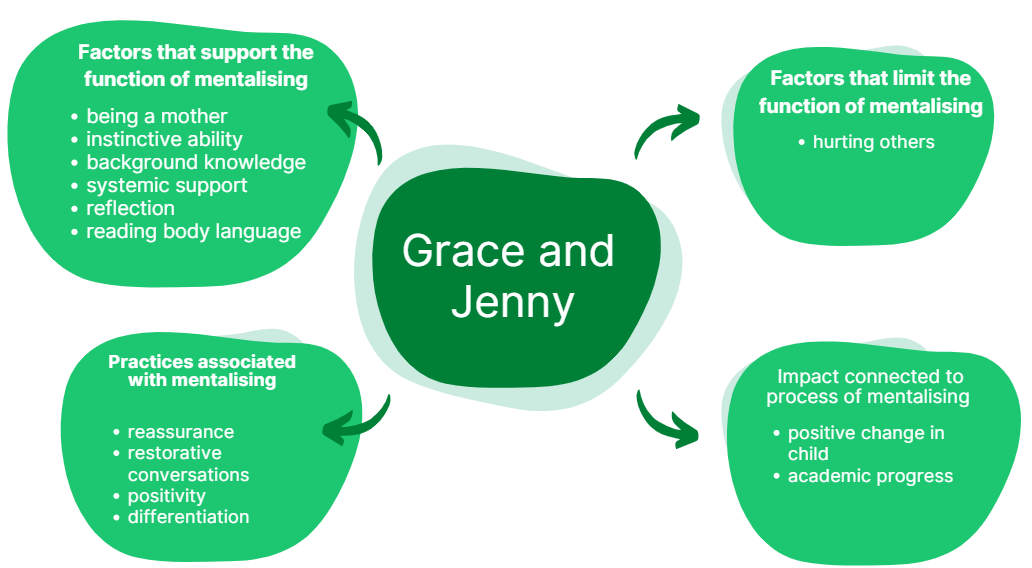
Throughout Grace’s narratives, she has a positive outlook on life and her work and aims to share her values with those around her. Grace’s narratives share the journey of her relationship with Jenny, the highs and lows, the progress that has been made both in the trust between them, and in Jenny’s behaviour and academic performance.  Grace presents a narrative of someone who is currently learning and open to the process of further learning. She regularly reflects and adapts her practice. The overall narrative is upbeat, hopeful and one of positive change. Across all her stories, there is a major theme presented around Grace’s mothering skills that she draws on and considers to have an impact on her ability to mentalise.

Throughout each narrative, there are examples of times when Jenny’s behaviour has not met school behaviour policy expectations and Grace has had to put a sanction in place. She has found this challenging and been concerned about how these boundaries will impact on their relationship. There are also, what appear to be, special moments of progress where there are breakthroughs in their relationship. The relationship is initially described as intense, however as the different interviews progress, this word is used less. This might be because as Grace reflects in the interview process, she can see the progress that they have made.

Grace’s holistic content demonstrates that mothering skills appear to facilitate the function of her mentalising, which appears regularly in her daily work. She understands the impact of these skills to have led to positive change for Jenny in different areas of school life. Mentalising and interpreting Jenny’s behaviour, appears to be a prominent part of her daily work. (For Grace’s transcript excerpt and this stage of the analysis see appendix 2)

***4.2.2. Categorical content***

The diagram below (figure 5) shows the different overarching and subcategories that emerged from Grace’s narratives. Within the analysis, subcategories will be discussed and illustrative quotes will be provided.



*Figure 5*. Diagram illustrating categorical content categories and subcategories for Grace

**Factors that support the function of mentalising.**

This overarching category explores what factors impact on the function of mentalising, specifically what might facilitate this process. Being a mother is mentioned in Grace’s narratives and she draws on this experience frequently to help her to support Jenny;

*“I kind of, I look at it as being a parent myself, that with children. I suppose with all of us, you do kind of take your emotions out on those closest to you.” 1.3*

*“I look at it because of my, I am quite motherly…. that I don't know if that's maybe why she's attaching herself to sort of little bit more to me recently, maybe because of the change.” 2.4 (in relation to the change in Jenny’s home life).*

At times, Grace references her lack of experience in her current role and how this supports her to be open to help, which she feels is a good thing. Grace appears confident in her nurturing, comforting skills as a mother and she knows that she can draw on this to help Jenny. Through the narratives, it appears these skills are key to helping her to mentalise and Grace links them to the progress made by Jenny. Grace attributes her skill in this role to an instinctive ability, as opposed to training that she might have received;

*“It was because of my kind of caring and nurturing nature…I don't really know. I think I'm just, because I haven't got any training or anything, it's just who I am.” 1.6*

Another subcategory that is important and prominent for Grace, is being able to draw on support from the system around her, this might be in the form of advice or in the containment of her emotions;

*“Oh, yeah, definitely. Especially with the class teacher we do work really closely together. And you know, he will, if he can advise me, I mean, he's advised me a lot.” 2.6*

Grace uses her background knowledge and experience of knowing Jenny to support her to mentalise, and this has developed over time. This appears to facilitate mentalising in that in knowing her well, she is better able to interpret or ‘sense’ her emotions;

*“We found that that works well. If she just goes off to the toilet, whereas at the start of the year, we were having a lot of, just storming out kicking the door, running out, a lot of running around the whole school as well…..so we have managed to, we can sense it now.” 2.7*

Body language is also referenced for Grace, and this highlights how Grace is often reading Jenny’s body language and uses this to mentalise;

*“She's a child that shows it in her body language…..but she was still kind of, she was quite, heavy breathing… like shallow breaths, very frustrated and I could see her (huffs breath)..... She always shows it through her body language.” 1.4*

She also uses reflection time to consider what Jenny’s behaviour or actions might mean. Reflection time also demonstrates how she uses this process in different time frames and when she is away from Jenny. This highlights the amount of work Grace goes to, to deduce the mental states of Jenny;

*“I did have to step back to, it took me a day or so to realise actually, Oh, I understand now. She, she felt like had abandoned her.” 1.2*

This quote also references a turning point for Grace and a moment of realisation where she felt she better understood Jenny. This appeared to help her move forward in their relationship with her renewed understanding.

**Factors that limit the capacity to mentalise.**

This overarching category looks at what factors impact on the function of mentalising, specifically what might hinder or prevent this. Hurting others was the only subcategory that Grace shared that impacted on the function of mentalising. It appears that Grace tried to mentalise and interpret this behaviour but she could not;

*“But no incidences like that, I just, I don't understand why she keeps doing it…And I don't understand what it is really, it's frustration, but I'm not so sure why it's just pinpointing a couple of people.” 3.5*

There may be different reasons for why this makes it hard to mentalise that could be linked to policies within school and stress on Grace to support Jenny to conform with these policies.

**Practices associated with mentalising.**

This overarching category considered what practices or strategies Grace might implement after mentalising with Jenny. The use of reassurance was apparent and appeared to be part of Grace’s daily work with Jenny. This appeared to link to the subtheme of instinctive ability, as it seemed Grace felt this reassurance was natural;

*“But I'm back, so I just started to reiterate to her again. I was you know, I was poorly, I couldn't have helped it but I'm back now I'm not going anywhere.” 1.3*

Positivity was a practice utilised by Grace in her approach to working with Jenny;

*“I will say that to her now, if ever she has a bad day, tomorrow's a new day. So it's kind of like reinforcing for us both. tomorrow's a new day, whatever's happened as long as we learned from our mistakes.” 1.7*

Restorative conversations were frequently mentioned by Grace, it appeared a large part of her time was spent talking things through with Jenny. It links to the subcategory of reassurance and positivity, as sometimes their talks encompassed Grace sharing her positivity and her positive regard for Jenny;

*“Definitely, I started the day just having a chat, just to kind of open up. But then if I was met with refusal of work or anything, I was a lot softer with her.*” 1.3

Supporting Jenny academically appeared to be important to Grace. Differentiation of work was prominent across all of Grace’s narratives and describes several different occasions where Grace notices Jenny might need the work to be broken down into smaller steps, or she adapts work so that Jenny can achieve;

*“ I kind of go through the steps right. “Okay, so now let's get your pencil. Right. Okay, let's start doing this. Let's get your Jotta book out. We're going to start doing some notes”. So it's every like step by step.’”* 2.1

**Impact associated with the process of mentalising.**

This overarching category centres on what Grace understands the impact is after she has mentalised and implemented strategies to support Jenny. Grace highlights the positive change in Jenny that has happened over the course of their relationship. The sentences selected also illustrate that this is a change and a big step for Jenny;

*“that it shows how much our relationship has built actually because she'll even turn around and say to me and I can listen to anything you want to talk about.” 1.4*

*“And she came in and she just sat herself straight down and opened a book, which is a big step for her actually.”* 1.4

The subcategory of academic progress links to the practice of differentiation. Grace refers to her differentiating the work and then Jenny achieving and making progress;

*“I've just learned that actually we do need to break it down….And then she, she also feels, because she's finished her amount of set work. She feels she's achieved as well….. Whereas she, she really is really hard on herself. If she feels like she hasn't achieved, so if I didn't set those expectations for her she would feel like failure if she's not finished the work.*” 1.7

(For this stage of the analysis see appendix 5)

***4.2.3.Categorical Form***

I decided to focus on two linguistic features of Grace’s story. The use of phrases relating to mental processes and the use of de-intensifiers (see extract in appendix 12 for full extract).

De- intensifiers can be seen as words that are used to remove the intensity of a word used. Grace uses de -intensifiers when she talks about Jenny’s behaviour, for example, *’‘Quite rude’, ‘took it out on me a little bit’.* I interpret that this might be done in order to continue to advocate for Jenny and de-intensify what someone might think is unacceptable behaviour. This idea is supported by other examples within the extract where Grace provides rationale and explanations for Jenny’s behaviour, perhaps again demonstrating her advocacy for her. It seems that Grace uses mentalising to advocate for Jenny in order to help her and others to see why Jenny might be behaving in certain ways. This may also relate to the research question and demonstrates Grace attempting to understand Jenny’s thoughts and feelings. Subsequently, the de-intensifiers are used as she interprets the meaning behind Jenny’s actions and justifies them to others to gain their empathy and understanding.

Grace uses a lot of words to express the amount of mental effort she is going to to figure out why Jenny acted in a certain way - *think, realise, understand,* *reflect,* these are used in relation to Jenny’s actions and feelings. The word *reflecting* and the context of it being used after an incident, also suggests how Grace is thinking about something after it has happened. This shows that Grace is frequently working to deduce Jenny’s thoughts and feelings, this is in the moment and also at home when she is away from Jenny, showing that the skill of mentalising occurs in different time frames. This could demonstrate the emotional labour of the role of the key adult, as they are often reflecting on the CYP’s thoughts and behaviours at home. This use of language around Jenny’s thoughts in the chosen extract is reflective of Grace’s whole narratives.

Furthermore, in the extract chosen, Grace uses the word *abandoned* in relation to how Jenny might feel when she (Grace) has had time off sick. I interpreted this as a strong word for Grace having time off. This could be linked to Grace feeling guilty for being ill, which could again illustrate the emotional labour of the work. Further to this, when Grace shares that Jenny feels she may have ‘*left her’,* her tone of voice changes and she adds extra emphasis on the words and uses a lower tone to her voice, which could be expressing her guilt or sadness. After saying *‘left her’* she pauses, and adds ‘*for unforeseen circumstances’* quickly. This statement appears to be a justification for not being there, this further adds to my interpretation of the emotional labour of her role as a key adult. Whilst this does not directly relate to the research question, I consider this an interesting finding in relation to being a key adult for a CYP with SEMH needs, as it shows the level of emotional involvement between the key adult and the CYP they work with.

***4.2.4. Identity Positioning***

Throughout Grace’s narratives and Sjuzet, she frequently positions herself as a mother. She relates to this in the skills that she draws on to support Jenny e.g. nurture, reassurance and care;

*“It's just I suppose as a mum, it's just quite a natural feeling to kind of take a moment to give that child chance to open up……... I'm just I suppose, I'm just I am quite a comforting person anyway.” 1. 6*

Grace’s Szujet also reflects the emotional labour that goes into her work, with asides and reflections about her worry for Jenny and her feelings of guilt about maintaining boundaries but trying to maintain trust. For example, she shares she is ‘*heartbroken’* when Jenny is upset.

Grace positions herself as being part of a strong school team that she can draw on for support and guidance. As part of this, she wants to meet the expectations of the team and provide the best support for Jenny academically. Linked to this, is Grace’s identity position around being inexperienced. She reflects that this can mean she needs to draw on support, but also this is positive as it means she is open to, and accepting of support;

*“I'm new to the role, I may be more open to you know, to new things. And I think sometimes, if you've worked in a place, you kind of think “I know what I know and I'm going to do what I do” and you can kind of get a bit stuck and not really open yourself up.” 3.3*

Grace positions herself as being tenacious in her role;

*‘So I don't like to give up (laughs). I'm quite stubborn. I think I have been quite stubborn with it really, to just keep persevering.’ 1.1.*

She describes the hard work and time it has taken to build her relationship with Jenny and she does not give up. Her mantra of every day being a new day, is both for Jenny and herself and this supports her in her attitude renewal each day.

Grace’s identity position relates to what factors she considers support the function of the mentalising process. Grace shares that she draws on her natural mothering skills and nurture to help her to mentalise in her role. She also highlights how important the wider school team is to her, in terms of helping her in her role and also in supporting her with mentalising. She also considers her personality traits, in terms of being positive and stubborn. These may also be factors that impact on her ability to continue to mentalise and work in her role. (For notes pertaining to this stage of the analysis see appendix 2).

**4.3 Julia**

Julia is a key adult that works with a young person in year six - Barry. Barry is on the SEND register with a primary need of SEMH. This is Julia’s first year in her current setting and she has supported Barry from January 2022 to July 2022. Julia has worked with children with different SEND for the past 14 years. She is a mother to a daughter. Julia was interviewed twice across the half term.

***4.3.1. Stage 1 - Holistic content***

The global message and overarching impression that was taken from Julia’s narrative is;

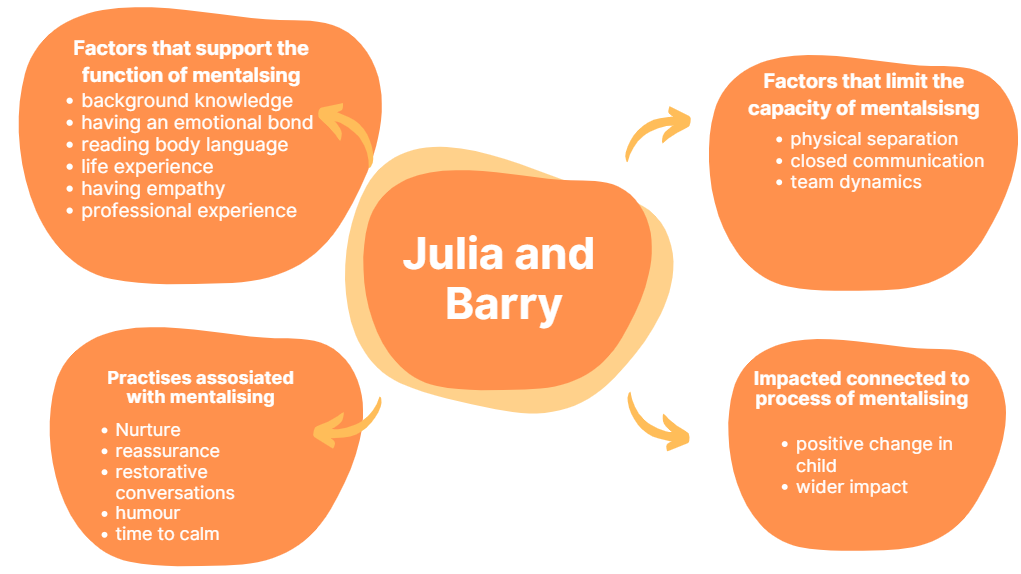
***Life experience is meaningful and useful.***

Julia’s narratives illustrate her resilience and hard work to get to the place she is today. She shared challenging life experiences, which she feels have helped her to understand and empathise with CYP. Julia appears to make meaning from her challenging life experiences and how through these experiences, she is better able to understand CYP. Her story is one of resilience and hope. Julia’s story shares the progress in her relationship with Barry and the positive change Barry has made, she makes reference to the things he no longer does and how others have recognised the impact of her work with him. At times, there is a regretful, possibly sad element to the narrative that her time with Barry has been short, and is drawing to a close, as he goes to secondary school.

Julia’s Holistic Content shares how much progress Barry has made. This relates to the impact that Julia perceives mentalising to have had upon her support for Barry and therefore Barry’s behaviour. There are other major themes across the narratives around personal and professional experience, and these link to what Julia considers facilitate her ability to mentalise and use this in her role. (For Julia’s transcript excerpt and this stage of the analysis see appendix 3)

***4.3.2. Categorical content***

The diagram below (figure 6), demonstrates the overarching categories and the subcategories for Julia. Within the analysis, subcategories will be discussed and illustrative quotes will be provided.



*Figure 6*. Diagram illustrating categorical content categories and subcategories for Julia.

**Factors that support the function of mentalising**

This overarching category references the different factors and resources that Julia feels supports her ability to mentalise with Barry. Life experience was an important subcategory for Julia, and she draws on her life experiences often. They help her relate to children and she discusses them frequently in her narratives;

*“So I've lived on my own from being 16. So I wonder if a lot of my understanding of what children are thinking comes from my own background.*” 1.3

*“I've never had any, you know, outside, education training for anything to do with working with children or children's mental health. I think a lot …goes on my own childhood,*” 2.4

Julia’s experience of being mothered is referenced. Julia appears to have a clear perception of what a mother is to her. Her mum didn't fit with this, and she sometimes feels she doesn’t fit with what is traditionally thought of as maternal and she refers to herself as;

“*not particularly maternal*.” (1.2).

She shares how she wanted to be different to her mum. This might be a factor that supports her to be more nurturing and therefore work towards deducing the mental states of the CYP she works with to support them.

Julia references her professional experience working with other CYP with SEND and how this supports her with Barry. This appears to help her mentalise and interpret his behaviour as she has learnt this skill (and others) in different roles;

*“Maybe because for the last 10 years, I have worked with difficult children. It's just I pick my battles. That's my sort of header….if it's not going to hurt them. It's not it's not gonna harm them in any way. Then let's do whatever it is.” 2.3*

Julia shares that she understands Barry and she uses this knowledge to support him;

*“I Just understand him? …But I just feel that if he's quiet or he’s maybe a bit tense or his heads down or for me there's always a sign of something that’s either, going on in his mind or you know, might be fidgeting a lot….it's not very often that I don't know, with him.*” 1.8

The subcategory of having an emotional bondshows that having a close relationship with Barry helps Julia to mentalise with him;

*“I think he feels loved. Yeah, I think he feels, you know, like I'm family rather than, you know, I’m not just a teacher at school. I think I'm someone that he knows he can come to for help if he needs it.”1.10*

Body language supports Julia to mentalise with Barry, she appears to read signs from his body language and uses this to deduce his mental states or emotions;

*“I can see in the look on his face the way his body changes.” 1.5*

**Factors that limit the capacity to mentalise.**

This overarching category relates to what factors might hinder the function of Julia’s ability to mentalise. Julia shares how factors such as physical separation, canimpact on the function of mentalising. Within Julia’s narratives it appears that when she is with Barry, she can mentalise with him and then act on this. However, sometimes she cannot be with him and that means she cannot mentalise about him;

*“So yeah, sometimes it's a case of time or cover, and that those are just those practicalities. But it just means that there's that, I guess, that physical separation.” 1.9*

I interpreted the subcategory of *closed communication* as noteworthy. Within Julia’s interview she appeared frustrated by this, in that she could have supported Barry better, if he would have talked to her;

“Y*eah, but that's I think that's based on the fact that he doesn't always talk…*.

*“Why didn't you tell me about last week, we could have had a better week. If, if you’d told me that on Monday, or on Tuesda*y”, *It's it is a difficult one,”* 1.9

Julia shares that team dynamics may impact on the function of mentalising. She refers to the fact that despite mentalising and gaining an understanding of Barry’s behaviour, she cannot always act on this because of the hierarchy or the dynamics with some members of staff. It demonstrates that despite being able to mentalise and it being a prominent part of her work, sometimes she might not be able to implement actions based on it;

“*I wouldn't say stop me from mentalising. It might stop me from acting, something that may be or has been on occasions where I've felt, now's not the time for me to say anything or to give Barry the direction, because it might be that he's been told to do something..”* 2.3

Julia goes on to share that there might be different roles within a school, and that staff may have different aims for CYP. Sometimes this may cause a tension and means that she may need to wait until the time is right to advocate for a CYP.

This might also reflect that Julia is mentalising about members of staff that she works with, and that there may also be a strategic element to how she responds to Barry. This may be in reference to the teacher’s mental state that she has deduced, or some recognition of what's a priority in a given situation, possibly for the teacher and also for Barry.

**Practices associated with mentalising**

This overarching category relates to the range of different approaches that Julia uses after she has mentalised with Barry. These may centre on Barry, supporting his needs and finding the right way to approach a situation.

The subcategory of nurture refers to nurture in a broad sense, rather than discussing specific examples, Julia shares how this is part of her role and that this is different to the role of the teacher;

*“Because again, it's the nurturing, it's the emotional side that we give. Teachers don't often have the time to give*.” 2.4

Reassurance appeared to be used in response to situations where Barry was heightened or dysregulated;

*“So I just, I just held him, wrapped my arms around gently and said in his ear, it's me, it’s me.*”1.5

Other subthemes in this category include humour, which is prominent in Julia’s approach with Barry and appears to work well to diffuse situations;

*“Whereas if it's me, I kind of, I don't know, I tend to try and turn everything into something that's quite jokey. Where he's concerned, you know.” 1.6*

Time to calm is another practice used by Julia to support Barry after mentalising with him;

*“I take him into the library. And there's a tunnel in there. So he lays in there on his back with his feet up. Yeah. I just say to him, you can stop here until you're ready today. Yeah, and then I can either stop with you, or I'll go back to class and you can just come in and give me a shout when you're ready.” 1.5*

The restorative conversationssubcategory shares that when Barry can talk things through and ‘open up’, this can be supportive;

*“That's all it takes. And then he will come and he'll say, Can I have a word outside? And then he’ll tell me whatever it is that that's happened.” 1.5*

**Impact connected to the process of mentalising**

This overarching category illustrates how Julia considers the impact that happens after mentalising and a strategy or practice has been implemented. The subcategory of positive change in the child is a prominent subcategory, this relates to the fact that Julia and other staff have seen a positive change in Barry since she has worked with him;

*“And he now no longer throws chairs. He's slowly learning to control his emotions and do the right thing.” 1.1*

*“But everybody says they've seen a difference in him since I've joined, which for me is, you know, is something I want to do.” 1.5*

Julia references the wider impact that comes from mentalising with and supporting Barry. She shares that through her support of Barry (the nurturing role), and him making a positive change, the teachers are then able to teach the class and focus on the academic side of school. This references the separate way that Julia sees support staff and teachers in school;

*“They've got to get these children to ARE (age related expectation), and that is their focus and that is their job. Whereas for me, it's not my job. I think schools that don't have TAs, I don't know how they nurture because teachers don't have time to, they do (it) but they don't have the time to focus on it…..My role is to support the academic side of it by taking on more of the nurturing side.” 2.4*

(For this stage of the analysis see appendix 6)

***4.3.3. Categorical form***

I decided to focus on two short extracts for Julia and two linguistic features within these extracts. These were the use of phrases relating to mental processes and de-intensifiers (see full extract in appendix 13).

Julia uses a lot of words to express her efforts to access what Barry might be thinking - *thought, see, think ‘In his eyes’ ‘ I can see’.* Julia makes the effort to see things how Barry might see things and uses this to interpret his behaviour. This demonstrates how Julia is often working to deduce what Barry is thinking and feeling. Later in the extract, Julia speaks in Barry’s voice - she alters the tone and pitch of her voice to share what he said. This also could be emblematic to signify what Barry might say. This might be one of the ways Julia makes sense of Barry’s behaviour and shows the effort made to mentalise with Barry. This appears to be a prominent feature of her work.

Within a different selected extract, Julia uses intensifiers and de intensifiers. The phrase ‘*Bit of a major flip out’* is possibly inconsistent with the opposite nature of the words, ‘bit of’ and ‘major’. I interpret that this might be used because Julia finds it hard to find the balance between sharing what happened, but still wanting to advocate for Barry and share the behaviour was not that challenging. This interpretation could also be supported by the use of the phrase, “*He didn’t throw anything*”, which again might have been said in order to show it was not as bad as it could be, or has been in the past. Within the same move, Julia goes on to use intensifiers to describe just how much progress Barry has made, *“I was so proud*” and *“Absolute, model student*”. This might be shared at this point to balance out what Julia has shared about Barry having a *‘flip out*’. Perhaps Julia wants people to know how much progress Barry has made. Her tone of voice changes at this point (when describing her pride in Barry), and she laughs and smiles. I interpret this to suggest that Julia is proud of Barry, and she wants people to know that in her role as his advocate, there also appears to be genuine warmth and emotion from Julia towards Barry. Julia has insights around what Barry is thinking and feeling, alongside what he might be going through at home and from this she responds by advocating for him, working to support him and helping others to understand him.

***4.3.4******. Identity positioning***

Within her narratives Julia uses her Sjuzet to position herself as someone with life experiences and professional experience. She shares how these experiences are useful to her in her role;

*“I’ve always worked with children like that.”* (in relation to professional role). 1.1

*“Maybe because for the last 10 years, I have worked with difficult children. It's just I pick my battles.” 2.3*

The way Julia positions herself in relation to adversity, is that she has learnt from it and uses it in her daily work to empathise with CYP;

*“for example, when Barry says, oh, what would you know? I can actually say to him, Well, actually, I was in that position myself. And I do know how it feels.” ( in relation to childhood experience)1.4*

Further drawing on her life and professional experience, Julia positions herself as hard working and resilient. She has overcome adversity and she has worked hard to get to where she is today;

*“I've been through, you know, the ups and downs of not so good childhood myself, and perhaps not so good teenage years because, obviously, I didn't do all the partying because I couldn't afford to, you know, bills to pay. And so yeah, so I think starting work as well at such an early age makes you a more rounded person.” 2.5*

Julia’s identity position suggests that she considers her life and professional experience to support her to be able to mentalise. She also identifies with Barry’s experiences and this might support her in her interpretations of how he might feel and to empathise.

Through the use of her Sjuzet, Julia positions herself as working with the team at school. However, sometimes she feels her role is different to the teaching staff and that it is to nurture CYP, as opposed to focussing on academic work. These two different ways of viewing the purpose of education may be juxtaposed, which positions Julia as separate to teaching staff at times. Julia also references how team dynamics may impact on how she may respond to her insights from mentalising. This may mean that although she is able to mentalise and this process is functioning, she may not be able to respond to it and therefore it cannot have an impact at that time.

Julia positions herself as ‘*not particularly maternal*’ (1.2). However, despite this, at times she shows a nurturing side where she is physically affectionate with Barry and shares how she might be perceived as ‘*family’* to him.

(For notes pertaining to this stage of the analysis see appendix 3)

**Chapter 5. Discussion**

**5.0 Overview**

This chapter will consider how the findings from my analysis link to my research question;

**How does mentalising appear and function in the relationship between ‘key adults’ and children with SEMH needs?**

Firstly, I will consider whether mentalising is a feature of the work of the key adults and how it appears and functions. Then I will consider what educational discourses and current approaches mentalising may align with. Next, I will explore the impact associated with mentalising, and what theories and research might explain its efficacy in the relationship between key adults and CYP with SEMH needs. Subsequently, I will consider what may facilitate or hinder the use of this process. I will then consider what the implications are for schools and EPs for supporting key adults and the young people that they work with. Finally, I will discuss the quality and limitations of the research and I will make some recommendations for future research.

**5.1 How does mentalising appear and function in the key adult role?**

The main aim of my research was to explore how mentalising appears and functions in the role of the key adult, supporting a young person with SEMH needs. This was done through a Narrative Orientated Inquiry (Hiles and Cermack, 2008).

The findings within the analysis section showed that mentalising appeared to be an important part of the work that key adults do, when working with CYP with SEMH needs. The examples of mentalising shared and reflected on by the participants, demonstrated that situations were happening daily that required mentalising to gain a greater understanding of what a CYP might be thinking and feeling, so that they could respond to them appropriately.

There appeared to be a pattern to key adults’ work where they would mentalise to interpret what a CYP was thinking and feeling. Key adults did this through their body language, observable behaviours and knowing them well. From this, they implemented a strategy to support the need that they had interpreted. Each participant was flexible in the strategies used, suggesting that they did not use a ‘blanket approach’ for every emotion and situation, but chose a way to support a CYP based on their knowledge of the child and the context. A tentative link could be made that this flexibility was demonstrative of how they interpreted the behaviour through the process of mentalising. This is consistent with research that focussed on a mother’s relationships with their child, whereupon mothers operationalised their mentalising in the behaviour they showed to their child after they had mentalised (Sharp, Fonagy and Goodyear, 2006).

In terms of thinking about how mentalising functions, all the participants shared how it was often done in the moment with the child. However, two of the participants shared that it was also done when they were apart from the child and at home. This suggests that mentalising functions in different time frames. This view is supported by Allen (2006) who suggests that mentalising does happen in different time frames including the past, present and the future. Mentalising in different time frames and in their own time away from work, suggests a level of commitment from the key adults in my research, who appear to strive to support and understand the inner experience of the CYP they work with.

At times, mentalising appeared to serve a predictive function. Allen (2006) states that this hindsight around a CYP can be converted into foresight, suggesting knowledge of the past can be used to anticipate the future. This appeared to happen for Betty and Grace, who would often anticipate a response to a piece of work, and adapt it in order to help their key child succeed and to avoid them becoming dysregulated. Consistent with Allen’s (2006) view, the key adults in this study did appear to mentalise across different time frames including consideration of the future. Allen (2006) suggests that a child’s history may also be used when mentalising. This is an interesting consideration, as all participants referenced the background and past trauma of the CYP they worked with, appearing to have an extensive knowledge about them. This may suggest they are also using this knowledge when interpreting mental states and behaviour. Research shared in the literature review such as Turner and Gulliford’s (2020) and Broomhead‘s (2013), may also support the findings that knowing a child’s background can help with empathy, mentalising and reflection about a child and their behaviour.

Allen (2006) also argues that mentalising can be conscious or unconscious. For my research, participants were asked to reflect upon times when they had mentalised. When I considered their responses, it appears that quite often they were consciously working to understand what was happening for the CYP. Prior to my research, they may not have labelled this process of deliberate thinking about a child’s thinking and feelings as mentalising. However, I interpret that many of the examples shared in this research demonstrated conscious mentalising.

Using the methodology that I have, it would be hard to fully explore unconscious mentalising and this may require a different approach, both at the data collection and analysis phase. However, within their narratives, all participants referenced the fact that this is a natural process that they did not have training for. This may suggest some of the mentalising that they do is perhaps effortless or unconscious, perhaps referring to it as natural, could imply that they do not consciously have to put this process into practice. However, when the behaviours were more challenging to interpret, this is when the more deliberate, conscious mentalising appeared to have occurred.

The process of mentalising, does seem to have been a prominent part of the work of the key adults in my research. From the accounts shared by participants, it seems to be apparent in many contexts. These contexts include the classroom to support learning, interactions out on the playground, school trips, and with more significant incidents where the CYP was in crisis and dysregulated.

**5.2 The relationship between empathy and mentalising.**

A finding of my research is that sometimes the functioning of mentalising and empathy are interwoven, and this can be hard to unpick. Sometimes, especially in initial interviews, when asked to give examples of when they have mentalised or what has helped them to do this, participants shared they had considered what it was like ‘to be in their shoes’ or to ‘see through their eyes’. This is consistent with the research and view of Swan and Riley (2012), who assert that mentalising is the same as cognitive empathy. However, the participants' stories suggested that perhaps mentalising was used to interpret the underlying emotions or thought behind a behaviour. Then as part of this, they thought about how it might feel for a CYP, which perhaps impacted on the strategy that they chose to support them with. I tentatively suggest that, mentalising could be utilised without empathy, for example, a key adult could interpret someone’s mental states from their behaviour. However, it is perhaps the action afterwards, that shows they have that understanding of what that mental state might feel like, and that they have empathy. This view is supported by Decety and Jackson (2004), who state that although mentalising and empathy both involve an understanding of another’s mental state, the feeling of empathy also needs to have the sharing of the emotional experience. Linking to the research in the literature review, empathy is seen as a multifaceted, complex intersubjective experience (Mercer and Reynolds, 2002) and perhaps my research goes further to suggest that mentalising can be seen as one aspect of this phenomenon. Contrary to this, Schwarzer, Nolte, Fonagy and Gingelmaier (2022), state that mentalising covers a broad range of processes that occur in the mind and empathy is part of this.

Decety and Jackson, (2004) argue that questions around the overlapping of empathy and mentalising, remain a yet to be resolved theoretical matter. My research does not claim to have resolved that issue, but further highlights the interwoven nature of these concepts. Having a greater understanding of the link between these intersubjective processes may help to support and facilitate them when they are not apparent, which may facilitate positive relationships.

**5.3 How does mentalising and its associated practices fit with current educational discourses and research?**

Within current educational discourses and research, relational approaches to supporting CYP are gathering momentum. Relational approaches centre on the relationships between people and there is an importance placed on the interpersonal, as opposed to intrapersonal dynamics (Gus et al., 2017). The work of Michael & Frederickson (2013), Hill, (1997) Lloyd and O’Regan, (1999), Hattie (2009), McLaughlin and Clarke (2010) all demonstrate that good relationships are key to improved outcomes for CYP. The voice of the key adults in this study demonstrates that relationships are a priority in their work with CYP, and that through this relationship there can be positive change (as shared in their narratives).

The pattern of support given after mentalising appears to be consistent with current practices used in schools across the UK, such as Emotion Coaching (Gottman, Katz, and Hooven, 1996) and the PACE approach (Golding and Hughes, 2012). Approaches used by the different participants echo those suggested in the PACE approach (Golding and Hughes, 2012) whereby humour is used to support the CYP (Playfulness), they are accepted and treated with respect and positivity (Acceptance), they are listened to without judgement (Curiosity), and an empathetic approach is used in their support (Empathy). The PACE approach was originally developed to support the relationships and parenting of children who are looked after, and those who have experienced trauma, however it is now being more widely used in the education system to support CYP (Goulding and Hughes, 2012). Evidence of the PACE approach is visible to varying degrees, in the *‘practices associated with mentalising’* category of the Categorical Content analysis*.* For example, humour appears to be a big part of Julia’s work.

Goulding and Hughes (2012) state that children who have been exposed to trauma need to be supported in a specific way to help them to feel safe, and that the aspects of PACE are important to feeling secure and to supporting child development. It is important to note that the children discussed in this study had a range of different backgrounds, which included two of the CYP being Looked After and all the CYP experiencing adverse events. Perhaps without realising, aspects of the PACE approach were used by the participants as in their experience (professionally and personally), the processes involved with PACE had led to good relationships and feelings of security being fostered in the children that they worked with. It could be suggested that being curious may support the function of mentalising, as being open to different interpretations of behaviour could help to try and find the best explanation and therefore, best approach to support the CYP. Also, another tentative link could be drawn that perhaps mentalising and understanding a motivation or reason behind a behaviour, may also support acceptance and empathy.

Other aspects of participants’ work seemed compatible with Emotion Coaching. Emotion coaching is an approach to dialogue with children when they are experiencing heightened emotions, which aims to support more effective responses to the emotions (Gottman, Katz, and Hooven, 1996). Working with the child empathetically, their emotions are labelled and validated. This can be said to promote a feeling of security which can help them to be calm and regulated (Gottman, Katz, and Hooven, 1996). ‘*Restorative conversations*’ were a prominent subcategory within the Categorical Content aspect of the analysis for all participants. This theme encompassed many aspects of the Emotion Coaching approach, such as being empathetic, labelling emotions, supporting the CYP to feel heard and understood, and then problem solving with the CYP around next steps.

Emotion coaching has an evidence base that might be consistent with some of the positive change and increased emotional regulation that was described by participants in my research (for Jenny, Belinda and Barry). It may help to further reinforce why some of the practices associated with mentalising were effective in instigating change. Gottman, Katz, and Hooven’s (1996) research found that children who were Emotion Coached in times of dysregulation, showed an increase in the ability to regulate, showed more self-soothing behaviour, better attention, and quicker recovery from stress. This led to children achieving more academically, being more popular with peers, having fewer challenging behaviours and being more stable emotionally.

Within the interviews, participants were asked to consider what they thought the impact of mentalising was. Through their narratives the main emergent findings were that it led to reduced behavioural incidences and a positive change in the child, in that they could regulate more quickly, which has some similarities to Gottman, Katz and Hooven’s (1996) research. Grace also referenced improved academic performance and Julia and Betty shared improved access to learning based activities.

Avery, Deppeler, Galvin, Skouteris Galarce and Morris’s (2022) paper suggests that there is a need to change educational paradigms towards a relational approach, that encompasses mutuality, and opportunities that are equitable for all CYP. In their research, they suggest that the use of disciplinary practices, that are punitive, harms relationships. This may lead to CYP feeling disconnected from school, and may further embed behaviour that challenges others.

A recent Department for Education (DfE) publication, Behaviour in Schools (2022) has a focus on creating behaviour policies whereby, *“All headteachers should take responsibility for implementing measures to secure acceptable standards of behaviour. They should ensure the school’s approach to behaviour meets the following national minimum expectation.”* (DFE, 2022, p. 6*).* Within this DfE document, there is no mention of relational practice, and the document has a focus on ensuring standards of behaviour. From this viewpoint, it may be harder for schools to take a relational approach, as this may go against the rhetoric of the current government.

**5.4. Why might mentalising be a useful process in supporting young people with SEMH needs?**

When searching the literature to explore the impact of mentalising on children, much of the published literature centres on the mother and child relationship and links to Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1958). Attachment theory considers the importance of early relationships with a primary caregiver and how this affects social, emotional and cognitive development (Bowlby, 1958). Through this relationship, a child can have a safe, secure base to explore the world around them.

The literature around attachment theory can be viewed as relevant to my research, as the purpose of a key adult is often to provide an additional attachment figure, and to support a sense of security for children in schools (Bomber, 2008).

Bergin and Bergin (2009) share that an attachment can be seen as a relationship that has formed as a result of many interactions between a specific adult and a child and this is not an inborn trait. Therefore, this may be a child and their parents, or a child and an adult in school. The key adults in my research appear to have had many specific interactions with their key child which spanned over the course of time, this in turn may have allowed for an attachment relationship to form. It could be suggested from the narratives shared, that mentalising was part of these interactions. Through my analysis, I did interpret that the relationships appeared to be secure, and that the key adults' support seemed to be important to the CYP being calm and regulated. It could be argued that mentalising might be one of the ways that key adults can work towards building a positive, secure relationship. This in turn impacts on the CYP socially, emotionally and academically and therefore on the wider school.

This idea of mentalising leading to a secure relationship, can be further supported by the literature around mothers mentalising with their children effectively and this leading to secure relationships (Slade et al., 2005; Meins, Fernyhough, Fradley, and Tuckey, 2001). The relationship between mothers' insightfulness and the security of attachment with their infant has been studied by Koren Karie, Oppenheim, Dolev, Sher Etzion-Carasso (2002). Insightfulness and mentalising could be seen as interlinked, as insightfulness encompasses considering underlying behaviours and emotional experiences, as well as a mother acting in a child-focussed manner. Koren Karie, et al. (2002) share that this insightfulness is an antecedent for secure attachment. Linked to my research, this may suggest that the key adult being able to be insightful, or mentalising with CYP, is perhaps key to forming a trusting and secure relationship. Koren Karie et al.’s (2002) research also suggests that this relationship will need to be built over time.

Fonagy, Steele, Steele, Higgitt and Target’s (1994) research also shares that mentalising has another function in the parent child relationship. Their research highlighted that parents who mentalise accurately with their children, provide them with an environment that supports them to have better coping strategies. This could be consistent with the findings of my research, in that in all narratives, the participants shared that they mentalised with their CYP daily and that this had led to positive change in behaviour, and the CYP being regulated more frequently. Fonagy, Tremlow and Sacco (2002) share that when caregivers at home and in school respond to children’s signals, this then helps the signals given by the child to acquire meaning for them, this in turn is internalised as part of their self-regulation. The narratives shared by participants demonstrated that this did appear to be occurring, that is reading the mental states of their key children accurately, helped them to understand their emotions better (the child) and therefore cope with them more easily over time. These ideas can also be said to be supported by key foundational theories, such as Bion’s idea of containment (1962), whereby a parent absorbs the emotional state of their child, supporting them to have a better understanding of it. Klein (1958) suggests that from a caregiver working to contain young child’s emotions, that over time, the child can become better at managing its own internal states. Therefore, they will have less need to externalise them.

Research in the area of attachment theory highlights the link between mentalising, forming secure relationships and the positive impact that this can have on emotional regulation.

**5.5. The role of ‘mothering’ and the key adult. How does this support mentalising and are these roles valued in the educational sector?**

A prominent theme identified that supports mentalising (in particular by two participants and somewhat for one participant), was their experience of being a mother and what that brought to the role of being a key adult. For one participant, this gave them resilience and helped them to read and respond to situations (Betty). For another it appeared that they utilised the skills that they used as a mother, such as nurture and comfort, and thinking about how their own child would feel (Grace). For Julia, she reflected on her experience of being mothered and that it made her want to be different with her own child. This was not directly referenced in relation to being drawn upon to support her role in school, but in that her challenging childhood experiences helped her to empathise. All the participants had experience of being mothers which they shared in the interviews, despite not being asked about this. It could be suggested that this was something important to them, both in their personal and professional identity. Possibly the experience of being attuned to, and mentalising with their own child, could be said to have helped them to know how to do this. These parallels between the role of a teaching assistant (TA) and a mother were also themes identified in the work of Barkham (2008). Barkham (2008), conducted a piece of research into the role of Teaching Assistants (TAs) who talked at length about the children they worked with and also their own children. In Barkham’s research and my research, being a mother and the role of a key adult, draw on a similar skill set.

This research did not set out to highlight the link between key adults in schools and being a mother, or the gendered notions around this. Within this discussion, I have drawn on literature around attachment and a lot of my wider reading has focused on the mother and child dyad. This may again go on to reinforce the gendered assumptions around women’s work with children.

The participants in my research appeared to link the role of motherhood with the role of being a key adult in a primary school. Within the literature (Page, 2018; Barkham, 2008; Miller, 1996) there is some evidence to suggest that the roles of a TA, key adult or those adults that do a pastoral role, are undervalued in education. Miller (1996) puts forward an argument as to why this undervaluing may occur. She suggests that there is a portrayal of women in education, which is influenced by views such as, “*Women who work with children do so out of ‘‘natural’’ inclinations and needs.*” (Miller, 1996, p. 99).

Miller (1996) contends that teachers of young children have been romanticised as a "*loving mother,"* and that the concept of teaching as work has been confused since the nineteenth century. This is because there is no need for training if a teacher's tasks and characteristics are the same as what a good mother can accomplish intuitively for her children. Miller’s provocative arguments that challenge these assumptions, may align with some of the findings from the participants in my research who suggest that they have not had formal training for the role they find themselves in. In particular, two participants drew on their ‘mothering’ skills and their experiences of being a mother and these themes appeared across all of their narratives.

Miller (1996) also mentions that the low salary of teaching assistants, may imply that their work is not real work because it is, “*only a step away from what mothers do willingly for nothing, simply because it is in their nature.”* (p. 101–102). The pay of the participants was not referenced in their narratives. However, the disparity between the pay of teaching assistants and teachers cannot be overlooked, and this goes on to reinforce the view that the work done by teaching assistants is less skilled or valuable. These ideas shared by Miller (1996) may also relate to the "maternal wall" which refers to the various forms of discrimination and stereotypes faced by mothers in the workplace, that may account for differences in pay. O’Reilly (2021) shares that while women have made gains in salaries in the past thirty years, mothers have not. This may go further to highlight the discrimination that may occur against mothers.

Barkham (2008) suggests that TA's work may not be valued because it can be seen as ‘women’s work’ and a continuation of the historic roles of women, such as housewife and mother. This view can mean that the school community may deny the voice of TAs in decision making. Barkham (2008) suggests their views are not often heard among others in the educational community who hold more power. Drawing back to my research, the participants in this study did not talk about feeling undervalued or not heard. However, within two of the participants' narratives, there was reference to the hierarchy and power structures within school which suggested that sometimes it might be harder to make their voice heard if it would, *‘insult maybe I don't know, to their professionalism*’ (Betty 2.4, when discussing why it might be hard to share how best to support a CYP with a class teacher). Julia references the different roles of staff in school and how these may have an embedded hierarchy within them - teachers work on the education, and TAs work on the nurture. This could link to literature, such as the work of Page (2018), who suggests that there are myths within education about caring being less important than cognition.

I hope that my research demonstrates the high level of skill and complexity that is involved in being a key adult for a CYP with SEMH needs, also that being a mother, or parent, may bring relevant applicable experience that should be valued.

In more recent research, Rogoff et al. (2021) have considered that mentalising ability may be on a spectrum from those who have deficits in mentalising function, to those who are expert mentalisers. Those in the ‘expert’ group have been those who are trained psychotherapists and ‘mind minded mothers’ (Allen, Fonagy and Bateman, 2008). This may go further to highlight the value that being a parent may bring to being able to mentalise about children and therefore supporting CYP.

In an earlier section, when considering that mentalising happens in different time frames, staff shared that they thought about a CYP’s inner experiences at home in their own time. This also demonstrates a level of commitment, which could be something that is overlooked and undervalued in the role of the key adult.

Building on this further, when thinking about the CYP they worked with, two participants shared emotional responses, and perhaps emotional involvement with them. This made me consider the impact of their work on their emotional wellbeing. Greenhalgh (1994) shares that working with children who are experiencing intense emotions, may leave the adults feeling these difficult emotions, as they are ‘pushed’ into the member of staff. It also needs to be considered that daily and regular emotional events can have an impact on staff wellbeing (Split, Koomen and Thijs, 2011). My research may go further to highlight the unseen challenges that key adults face as they work with CYP with SEMH needs, which I hope further highlights that this role should be valued within the education system.

Extreme, difficult and intense feelings were not frequently mentioned within my research. However, the time and design of my research may have impacted on this aspect of the findings. I interviewed key adults who had worked with their key child frequently for at least two terms, which meant they had an established relationship. At the point of our interviews, the participants were mainly reflecting on their work and the progress that the CYP had made across the academic year. During the interviews, all participants presented as calm and positive. It would be interesting to consider if their emotional stress would have been higher if the interviews had been conducted at a more turbulent time in their relationship.

**5.6 Factors that enable or disable mentalisation within the educational system.**

Across the participants' narratives and particularly in Grace’s, teamwork and team dynamics were seen as a factor that could support mentalising. When this was unpicked further, it appeared that containment and support from staff after challenging incidents was supportive in helping her to be able to feel supported and be able to mentalise again. It also appeared that *thinking together* and having similar values, helped staff to feel confident to act on their interpretations of the CYP’s behaviour (Betty). Participants also shared how there were times, possibly in this role or in other previous roles, when they were not able to act on the mentalising that they had done, based on team dynamics (Julia and Betty). Linking this to other research, Tremlow et al. (2005b), state that social systems require support to be reflective and examine the mental states of the self and other. Tremlow et al. (2002) state that a school should be like a securely attached family. A secure system recognises the emotional state of those in it, is open and tolerant of dysregulation, and able to implement flexible communication patterns. This contrasts to insecure systems, where communication is imbalanced and there are minimal opportunities for self-expression and recognising emotions.

Tremlow et al. (2017) share that schools should take proactive steps to prevent staff from going into prementalising modes (a state where you are unable to mentalise). Non mentalising systems can be said to prevent higher order cognition, and may force staff into prementalising modes, as mentalising is very suggestable to cues in the environment (Tremlow et al., 2017). In their paper Tremlow et al. (2017) suggest that staff who are faced with affect driven, anxiety provoking situations, need support to maintain their capacity to mentalise. They share that as mentalising is a highly interactional process, it needs a compassionate environment to support it. It appears that this compassionate environment was particularly evident for one participant. The findings of the wider research (Tremlow et al., 2002; 2005b; Tremlow, Fonagy, Campbell and Sacco, 2017) support the findings shared by the participants that the systems around them affect their ability to mentalise.

At times, it could be suggested that a school system’s culture did appear in participants' narratives. For example, when describing a child *‘learning from a mistake*’, it is interesting to consider, whether this was the participant’s view of a mistake or the school's view of a mistake. It is a pertinent question whether at times the climate, or culture, of the school may come into contact with the practice of mentalisation, and impact it in a way which challenges the key adult. This may cause tension for the key adult as they try to mediate between the child's needs and the expectations of the system. I consider the *categorical form* aspect of the analysis to demonstrate some findings that show how key adults do mediate and advocate for the CYP they work with, in the language they use when talking about them. For example, the use of de-intensifiers when talking about certain instances may be an attempt to frame situations in a way which would be acceptable in the school system. Another function of this may be to try to find a way to connect the different ways of thinking about a child and their behaviour, that they have done through mentalising, with others.

When considering the findings that participants shared around what hindered their ability to mentalise, two of the participants stated it was when their key child had hurt others. One participant also shared that they had been unable to mentalise when an allegation had been made against them. Tremlow et al. (2017) share that mentalising may fail in high stress situations and that people may function in a prementalising mode, where they find it hard to consider alternative perspectives.

Within the foster care and social care sector, false allegations can be seen as stressful, traumatic events (Nesmith, 2020). Wilson, Sinclair and Gibs (2000) shared that for foster parents this was the most stressful event that could happen. Further to this, Plumridge and Sebba (2016) found this was the most likely cause for a relationship, and therefore placement, breakdown in foster care. From this a tentative link can be drawn, that when an allegation is made, this is highly stressful for key adults, and it may impact on the relationship and make it harder for them to mentalise. Nesmith’s (2020) study around false accusations and long-term foster placements highlighted that peer support from other foster carers and social workers, supported the relationship and the foster placement. This also links to the support from the system around the key adult, as earlier discussed, and how a supportive, secure system can support mentalising.

Considering other factors that may impact on mentalising, one of the participants who often went to extensive effort to mentalise with the CYP they work with, doesn’t appear to do this when they hurt another child. This might be because when this happens, it is stressful for the key adult as it is perceived as their responsibility to prevent these incidents from happening. Therefore, this might mean they operate in a pre-mentalising mode when their key child hurts someone, due to pressure and stress from the system.

Another explanation could be that when another child is hurt, they need to mentalise with more than one other person. That is, they need to mentalise with the key child, to consider the reason behind their behaviour and they also need to mentalise with the CYP who has been hurt, to consider their feelings and support them. The ability to mentalise with more than one person at once may also be more challenging. This view is supported by Allen (2006) who shares that it is easier to mentalise in a dyad as opposed to mentalising in a group. This may be because schools are social systems that rapidly change and the capacity to mentalise with a group can be stretched (Datler, 2006 as cited in Hover-Reisner, Fustaller and Winiger, 2018). Perhaps when an incident happens and a situation becomes more complex and develops rapidly, the capacity to mentalise with the hurt child (which appeared to happen for one participant), overrode the ability to mentalise with their key child in that instance.

Julia and Betty both referenced that it could be difficult to mentalise when a CYP would not talk to them. I considered this a surprising finding, as often in their work they relied on nonverbal cues to interpret behaviour. Tremlow et al. (2017) reference different non-mentalising states. One of these states is termed ‘teleological mode’, which refers to the fact that the recognition of mental states will only be possible if they occur with a concrete signifier, for example a physical behaviour or a verbal explanation. Perhaps their difficulty to mentalise when their key child will not share verbal information, comes from an interpretation of a mental state or behaviour that they are not sure is accurate. Subsequently, this might hinder them from doing further mentalisation if they do not have this confirmed by a CYP giving them verbal information about their feelings, emotions and behaviours. Therefore, the teleological mode may provide a rationale for why it may be challenging to mentalise without further evidence.

Bateman and Fonagy (2013) share that short-term lapses in mentalisation are typical, and that a quick recovery from breaks in mentalising, indicates ‘robust mentalisation’. It does appear from the instances that participants shared around the breaks in mentalising, that they were able to recover this ability quickly. Only within the false allegation situation, was it more difficult to recover quickly and relied on support from other staff for mentalising to function again. This may be explained by the high level of stress experienced at this point, being above the typical stress levels experienced in daily work.

A theme identified by two participants' narratives was the value that life experience and adversity could bring to the practice of mentalising, and the work of the key adult. This was in terms of making meaning from adverse experiences, learning skills from them, and drawing on them for empathy. Personally, this resonated with me, and I made links to the work of Frankl (1984) in *Man’s Search For Meaning* where he shares his approach to finding meaning from challenging life experiences, and using these in a positive way to help others. I felt that this was echoed in the accounts of participants who used their life experience and personal experiences to empathise and support CYP. As already referenced, there is an overlap between empathy and mentalising, and potentially having challenging life experiences supports empathy with CYP, who may share similar experiences, which in turn may support the function of mentalising.

**5.7 Conclusion**

In summary, mentalising appears to be an important part of the key adult role that occurs in different time frames and different situations. There seems to be a pattern where key adults mentalise and then choose an associated practice to support the CYP. Tentative findings can be drawn (supported by other literature) that mentalising supports a secure relationship to form between a key adult and the CYP they work with, which impacts the CYP and the wider system.

The process of mentalising appears to be supported by the key adults’ professional and personal experience, in particular experience of mothering. Within school, containment, support and having similar values also appeared to support the function of mentalising.

There appeared to be breaks in mentalising and at these times, the process was hindered by stress, and hierarchy and dynamics (meaning actions could not be taken based on interpretations). Lack of verbal information about what CYP were feeling and thinking, to support interpretations, also appeared to prevent or disturb the mentalising process.

I feel an important function of mentalising in the key adult role, is around differentiation of approaches used and inclusion. Without using this level of interpretation to meet their needs, CYP with SEMH needs may be misunderstood, and subsequently sanctions put in place that may have negative consequences for their access to education and further life opportunities.

Furthermore, I assert that another function of mentalising is advocacy for CYP. An advocate can be seen as someone who works to make sure that children’s feelings and wishes are listened to, and that their rights are respected. Due to children with SEMH needs being a group of children that teachers can feel more negatively about including in the classroom (De Boer, Pijl and Minnaert, 2011), these children need a key adult who can advocate for them, promoting their inclusion and supporting others understanding of their behaviour. It appeared that all the participants did this for the CYP they worked with and could describe this explicitly. Further to this, I also interpreted advocacy being evident on more of an unconscious level within different aspects of the analysis (categorical form), whereby the participant used linguistic devices to advocate for CYP. This practice of advocacy after mentalising, can be seen to act on a systemic level that seeks to influence a wider group of people around a CYP. I assert that this is an important function of mentalising, in that it may lead to greater understanding and inclusion of a CYP with SEMH needs.

**5.8. Implications for schools**

Based on the findings of my research, I contend that certain structures should be put in place to embed and facilitate the practice of mentalising in key adults. This will therefore support the CYP they work with to have better access to education.

One of these structures could be planned time to reflect on and talk with other staff members around how they interpret the CYP’s behaviour, and discussions around the right approach to meet their needs. This could be done through supervision or through staff ‘buddying’ systems. This will allow the time and space for key adults to reflect on and make sense of the CYP's needs, so they can better support them.

Further to this, these staff would benefit from support and training to develop ideas and strategies to support CYP. For example, drawing on approaches such as PACE (Golding and Hughes, 2012) or Emotion Coaching (Gottman, Katz, and Hooven, 1996) to support CYP’s social and emotional development. This may be where staff could draw on support from external agencies such as the EP service.

Within school, there are certain hierarchies and power structures which may not always value the work of TAs or key adults (Barkham, 2008). The findings from my research demonstrate that the participants in this study are regularly engaging with complex thought processes in high stress situations. This should be recognised and respected. Furthermore, key adults are often the person in school who know a CYP best, so valuing their opinion around provision and giving them the freedom to act upon their interpretations of behaviour, would help their mentalising to have an impact.

My research also supports Bomber’s (2008) skill set for key adults (including experience working and relating to children with behaviour that challenges others, having a good sense of humour, being resilient, calm, empathetic, resourceful, taking a balanced approach to structure and nurture). Furthermore, considering the voice of young people in research, they share that respect, listening, empathy and personalising the learning, are important for supporting them in school (Pomeroy, 2010, Michael and Frederickson, 2018). These characteristics and ways of being with young people, should be considered by head teachers when writing job adverts and employing someone to work with CYP with SEMH needs. My research also emphasises the importance of life experience, and what that can bring to the role of a key adult. This is something that should not be underestimated, particularly around the experience of parenting.

Although participants shared that they mentalised when they were away from CYP, a further subcategory identified was around the fact that they could not continue to mentalise with their key child, when there was a physical separation from them for an extended period (as they were not around them to interpret their thoughts or behaviours). This is a consideration for schools, as often in busy settings with staff absence, key adults may be taken from their key child to cover a lesson or to support another child (who perhaps is a bigger priority at that point). However, this prevented participants from being able to mentalise and support the CYP. This could have implications for the progress that CYP make, and within my research two of the participants referenced CYP being unsettled, or finding school routines more challenging, without them. Therefore, where possible schools should prioritise the key adult approach to continue to give consistent adult support, and be supported to see the benefits that this approach can have, this might be done through part of the assess, plan do, review cycle.

When reflecting on the level of psychological knowledge of some of my participants, it was interesting to consider that despite it not being referenced in the interviews, I knew that one of the schools my participants worked at had previously received Trauma Informed Schools training. The level of knowledge from my participants appeared to support them to understand the CYP they worked with, for example, one participant referenced the ‘fight or flight response’ and ‘behaviour as communication’. These phrases are now more in the everyday vocabulary of support staff and teachers. This highlighted the value of psychological education in schools. The impact of this may be that staff are better equipped to mentalise and empathise with behaviour that challenges others, when they see this behaviour as communication.

**5.9. Implications for EP practice.**

One function of the EP role is to bridge the gap between theory and practice in schools. This might be within consultations, supervision or in staff training. In the EP role, I feel it is important for practitioners to share psychological knowledge and research that highlights the value of relational practice. Sharing how intersubjective processes, such as mentalising may help to build relationships with young people with SEMH needs and support them, should be more widely shared. Delivering training and supervision to key adults around the value of mentalising and providing time to reflect and mentalise about the CYP they work with, could be a way that promotes understanding and advocacy of CYP.

Interventions of this type have been found to be successful in nursery settings in Vienna (Hover-Reisnera , Fürstallera and Wininger, 2018), and for foster families in the United States of America (Bammens, Adkins and Badger, 2015). In these studies, staff and parents have been encouraged to actively mentalise through group work or reflective diaries and this practice has supported their understanding and relationships. It would be interesting to consider if the positive findings from these studies, could be replicated in UK education settings.

Another implication may be in terms of managing expectations around how quickly implementing a key adult approach may take to have an impact. Expectations for school staff may need to be managed. It needs to be considered that there will be a time before the key adult knows the CYP well, and before they can establish a secure relationship which will have a positive impact. An EP may need to sensitively encourage staff to persevere and that it is only through daily, consistent work, support and mentalising with a child, that a relationship can be established. Making recommendations around allowing key adults time to get to know the child and their background, may also be helpful in supporting them to mentalise and through this (and other strategies), build a relationship.

Another facet of the EP role is to support CYP who are at risk of permanent exclusion, by finding a collaborative way to move forward and support them. One of the ways an EP can use the findings from my research is, where possible, to make sure the voice of the key adult is heard and built upon within consultations and by helping them to share their knowledge and advocacy of the CYP they work with. There was evidence of the key adult encouraging others to mentalise about the CYP, this was with other pupils in the class and other adults in school (particularly when a child was in crisis). The encouragement of this wider mentalising practice, is something else that can be fostered within consultations by an EP, for example, encouraging school staff or parents within consultations to think about the thoughts and motivations of others, this might be the child or each other.

**5.10. Quality of research and limitations.**

Drawing back to Tracy’s (2010) Eight Big Tent Criteria for Quality in Qualitative Research, I will now consider the quality in my research. As I engaged in my interviews and the subsequent analysis, I strongly felt that this area of research was a ‘Worthy Topic’. One of the reasons for this was that mentalising has not been explored in this way, in this sector, before and little is known about this phenomenon in the relationship explored in my research.

I also feel my piece of research is valuable in the current context with increased rates of exclusions for CYP with SEMH needs. Mentalising appeared (from participants’ interpretations and mine), to have a positive impact on the child and the system around the child. From this, it may be seen as a process that can support inclusion of CYP with SEMH needs. It is important to consider that the findings in my research are interpretations and this should impact how they are perceived and used. However, it is my hope that this research has highlighted some interesting findings that I hope will prompt further research, exploration, and training for staff.

I tried to ensure ‘Rich Rigour’ within my research by spending an increased amount of time with my participants. I aimed to interview the participants three times each, in the hope that this would lead to a more in depth exploration and well established relationships with the participants. However, the three interviews were only possible for two of the participants as one participant could only be interviewed twice due to illness. Therefore, this could have impacted upon the richness of the data from that participant. The sample size of my research is small, however I believe this was appropriate in the time constraints for an initial exploration in this area.

In the analysis phase, I used a multi-layered process to explore mentalising within the key adult role. I consider NOI (Hiles and Cermack, 2008) to have been a thorough method for exploring the narratives on different levels. The process helped me to draw out overall themes, find categories in narratives, consider linguistic devices used, and think about how a participant positioned themselves within their narrative. Being able to explore all these factors when trying to answer my research question, I feel contributed to the richness of the research. I believe that the method of analysis chosen built ‘credibility’ and added to the rigour of my research by triangulating the different layers of the analysis for each participant, and then between the participants in the discussion.

On reflection, one aspect of the research that may have limited the richness of the picture of mentalising within the education sector, is that I only explored one aspect of this phenomenon. That is the dimension of mentalising about ‘the other’. Whilst there are reflections at times in the narratives about the ‘self’, my research did not set out to explore this facet of mentalising. More research in this area (exploring how the key adult mentalises about themselves), could generate a further richer picture around this process in the education sector.

‘Sincerity’ in research encompasses the consideration of challenges faced. When reflecting on this, it was a tension that the concept of mentalising was new to the participants, and this meant that it took some scaffolding to support them with this concept. Firstly, using examples shared prior to the interview, and then the co-construction approach taken within the interview. It must be questioned whether participants had a full understanding of the concept of mentalising. I would argue that through the use of examples pre interview, and some feedback during the interview, that participants were guided towards a better understanding or recognition of this aspect of relating and thinking. They appeared to become more confident in the examples they shared across the interviews. Perhaps completing more than one interview helped to counter this tension.

Deliberating further and in attempting to be transparent, (as mentioned in the methodology section), the interviews became a co-construction of knowledge around mentalising in the key adult role. On reflection, this approach was different to the semi-structured interview that I had planned, and I am conscious about the amount of dialogue I contributed to this process. However, through this way of engaging in my interviews, I was able to listen and work together with my participants to gain a greater understanding of their experiences. This co-construction of narratives may be appropriate at this very early stage of the research around key adults’ mentalising with CYP.

Another factor which may have impacted the ‘credibility’ of the findings could be the virtual nature of the interviews. Perhaps I may have seen more nonverbal cues, and possibly the participants may have felt more comfortable conducting the interview in person. However, virtual interviews were the participants' choice and I ensured that I met all participants in person first. In terms of feeling comfortable, I would argue that participants did, as our relationship appeared to develop across the course of the interviews. The participants chose to share with me some challenging life events, which suggested that they were comfortable.

Through the process, I tried to demonstrate ‘sincerity’, by being open in my aims and methods through the participant information sheets, the interview process, and the post interview discussions. Linked to this, is the ethical aspect of my research. I carefully planned and subsequently followed my ethics application. I remained true to this by redacting personal information and information that participants wanted to be withdrawn after the interview. Furthermore, I also shared sections of my written analysis with one participant to check that she was comfortable with what I reported in her section of the analysis. I have also shared different excerpts of my analysis procedure in my appendices to aim to be honest and transparent. I have aimed to be self-reflexive at each stage of the process by keeping a diary, which I have shared as a separate appendix (appendix 24).

Furthermore, when considering findings that I am drawing from the research, that mentalising is important in the key adult role, and aiming to be reflective, it is important to note that the focus of the interview was about mentalising, and because of this may have occurred as a prominent theme in their daily work. However, I hoped using the term mentalising, which is a lesser-known term, that the participants were able to reflect on how much they were mentalising with their growing understanding of this concept, without being influenced by the social desirability that may occur with other concepts such as empathy.

I feel that the research has achieved ‘resonance’ and that there may be some tentative transferability across to other primary school settings, as there were some similarities in findings between participants. Tracy (2010) states that this transferability is made by the reader when they feel like the stories shared by the research have some similarities with their situation, and they make connections between the research and their own lives. Therefore, this aspect of the quality of my research will be better judged by others reading it.

This ability to achieve further transferability may have been further strengthened if each of the participants had been from different schools, as I had originally planned. My pilot study participant cancelled at short notice. This meant I had to recruit another participant, and this was done at the school where one participant worked. Having three, different educational settings may have provided further different examples of the key adult role that may have resonated with different readers’ experiences.

In terms of considering its “*significant contribution*” I feel that my piece of research could be argued to be methodologically significant, as it explores a concept which has mainly previously been explored through quantitative methods. I hope it has achieved “*heuristic significance*” (Tracy, 2010), and that it has promoted curiosity that might prompt further research in this area. Also, and importantly in terms of my personal values, I consider that it has achieved “*practical significance*”, as some of the findings can begin to support key adults who work with CYP with SEMH needs, as they learn about the value of mentalising.

I believe that my research has “*meaningful coherence*” by achieving what it was designed to do, which was a preliminary exploration looking at how mentalising appears and functions in the role of the key adult supporting a young person with SEMH needs. My research is small scale, and I feel it has just begun to highlight the importance of further exploration in this field. The discussion section, which was aimed to connect the literature and my research focus, I believe, has helped to strengthen my arguments about why mentalising might be used and is an important process for key adults working with CYP with SEMH needs.

**5.11. Future research**

It is my contention that my research has demonstrated some useful and interesting findings, that have shown value in this area of research. Moving forward, I think it would generate further useful findings if the area of research was explored on a larger scale. This research could investigate further whether mentalising appears and functions in a similar way in other educational settings, and if it is as prominent and impactful in the daily work of other key adults.

My research has highlighted the link between being a mother and the transferable skills that this brings to the role (to the participants in my research). The wider research shared in my literature review and discussion demonstrate my research is heavily influenced by Attachment Theory. Page (2018) argues that attachment theory can be said to simplify and limit models of caregiving to one adult, usually the mother and that this is a culturally specific, western notion. This notion can be said to negate complex social interactions that impact a child’s ability to have and continue meaningful relationships (Page, 2018). Harris (1998) suggests that Attachment Theory may place too much emphasis on the parent’s role in the child’s development and suggests that other relationships, such as those with peers, can also impact upon a young person’s development.

According to Burman (2016), developmental psychology has a significant influence on our lives and how we view ourselves. Its impact may filter into our societal expectations of ourselves or others and may even impact at a policy level. Burman (2016) suggests moving past seeing developmental psychology as ‘*scientific and benign’* and to reflect on its origins. Much of the research into attachment and child development reduced families to a mother and one child, negating the influence of the wider family unit (Burman, 2016). At the time a lot of the research took place, mothers were more widely available ‘research subjects’ as they were at home during the day. Burman (2016) states, ‘*A consequence of the normalised absence and pathologized presence of black, single, lesbian and working-class mothers within developmental psychological research is a homogenisation as well as a normalisation of accounts of mothering and children’s development’* (p.119).This led to dominant assumptions around nuclear familiesbeing the ideal. Burman (2016) states that it is important to address these dominant assumptions and consider the omission of other cultural or historical practices around shared child rearing (including fathers, grandparents, and other mothers in some communities) and what they can add to the field of knowledge in this area. Considering these counter arguments, the research focus could be widened by exploring other models of development such as Crittenden’s Dynamic–Maturational Model of Attachment and Adaptation (2000), which considers relationships within a wider family and cultural context, alongside how these systems may influence a child’s adaptive response and relationships.

Therefore, a further exploration into the adults around a child, both in schools, at home and in the community, and how they mentalise and support the child, could support the research to be possibly less culture and gender specific. This may help to move away from gendered notions of women being carers, and explore whether mentalising as a process honed in personal experience or as a parent.

Drawing on research of Twemlow et al. (2005a; 2005b) and the Peaceful Schools Experiment, I would be interested to consider the impact of working with schools in the UK to create mentalising systems. This may be particularly effective in schools where there are large numbers of children with SEMH needs and CYP who are at risk of Permanent Exclusion. In my research, using the practice of mentalising appeared to generate a range of interpretations that built a close relationship between key adults and CYP and as part of this, led to improved outcomes for the CYP (although I am not suggesting a linear relationship). This could be built upon as part of an intervention that supports inclusion and a more relational approach in UK schools.

My research (by design) wanted to explore an established relationship between a key adult and CYP with SEMH needs. However, at the point of the year where interviews took place (the summer term) relationships were established and participants knew the CYP they worked with well. This was important to my research, however, it would be interesting to consider the role of mentalising in a new relationship and how this could contribute to the formation of a secure relationship, and the support of a CYP.

My research intended to listen to the voice of the key adults, however further information could be gained from CYP about the role that mentalising plays in their relationship. Although it might need to be termed differently to support their understanding, what aspects of their relationship with a key adult were most supportive to them, could be unpicked, to see if mentalising was part of this.

Mentalising is seen as an intersubjective process between people. Fonagy and Target (2002) argue that an attachment relationship is vital to the development of mentalising and reflective functioning in children, and that they learn to mentalise themselves through people doing this with them. It would be interesting to explore how the role of the key adult may support the function and development of mentalising within children. Interventions have been used to begin to support mentalising, specifically metacognition and awareness of emotional regulation strategies (Lombardi et al., 2022). However, exploring whether the process of mentalising develops in a relationship, as opposed to exploring knowledge gained in an intervention (as researched by Lombardi et al., 2022), would be interesting and valuable to understanding more about children’s emotional and social development.

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**Appendices**

**Appendix 1 – Betty interview 1 analysis stage 1, 2 and 5 excerpt**

Key

Sjuzet = underline

Yellow = areas of interest

**Bold and underlined – interviewer**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | My notes and comments as part of analysis |
| **Right so first of all, can you just tell me some general information about your relationship with Belinda** |  |
| 1. General relationship   Right well, Belinda is very Id say she's very, whats the word very attached to a her mum, very attached she's had quite I don't know the ins and outs because I don't need to I just know she's had a lot trauma in her background. And though she is adopted, and struggles to separate herself from her mom she's also quite low ability. And she's now seeing that difference in significantly I'd say now because she's moved from, into year five, and the work as you know, becomes progressively harder. So now the gap between her and peers is becoming wider. And she's now becoming more self aware as well. So basically, that, in nutshell is is what I know about her. She's lovely, really lovely girl. She does get quite anxious. She's on a part time. Oh, she's on a part time timetable as well. And she gets anxious and she shows this in ways like she'll start to become disruptive in class and whistle, and make sounds and genuinely just get up the ante. So she'll want to know what time she's going home. She'll want to know what that what the time is. And then she'll ask you about two minutes later so you can see when it comes to need to home time that the anxiety builds with her. So once she's on task, and she's doing work, it has to be heavily sort of  scaffolded for her and what we tend to try and do is get the work done with it before the others start work and then she can have like a sensory break whilst that like whilst I help with the other children as well. So it's best of both worlds, especially in like maths when there's a couple of them that need that support. I'll take them to a quiet place and do the work and then they'll come back in and they'll have a minute | Acknowledging she doesn’t need to know – respectful.  School language – low ability. Gap widening – focus on academics.  Does get anxious. Recognising that this is a trigger for being disruptive.  Repetition of she – spoken in short sentences is adding emphasis.  Interpreting behaviour as anxiety and it building,  Sharing how the support works in the classroom. |
| **So why did like in terms of your relationship with their How do you get along with each other? How do you feel but you have well tell me about your relationship with her. Do you get on well is it a close relationship?** |  |
| Yeah, I think, I think she trusts me. I think now, Mom, mom, trusts me, which I think is quite important because I think Mom finds it difficult to I mean, I'm okay saying this she does find it difficult leaving Belinda, especially in the beginning of the day, and we have put things in place for that Belinda has her own charts and things like that to sort of encourage you to come in and then gets a prize at the end of the week. I think she knows Belinda knows that I'm very consistent. I always fulfil what I'm saying. I'm going to do so. I will always be at reception in the morning to collect her and I think it's that we have got good. We've built good trust trusting relationship. I think I'm a trusted adult to to Belinda. And she will come to me. Now Belinda doesn't really open up that much. And I don't know whether it's because she doesn't know how to really but she's normally quite honest if she needs to be you know, if we ask her Have you done anything? Or something happened and she will normally tell me but, in terms of trying to unpick things with Belinda it's quite difficult to do that. She’s quite complicated. I don't know whether it's that she hasn't got that capacity to do that, the maturity. To do that, to be able to self-reflect or anything like that. I think that um, I know her, very well. I think that I understand that she finds it hard and she needs that sort of nurturing sort of adult to be there for her as that transition from home to school. I think I've got good understanding of what what she needs, and I always try as well, to communicate with mom as well after, after she's been into school, especially if shes had a tricky morning over that relationship that's with mom as well to say, ‘I know she was upset. It lasted two minutes. It's sorted. She's fine. She's getting on with the work’. And I think that's important as well. Because then it reinforces the relationship between home and school. | Trust is key to the relationship    Sharing her strengths as being consistent and how it has supported Belinda and her mum – always used to add emphasis.  Belinda as not opening up – difficult to unpick/ complicated  Knowing her well supports that relationship – needs nurturing  Understanding her needs and then tailoring her support to this – as well as mums.  Communication supports relationship. |
| **Yeah, definitely. So in terms of the things that you've sort of mentioned there, so it's, it's on to the questions about mentalizing. So this is that sort of ability where you're thinking about a Belinda's thinking and he's thinking about what's going on in her head, and how that might sort of translate into her behaviour. So can you tell me or give me an example about a time when you've mentalized with Belinda?** |  |
| 1. Mentalising or empathy -   Well, it was the other day actually, I don't know whether this just tells me I'm off track here but mom mentioned to me, because we had this we had a situation last week where Mr. X Teacher He was out for the last two days of the week. Yeah, so sir was out anyway, last two days. I was in on Thursday and then I wasn't in on the Friday because at the funeral. So anyway. Belinda was coming in Thursday, Friday, because she wasn't going on the trip that we were all meant to be going on. It was a residential and some of the children didn't have she didn't go and she didn’t go, and I can't remember but, somebody mentioned to me that. ‘Oh, it's mom, mom said that Belinda was due to get star of the week’, sir had said to mum, that Belinda is going to get star of the week. I was told this on the Thursday. So I'm at home anyway, I've forgotten about this. Friday morning. I thought ‘oh my god’. She needs star of the week. And I could have just left it because I wasn’t in on that day. But I thought you know what the impact that that is going to have on that child is massive because mum knows she was going to get it and If she hadn't got it and mum knew and asked her about it. She hadn't got it. And then that would have really sort of put barriers and her barriers would have come up and she just struggled. And so what I did was I was on the A1 and Id left my phone at home because im a I'm an idiot. So I borrowed Steve’s and rung up and said right? You need to make sure that this happens and it happens before the time she goes home because she goes home at this time. Anyway, it all happened and she was absolutely well over the moon, because it was about her resilience of coming into school. So it was establishing that strengthening that sort of belief that we have in her and she's doing fantastic and she's coming in. Actually, over the last couple of days. She came in through the main entrance rather than through the reception with all the other children that came in. So that's progress into how long and I'm I am aware that sometimes, you know, you'll take a step forward and two steps back, you know when you do, but you have to, you have to sort of congratulate the wins don’t you . And if I hadn't done that, I felt awful for one, and then it would have had a knock on effect with mom, and mums trust and Belinda's trust | Example given here is more empathy as she’s not interpreting behaviour more thinking about how she might feel. This highlights the over lap and challenge with researching this concept.  Betty is away from school but still thinks about Belinda – oh my god shares how important she considers something to be for Belinda – needs the certificate or trust will break with Belinda and mum – describes impact as massive. Barriers would have come up. Shows emotional labour of work – always thinking about her.  Story telling – adding details – I was on the A1, Im an idiot – Betty is a great story teller – humour used often.  Dramatic positive praise to share impact of getting certificate.  Shares that progress has been made – congratulate the wins – acknowledging her role in the support and the win for Belinda. |
| **So you were thinking about what it would sort of feel like to be her and you knew the impact of it. Yeah. That's brill. So what about is there a time that you've been together? You know, when you mentioned like the whistling? Yeah. And how you've interpreted that. Can you tell me a bit more about that?** |  |
| 1. Behaviour as communication   I'm quite good at doing this. I think I'm quite good at doing this mentalizing because for one of my son being autistic, high functioning, as it were but, you're always anticipating behaviours, you're always anticipating triggers and you're looking for what might happen in certain situations. So it's like walking in somebody else's shoes, being empathetic, trying to understand their point of view. And actually, that the behaviour is communication. It's nothing else. You know, you're always going to have some sort of behaviour whether it be negative or positive behaviour aren’t you. So from, from the whistling it is usually, it's usually when either she finds something too hard, or she gets to the end of end of her sort of threshold in terms of what she can cope with in a day. And I think it hasn't been happening that often. Lately, and I think it is maybe because we've reduced the length of time she's in school, and she has got that ‘right you starting then and you are finishing then’. Sometimes it happens when like one of us is out of the classroom like if I'm if I'm teaching sometimes I do cover and if I'm teaching then sometimes because she's not got that one to one support full on, then she does sort of start using these distraction techniques, you know what I mean? Just detract from doing the work I think and and because she cope with it. I think that's when the whistling starts. And it is a form of her trying to tell us, but actual Im finding this really hard. | A lot about identity and experience in this episode. Recognition of being good at this role.  Sharing experience of being a mum of SEN child – always add emphasis.  Behaviour as communication – this is threaded throughout Bettys interviews.  Sharing her interpretation of the whistling as finding it hard to cope. ‘I think’ opaqueness of mental states. Links this to behaviour as communication – interpreting what is the behaviour trying to tell us. |
| **Yeah. And what what do you do when she starts so you're interpreting that behaviour? And you notice it like you said the behaviour is communication, then what do you do?** | Using her phrase – behaviour as communication. |
| I ask her if she's alright. Don't tell her off. So, you know, are you alright, is there anything we can do? Or I'll give her something to do. That's nothing to do with the, what she's doing in the class, you know? ‘Why don't you just take that’, you know, that type of thing, get moving. Give her a sensory break, that type of thing. | Shared different approach – this suggests others will tell Belinda off? |
| **And what so you you've mentalized you've then gone in and supported her in that way. And then what's the impact of that?** |  |
| 1. Impact of mentalising   She settles back down then. From that. It is really important that you can do this, I think in a job like mine, because it saves it saves the child getting to a crisis point where they can't cope. And then and then it all ends up in a big mess. Whether it be a meltdown, a physical assault, whatever they do whatever they display, you know. I think if you can anticipate and you can read the signs and understand how that child might be feeling at that time. You can intervene before it gets to a boiling point and bring them back down. And that's what I'm trying to do sort of deescalate things and think actually, and think I know this will really stress someone so out whether it be Belinda or not. But the children that I work with, you know, let's see what we can put in place and let's anticipate what might happen. Whether it be the day before I mean, obviously I'm not got consent with it. But there is another person that I'm working with and I'll just I will just vaguely talk to you about where what we've tried to do is just timetable them, but tell them the next day and say right tomorrow, this is happening. So they've got that understanding and I think really especially when it's something like sports day which is tomorrow, wish us luck with that. Might rain. So we have a sports day tomorrow. So things like that even I mean with Belinda, Belinda wasn't here today. So we were unable to then do that because she she was genuinely poorly because Belinda loves swimming and it was swimming today. Now, she would have been they will Bells on smiling, happy as Larry and I think that has really helped her to come in actually to school so that type of thing that she really enjoyed. And also we do activities sort of at break time with that. If I'm not on duty, I'll sit with her and we will play a game or whatever. She has a colouring, colouring big colouring sheets and stuff like that. So yeah, I've gone off on a tangent. | Importance of this skill in the job – saves it from getting to crisis point.  Without this skill, children can end up in crisis/boiling point/mess (these phrases are very descriptive) provide opposite of what could happen without support.  Bring them back down – a physical return from somewhere – this is a theme across all three interviews.  Shares about working proactively to stop it – betty acknowledges the role that adults can have. |
| **No no that makes sense. And what you what you've said about the impact of basically you need to be good at this skill in your job because the impact of that is stopping things from reaching a crisis point. And that is you're, you're interpreting the behaviour you're putting yourself you know, and you're thinking about what it's like to be them and what might be going on in their head and you interpreting that so that's, that's brilliant. So you will have touched on it a little bit. saying about your life experiences have helped you to be good at this skill. Could you give me a little bit more information on that or anything else that you think helps you to be good at that?** | Summarising and recapping trying to use her words. |
| 1. Life experiences/ motherhood   I think yeah, my life experiences, I’ve had loads of  life experiences and loads of stuff that I've been through. Yeah, I mean, I mean a son with with high functioning autism is hard, hard, hard, hard, because they've got the self awareness. They've got the capacity to learn and you don't really get much help from services, if I'm brutally honest. And but that's not the point. I mean, in terms of me being able to manage a household with two children in, on my own, which I ended up doing because we got divorced, so I was with two boys on my own and being able to then keep a safe household. You have to be able to do that. Because it could end up being critical. You know, we could end up and it did even I when I did and anticipated what was going to happen. I couldn't control other people in there. What they did. So say my oldest son, he might trigger the younger one, to then go to a real high level of sort of danger, you know, within the household and trying to then try to explain to another person, how to do that how to mentalize how to anticipate behaviours, how to empathise, how to understand when they're still growing up themselves. It's very difficult, but I think that I, my ability to do that saved a lot of problems in terms of what could have happened within the house, so it was basically survival. Imagine yourself, I mean, and I've heard this Imagine yourself on a battlefield and you're a soldier and you're anticipating and scanning the environment. That's what it's like to be an autistic mum. You're scanning for all those bombs and everything else that could throw everything off course. And also having the flexibility to be able to say this ain't gonna work for them. And and and it's not a failure. It's just not going to work. You know, I think that's having the understanding that some kids can't cope with that. And you need to then think of doing it doing something a different way or not doing it at all. Like, ‘oh, let's go to fair. Let's Not, let's just not because that is going to be too much. Let's go to blah, blah, blah. No, that isn't gonna work’. So it's having that foresight into things like that, you know? And to do that you have to step into their shoes. And think actually, it's just gonna be too much. Even though, they're not verbally telling you that they can't cope with that, you know, from experience and, you know, from learning about what the triggers are with certain children, you know, what's going to trigger them and you know, what's gonna help, you know, and I think it's having that knowledge and understanding of that child..  Yeah . So I think that has helped me. Also the ability for me to be able to self reflect and think right, I could have done that better. Yeah. Massive. To understand my, my sort of part in things understand that I'm not right all the time | Life experiences support her in this role – using challenging times and making them positive.  Repetition and emphasis through speech. No support from else-where.  Using this skill to survive – sharing personal and potentially difficult experiences. Needing to make things safe. Powerful phrase as home often thought of as safe but needed this skill to be safe – or it could be critical/ dangerous – Betty is getting across the severity of the situation at home. Her ability to anticipate helped her.  Powerful imagery - motherhood as a battlefield/bombs – sharing potentially critical nature of this skill to mentalise at home.  Being flexible is not failing – wants to share her experiences.  Reported speech said in funny voice – humour used as a technique.  Foresight – is this different to mentalising?  Acknowledging that the communication isn’t verbal – you must pick up the signals else where.  Self-reflection and thinking about own actions – the part that is played by adults in children’s education. |
| **Oh, yeah, definitely** | My own response is that betty talks total sense!! |
| And don’t have that ego and pride. That stand in your way of saying I'm wrong. I've messed up. | Who does have this approach? Who has ego and pride- who is this contrasted with. Or is this self-learning. |
| **So going back to Belinda Is there anything in particular that you can spot in her behaviour? That tells you what's going on or you know, helps you to interpret so we've said about the whistling is there any other behaviours that you….** |  |
| 1. Spotting signs   Sometimes winks? Yeah.  When she's not telling truth, **right.** So you'll say,  ‘really is that what you're saying’ and she’ll go (makes winking face) and Ill be like come on…it helps to be a little bit mad | Betty does an impersonation and adds humour to the interview |
| **Definitely, definitely. Thinking, is that any thing within schools so you've got your experience as a mum anything within school that helps you to be able to mentalize?**  Pause from Betty  **And that might that might link on to the next one, which is Is there anything that stops you from being able to do it at all as well?** |  |
| 1. Relationship with teacher   I mean, you know, in our class I've got good relationship with teacher. I think that helps because we work together and we're able to then try and work out, I'm quite patient though me so I think having that unspoken relationship with somebody, the other adult is really important because you can you can sort of go (make gesture or eyes pointing to child) or whatever. Sign language across the thing, and we both know. And I think he never says like, I'll say to him, I'm just gonna take them out. Or I'm just, just for a minute and he never says ‘no your not’. And that could be a barrier. That could be a barrier, times a barrier. Because there's lovely ideas. Oh, if the world only had time, you know, we could, we could sit there. Weaving with the children and talk to them about you know, **as if**! you've not got time. I mean, I put a nurture group in place, which Belinda did come to when she was when she was full time. Or if she comes in for an afternoon she comes in and we do some activities in that but the main thing, I think the main thing I've found is the mutual understanding of the staff. You've got to all sing from the same hymn sheet if you want the school to be nurturing. You want the school to be what is it trauma informed? That old Chestnut, which is which we do do, suppose already to level through thrive. I mean, yeah, that easily. It's time again with that, time and  staffing. I think this from my experience of working in different areas and different schools. I think this school is, you know, it's quite proactive when it comes to, to working with children that need additional support, and to be to be empathetic towards them, rather than just branding them, right. They're just being naughty. You will get that in every school. And that's a barrier you will get people's perceptions of children's behaviour or anybody's behaviour. being naughty and **that has to  be smashed**. And the way to do that is to employ like minded people who have got that empathetic sort of way of thinking. But as you know, schools, you can't do that. look at me Im putting the world to rights now. Because you've all you've got historical staff haven't you that have been there a long time. ‘We've always done it that way, blah, blah, blah’. Some of them are really up for change. Some of them aren't. And, again, you can't control people, places and things. You can manage them out but you can't control. | Asked for what doesn’t help but response shares what does help.  Acknowledging her skills and patience.  Team work and non-verbal communication supports betty to mentalise and act on this. Without this , this could be a barrier.  Acknowledging the pressures of time and it not being an ideal world. Uses humour to do this.   Betty shares her input into supporting a child – ‘I put this in place’  Needing mutual understanding from staff – sing from the same hymn sheet.  Acknowledges this school is quite proactive – acknowledges impact of ‘branding’ and uses the word naughty. Branding is word used for animals – which is interesting.  ‘This has to be smashed’ – betty shares strong opinions on other perceptions of children’s behaviour – shares passion and systemic view around who to employ – then almost puts herself down.  Uses change of voice to describe what someone might say – whose voice is this? It’s the historical staff.  Bettys mantra – you cant control…. |
| **So is there a time when you've been working with Belinda, specifically when you found it hard to think about and interpret her her thinking and her behaviour** |  |
| 1. Harder to menatlise   it's hard when she closes up and she she won't actually she, This is what she does. So when when you ask us something that is quite significant, like you know, why is it that you don't want to come into school? Belinda, she'll go ‘I don’t know’ and she just won't talk about it. And she won't. If you had time to sit with her and maybe go through it, but it would I think with Belinda because the trauma is so deep seated within her. I think it will take a lot of counselling and she Belinda does have that external. So externally, she is also receiving support which is good for Belinda but I think she doesn't, whether she doesn't have the capacity, I don't know but she doesn't seem to want to talk about anything. Feelings wise, emotion wise in terms of why she doesn't want to. But the basic thing I can see is that she struggles to leave her mum and its attachment. That's what I perceive it as that and I think that mom is on board and now mum, is is sort of like Right. That's it Your staying to school. And I think that's made a big difference to belinda. Mom is sort of, everybody's singing from the same hymn sheet and we're all working together and I think that's really important as well. | Physical way to describe behaviour.  Again using a voice  Trauma is deep seated – powerful statement  Acknowledging this might not happen on purpose.  Drawing back to what could be the root of her anxiety – making a hypothesis  Team work is important to betty and singing from the same hymn sheet is a repeated phrase. |
| **Definitely** |  |
| that’s when Ive struggled when she just not prepared to you know, open up about why. Why she's struggling with certain things at school, that they're not the main one with her she never talks about she never gets cross over anything about learning she just distracts with the kicking table, sometimes she'll kick table or whistling, Like ive said just to try and get your attention say, ‘Oh yeah, I'm not Don't, Don't forget me because I'm here’. You know, and sometimes it just takes that acknowledgement, just hand on the table. You know, yeah ‘are you all right’ or whatever. And it's normally it's alright when I'm sat with her,  It's like I say when there's just when there's not, not both of us in there. It can be quite tricky. | Want her to open up to her and feels that this would help.  Comparison to others who might get cross – this is seen as a positive for belinda.  Voices what she thinks belinda is saying – powerful example of trying to add voice to belinda behaviour – like betty almost hears that communication from her behaviour.  Acknowledging Belinda is better when she’s there |
| **Yeah. Yeah, that makes sense. It's sort of one of my last questions. And again, you touched on this a bit earlier. So in your role, you're kind of mentalizing about Belinda. But you also talked about mentalizing about yourself. Do you know like you said about reflecting on things that you've done. And so is there a time when you've reflected on your own response to Belinda and you've thought, mmmm you know, I'm not sure that worked or yes, that worked. Really** well. |  |
| **9.own reflections**  Errmmm (laugh), cant think of any off the top of my head, there will be, there will be |  |
| **it will be it'll come to you in the middle of the night tonight won't it** |  |
| yeah it will be in the back of my brain wont it and it will be there. It will be there somewhere. I suppose sometimes. I mean, like anybody. I don't tend to lose my temper. So that would just be me making it up (hufffffssss) I cant really think of owt. I have to, think about that one. | I don’t loose my temper – comparison to others that do? |
| **Well, yeah, no problem. That's that's really, really helpful. I'm just going to I think I'm going to stop my recording now, I think, because that's the end of my questions. I'm just scanning through my list and just check. Was there anything else? And I think I'll stop that.** |  |
| Post script convo and asked permission to begin recording again. |  |
| Yeah. Okay.   1. Example of mentalising   So, what she tends to do as well is it's Im supporting her and there’s two of us in the classroom, what she'll do is she will, it's like if it's coming up to the home time. So it'd be like, ‘miss what time is it’ (whispers), and she'll be talking to me while sirs talking. So, instead of going, SSSHHHHH I will answer because if I don't, then I know it's not going to stop. She'll keep going because it's that anxiety. It's not because she wants to interrupt what what's going on in classroom. It's because she's got that and that is all she can see. And she's aint gonna focus on anything else until that is sorted in her head. And I know that, so I will say to her, ‘right, five minutes. That's it. Five minutes’. Look, Watch’ show her the watch. And it will be I'll respond to that, rather than just saying ‘shh’ which could be another way of doing it, which wouldn't work very well, because she’d just keep asking you, yeah. It's having that it's having that knowledge. I think, it's having that knowledge of the child and putting yourself in her shoes. She's frightened. She wants to go home. She wants to know when that cut off is. She wants to know when she gets her bag. She wants to know when moms come in, blah, blah, blah. So it's having, maybe we can look at a different thing where we have timer thing at all the sort of end of the school. The School Day,Okay, you've got this. You watch that and when it gets to the bottom, and you're gonna get your bag that might work for I don't know, it might not, but it's worth trying. | Uses voices and expression to give life to the story.  Sharing her interpretation that its anxiety – but is confident in this.  When she shares – its not because she wants to interrupt its as if this is because she’s had to advocate for Belinda.  In her head – an acknowledgement of thoughts/thinking  Shares how other approaches wouldn’t work.  In her shoes – repeated phrase – this is cognitive empathy. Repetition of she – all the things that belinda needs through an interpretation of her behaviour. |
| **I think yeah, I think it sounds like you are recognising her emotions. And that is reassuring. So potentially replacing that with a timer might not be the same for her as you being there and being able to. I mean, it's great to build independence, isn't it but** |  |
| She needs that support, I think  I just need to say, ‘its ok its ok, not long now’ and Ill just do that and she will eventually she'll be alright, but it's quite frequent because I think she knows it's coming because after break time, then she's got time. She's got about an hour when it comes to that last half an hour, she's sort of like that I know. It's nearly home time now. I know. It's nearly home time. And she will ask quite a few times. But I never say ‘shhh’ because I think that actually it gets to that time and she's ready. She's ready to go home. And she knows it's coming. And if she finds, I don’t know, What it is its that relationship with mom, she's meeting mom and she's getting excited. I think she's getting excited about going home or going on holiday. | How her interpretation is then shared in what she does and it works so she repeats this.  I never say – shhhh – who does say shhhh?? |
| **And again, the impact of you say,what would that impact be?** |  |
| She'd settle down then. She'd settle down and I'll always what I'll do is if it she gets over sort of over anxious, as I'll say, ‘right, let's go and get your bag then’. And I'll take her out the classroom we'll get the bag packed, we'll get that sorted and then we'll walk down and just go to reception, even if it's five minutes earlier. It doesn't matter does it for that sort of release of her anxiety. Yeah, I think you know, it's about reading it, isn't it? And responding appropriately on that given occasion. And I think that's what that mentalizing is part of you're looking at a situation from that child's point of view, and you're able to then respond appropriately to it. Bearing their sort of situation in mind. Just pretending that you're walking in their shoes just for a day, you know, just for that minute. How might they be feeling? Why are they feeling like this? If I told them to be quiet, is that appropriate? No, it isn't gonna solve anything. You're not gonna get a good response from them. And you're probably going to get sort of escalated behaviour, then you're going to have problems then, people that, you know, you're going to have responses that are not as good as, you know, if you are patient and you respond in an appropriate way. | Belinda shares what matters is making belinda feel better – other things don’t matter. Child centred.  Reading it – reading and responding.  Bearing their situation in your mind – lots of links to mind/head thinking.  These assertions from betty and short sentences are powerful – this is the way she thinks children should be treated.  Escalation will happen if adults don’t behave like this. |
| **Betty 1 Summary**  Betty’s narrative is one that is very child centred. This is her priority and this sometimes is at contrast to the system. Betty’s ability to mentalise is seen as essential and part of her.  Betty shares her relationship with Belinda is built on knowing her well and trust that has developed from being consistent. This has also needed to be developed with mum. Betty shares that she interprets Belinda has a lot of anxiety that’s come from trauma.  Betty shares an example of empathising with Belinda around a certificate.  From this she goes onto share her philosophy around behaviour as communication and the impact his has and how adults around children can stop them from reaching a crisis point. Betty talks passionately about this stance and the adults role in supporting children.  She shares that this reading of behaviour alongside anticipation of behaviour is important and shares an account of her experiences as a mother of a son with autism. Betty uses a lot of dramatic imagery to do this to portray how difficult this was and how bad the impact could be.  Betty shares how good relationships with the class teacher help her to be able to mentalise and then complete a follow up action – she is supported by the class teacher but acknowledges this isn’t always the case and that some people have opinions about children that should be smashed. Without the support of the teacher she works with this could be a barrier to mentalising. Betty’s narrative shares how working with people who are like minded supports children and she shares what it could be like, possibly drawing from prior experience.  Betty shares that it is hard to mentalise when Belinda doesn’t open up. Betty uses other phrases thoughout her narrative which suggest physically coming don/coming back/opening up.  Betty shares her hypothesis on why Belinda is anxious and gives an example of voicing what she thinks Belinda’s behaviour means. She gives an example of mentalising and how she responds to belinda. | \*sometimes the fabula is the sjuzet - when she says what she said at the time, its telling an event but she also using direct speech as a way of telling it. |
|  |  |

**Notes on holistic content and identity positioning**

**Holistic content - children come first**

Betty’s narratives share her passion for working with children and young people and how through a child centred, nurturing approach, they can make progress. Across her narratives Betty speaks with empathy for Belinda, Belinda’s mum and children in general. Betty’s story promotes making meaning from a hard time in her life. Betty’s life experiences have also led her to be calm and not afraid of any situation that arises in school, which makes her a valuable member of staff. Across the narratives, Betty shares a moral purpose for giving young people sustainable skills for a happy life and this appears to give her work meaning. Betty’s stories are consistently positive and the relationship with and behaviour of Belinda across the narratives is consistent describing the positive change.

Major themes

1. **Mothering experience** - Betty’s experience as a mother of sons with Autism, is shared across all narratives and has been drawn on to help her to work in a range of different situations at school. This experience appears to have given her skills to support young people and empathy for them. There seems to be an overlap in her skills as a mother into her role at school as firstly a child’s advocate.
2. **Behaviour as communication** - Betty clearly describes young people’s behaviour and what this is communicating, at times she gives voice to what a young person’s behaviour might be saying or what they might be thinking. By using this tool in her work, she supports young people to remain regulated. Betty often interprets this at the time, however she may also do this when is not with a young person to make sense of what is going on for them.
3. **Hierarchy** - Betty has the confidence and experience to be able to know what she is doing is right for the young person. Betty is part of a team and likes people she works with, however she gives the impression that she is not afraid to question this for the good of a young person.
4. **Being empathetic** - Betty has a set of values and she is a child centred practitioner. She often makes attempts to put herself ‘in someone else's’ shoes’ this might be the child or the parents.

**Identity positions**

Across all the narratives Betty consistently positions herself as a child centred practitioner and that her role is to support young people and advocate for them.

*‘And it's about understanding that kids aren't robots**and sometimes things are things are bothering them’. interview 3 move 5*

Because of this, Betty also positions herself as someone that will share her views with others in her advocacy for young people.

*‘So I'll just go in and I'll say, This is what I think. And then if they want to listen or listen, if they don't, they don't have to do that. you know what I mean’,  interview 2 move 5*

Furthermore, Betty describes good examples of team-work and positions herself as part of the team, however her child centred values mean that she is able to separate herself from the hierarchy as nothing is as important in comparison to a child’s needs. Through this she positions herself as part of the team but also separate.

*‘All I'll say is that if I think something is going to work, I don't really care who I talk to. I'll talk to the head. I'll talk to the deputy head. I'll talk to anyone. I'll talk to Sendco,  I’ll talk to, most of them, are really, really quite willing to listen.’ interview 2 move 4*

Betty’s identity position is also rooted in her personal experiences as a mother of young people with autism.

*‘Well, that's quite a lot of experience with situations, you know, like with my son, and I've had like, well. It's 16 years nearly now. So last 14/15 years. I've lived with really tricky situations where you have had to mentalize to actually survive the day. …… So, from that, I think I've gained quite a lot of experience of using that sort of approach.’ interview 2 move 5*

Because of this Betty positions herself as someone who isn’f afraid, which could be different to other members of staff .

*‘And I think a lot of people are fearful and frightened. So I think in themselves they project that onto the kid, they know they know. Whereas I'm not actually frightened of what what's going to happen, what's worse that can happen? It won't happen. It might happen, but if it does, it does, you know’ interview 3 move 9*

Her narratives position her as her a valuable member of staff, who is often drawn on in challenging situations.

Betty is always upbeat and jocular in her interviews, she often made me laugh. In this regard she shares challenging stories that she has faced but she uses humour to do this. This might be done through her sjuzet to make it easier for the listener of her stories and in order to help them feel comfortable. It might also be linked to her own personal coping style and making light of the challenges she has faced.

**Appendix 2 – Grace Interview 2 analysis stage 1, 2 and 5 excerpt**

Key

Sjuzet = underline

Yellow = areas of interest

**Bold and underlined – interviewer**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | My notes and comments as part of analysis |
| **And just to as a reminder, your grace and we're talking about Jenny So how has your week been with Jenny?** |  |
| 1. Unsettled week/ detention/ transition to year 6   So this week has been a little bit unsettled actually.  It's kind of been a build up from last week as well and I've kind of just put it down to getting the end of the year. Very tired. Everybody's ready to finish and Jenny especially. She's worked so hard all year and she is…. I'm getting a lot of like struggle from her now to like, to get any more work out of her this week. So yeah, she's definitely on wind down. But along with that comes any frustrations if I do have to get something out Of her in terms of work. So, so yeah, it's been a bit of a struggle.    She actually ended up on detention the other day, so… which was really disappointing. I was really I didn't really want it to go that way. But it kind of just been a few too many things. And to the point where me and the teacher both thought that she needs to, we just need to keep you know, keep the boundaries. She needs those boundaries, consistency, and we've had to transition for year six as well. So it's just that knowing you're going into year six, really need to, we’ve come so far. We need to keep that going. So So yeah, just a bit of a tough week, but I am understanding now that because I know how I feel. laugh | Unsettled  Build up and end of the year – relates to own feelings – mentalising – very tired.  Work as an important theme hard at times ‘get it out of her’ – knows her potential  Struggle  Grace didn’t want to give detention – disappointing – often a word used by a parent – does grace see this as her role for jenny in school?  Repeating the word boundaries  Going into year 6 –There can be a lot of pressure around year 6 from the system |
| **Yeah.** |  |
| 1. Understanding and interpreting   I understand. You know, she must feel really tired and drained as well. I think everybody is ready to finish. | Grace as understanding – lessonempathising – thinking of own feelings and relating to Jenny. |
| **Definitely and what kind of,, you can tell that she's struggling? What kind of signs are you seeing that she's struggling?** |  |
| Well, she can just be outright just tell me ‘no’ just very rudely, she, she's quite. She can be quite abrupt. And I kind of go through the steps right. ‘Okay, so now let's get your pencil. Right. Okay, let's start doing this. Let's get your Jotta book out. We're going to start doing some notes’. So it's every like step by step. And if she's not in the mood for that, to get started, it's  a ‘no’ hunched over cross her arms (makes gesture). So it's all in her body language. She's built up friend frustration. It just comes to the forefront. Straightaway if she's not in that mood. So I will ask you, you know, ‘just take a breath’. I always tell her what the expectations are for her work and can just prepare us as she knows how much she needs to do. And to try and, you know, bring her back. Back to me so that we can start you know, working. **Yes**, it can just be outright refusal, refusal and then rudeness. | Direct speech in a different tone – used to tell the story  Reading body language as part of interpreting behaviour.  Bring her back to me.  Refusal and rudeness used to describe jenny when she is dysregulated before she has intervened |
| **So, so you you're seeing that she's struggling, you're seeing that things are a bit difficult for her and then that's making you kind of change what you're doing by chunking things.** | I describe what she is doing. |
| Yeah, definitely. |  |
| **Yeah. And then how how what impact does that have on Jenny?** |  |
| 1. Expectations supporting work   So once she once she knows so today, for instance, we've been doing our English writing, and on the we're doing Greek gods, so the rest of the class the expectation is to do as many gods, fact file about as many gods as they can. But for her, I spoke to the teacher before the lesson and said realistically, what's the expectation so I had that chat with her. So before we even started the lesson, set her out for the day,’ this is what we're doing first, this is what's going to be next. And in our English lesson, we are doing that bit of writing, and we're just gonna do three gods’ So yeah, so once she knew that expectation, then she was a bit like, ‘Ah, okay’  Did one, two more to go! It's always a bit of a….work through it. You know, let's get the, we always write the sentences out together. I have found in the last couple of weeks, she's preferred it if, if I write it out, we verbally you know, put the work together and I write it out. And then she copies it. So that's another step just to simplify it for her as well. But I do like to just break it down, ‘right now. You've done two you have only got one more to go we can do it’. You know really just like to be positive for her and keep it going. | Understands that jenny has different needs to others.  Predicting how the writing might go and wanting her not to fail. Is predicting behaviour before its happened mentalising?  Together  Jenny needing more support.  Grace as positive – voice changes as she says the you can do it. |
| **Yeah, what do you think could have happened if you didn't give her you know how you said you gave her the now and the next and you were clear what, what do you think would happen if you didn't do that?** |  |
| That's when we tend to get a lot of disruption she might shout out to the lesson. Like the start of the lesson. Shout out to the teacher wanting to know what's happening today. So by me having that conversation with her first of all, that's that first level of disruption. I tried to remove.  And also, we can just get outright refusal from her if I don't prepare her for um for that work. And if I just left her to do it without any kind of breakdown, she'd do nothing, she would just sit there and not actually have any anything written down anyway. So So yeah, and I have been finding recently that I've not been able to leave her as much as I as I used to. | Impact of her support – stops that disruption.  What is that refusal about? Grace interprets that’s as a need to know routine and sharing routine helps although this is not voiced. So Grace notices behaviour and adapts.  Change in the relationship – can’t leave her as much |
| **Yeah** |  |
| 1. Change in behaviour and needing her more/ interpreting that.   I don't know if it's just like I say just coming to the end of the year and things like that. But yeah, she does seem to be relying on me just a little bit more just this last couple of weeks, really. But then there's also been, you know, personal changes and things like that. So, I don't know if it's, I suppose it can be a contribution to all sorts cant it really, so. | Relying on grace more – end of year or personal situation? |
| **so yeah, definitely. And I guess you're using those skills to kind of think about well, why is she wanting me around more? What's that about?** | Me supporting the reflection back to mentalising. |
| Yeah, yeah that’s true. |  |
| **That's sort of, from what you've said. There's two different sides to the impact. If I say anything wrong back to just say no, I didn't mean that. But sort of what I heard was that you're saying that there's the academic impact? Yeah. So if you didn't break the work down, you know, she might not make the progress you might not produce the work. But then alongside that, there's like that emotional side that if you didn't make things manageable for her, then she could, I think you said you'd be disruptive. So there's like two, two different things and actually, sort of what you said is you are you're thinking you're thinking about those factors that are impacting on her and why she needs you more at the moment. And you've said you think that's about you know, transition, and what's made you Is there anything that's made you think that that's what it might be?** | Sharing what I have heard and interpreted  Academic  Emotional  Using her words – disruptive  Sharing back with grace her theories. |
| with regards to what sorry ?  **You think she's a bit more unsettled? Is there any I know you've mentioned body language, but you've you've said she needs me a bit more, or she needs me around a bit more. I can't leave her as much and I think it's because things are a bit unsettled.** |  |
| 1. Helping jenny to achieve   Oh, yes. So in terms of English writing, it's, it's quite a hefty piece of work. In year five, it's a hefty piece of work. So we know straightaway, and I've learned this just over the year with her that it's gonna be a struggle. So I suppose it has just come with time over the year that I've just learned that actually we do need to break it down. what's expected of her? What do I need to achieve and you know, just help her to get through that. And then she she also feels because she's finished her amount of set work. She feels she's achieved as well. So that's nice. Whereas she, she really is really hard on herself. If she feels like she hasn't achieved, so if I didn't set those expectations for her she would feel like failure if she's not finished the work. Yeah, so it definitely does help.  **You sound like you've got that understanding of her on what happens when she's been hard on herself. What kind of things would you see?**  Just arrr, its she'll she'll cry she would literally head on the desk if she’s got an answer wrong.  You know, but we'll talk about it. You know, ‘it's not the end of the world.  We all make mistakes’. We've got to learn from those mistakes and we just have a chat about it and you know, I try and say, if I've got something wrong, you know, we're all, even as adults, we all get things wrong, don't we? So just just comfort her and tell her ‘we can just try harder’. ‘Let's let's have a look at a different way of doing that type thing you know’, so yeah, but she can take a few minutes then to come back round she might have to go off for a little toilet break just to change scenery, calm herself down. We found that that works well. If she just goes off to the toilet, whereas at the start of the year, we were having a lot of, just storming out kicking the door, running out a lot of running around the whole school as well. So So yeah, so we have managed to, we can sense it now. And say, ‘Jenny, you go to the toilet, go another minute of the toilet and come back. Come back to me when you ready’ and it does work. | Grace reporting schools expectations.  Grace has learned about Jenny and her triggers  She now helps her  Jenny can feel she achieved from this input she WOULD feel a failure – has she drawn on experience?    Grace has interpreted this feeling of Jenny’s failure from her behaviour.  Grace shares her mantras with Jenny – its not the end of the world.  Grace tries to model correct behaviour – like parent, brings comfort.  Consistent themes of coming back to grace coming back round – like she goes away from grace when she is upset/displaying challenging beh.  We – describes class team?  Grace has learnt strategies to support and prevent physical.  Grace can sense it now. |
| **Yeah, that sounds really amazing that using this like reading of the situations and having that understanding how much you know how much more positive things are for from what you've said, like comparing that kicking the doors and storming. Out to now**  Oh, yeah,  **Just being able to say go go to the toilet. Have a minute and she's responding, responding to that. I'm just scanning through my list of questions.**  **So just in terms of thinking about Jenny struggling a little bit, has there been anything this week that has helped you to mentalize anything? So last week, you talked about actually like your personal factors, your personal life. Is there anything that has helped you to mentalize with her this week at all?** | Validation from me – Grace is doing a great job. |
| I think when when I'm put on the spot like that I can't think about it, but then just talk again it just comes out.  (Laughs) | Reference to uncomfortable nature of interview |
| **Yes. Yeah,**  yeah. this week in terms of how I had to think about how she was feeling, yeah**?**  **I guess in a way you've sort of already mentioned it to me. You said ‘I thought about how I'm feeling and then you know’** | Drawing interview back to previously mentioned topics |
| 1. Describing upset at detention   With the tiredness? so yeah, absolutely. Yeah, yeah, I've definitely been doing that with her for the last couple of weeks. I mean, that the only other thing I'm thinking about is when we had to pass on the information that she had received a detention. She she had quite a meltdown.  Crying in the corridor and actually didn't want to leave the school, which was just heartbreaking. And, you know, the way that me and the teacher just worded it was just that, ‘you know, it's just been a combination of things. It's not just one thing. We've spoken about things, you know, all the way through. It's just unfortunate. It's just gone a little bit too far today. She needs to understand that the boundaries are still there’. And then when she did come out, I could just see how upset she was. And I just really just tried to just try to make her think that it's not the end of the world. And yes, we all make mistakes. And I say to her over and over. We just we just need to try and learn from those mistakes.  Her ….People around here would just think far more of her she just held her hands up sometimes and said, You know, I'm just, I did this. I didn't mean to do it. I'm never going to do that again. And we can only try and be better, can't we? And and I know that's where she struggles and I just said to her, you know, it's not the end of the world, tomorrow's a new day. All we can do is try better for tomorrow. So just really, but I knew that she was just so upset. And and then I couldn't help but think then it's gonna affect her this evening at home and things like that and then the next day, so I did prepare myself them for the next morning. | Thinking of own tiredness.  Meltdown – word in cultural vernacular  How it effected grace – heart breaking – she feels jennys pain – suggesting a closeness.  This speech is not shared how Grace normally does  Grace is visibly less bubbly and animated as she shares this – could this suggest it must have been hard for her.  Grace offers reassurance and she also repeats her mantra’s to Jenny – over learning? Repetition of what she said  People would think more of her – grace wants people to see jenny in a positive way – suggesting her protectiveness.  Thinking about her later and the emotional labour of working with a child in this way – used this to think ahead to next day. Grace seemed worried. |
| **And how was it?** |  |
| 1. The day after the detention   She was quite low. So because you see she came in she was quiet, ‘morning Jenny, how are you?’ ‘Fine’. And that's all I kind of got. So if ever I get that and I can see, um, you know not in the best of moods. I do like to take her out for a little bit of a chat before we go into the classroom just to see if I can bring around just a little bit find out how how the evening was and ‘what have you’ just start off with general  ‘What do you have for breakfast?’  **Yeah**  Just anything to kind of get her talking and then it usually comes out then.  **And did it work so you know you I guess it sounds like you were thinking about how her evening had gone and then sort of watching for the signals**  Definitely  **when she got in and then you notice that she was a little bit down. So then you took her out to chat to uh, did that have an impact?**  It did. Yes. So she did kind of offload to me what kind of happened at home, getting told off so. And I always I always kind of dread that because I think she's gonna blame me. And then that might set back our trust. But then, on the other side of it, she's also got to respect you know, grownups around her and grownups at school. So it's kind of a two edged sword that that bit, but now it really helps you offloaded and just reassured her ‘I'm always here to listen. And Today's a new day. Let's just try and be better’. Our behaviour chart. It's always perfect purple, super surfer and reach for the stars. I always say you can reach for those stars whenever you want to. And it does always give her, Yeah, it brought her up a little bit and yeah, | Interpreting mood as low through quiet voice – ‘Fine’ - gives as impression of jenny  Grace comes back to her relational practise – having a little chat – building rapport  ‘bring her around’ quite often grace is using her relational practise to rebuild.    Grace is worried about Jenny at home – dread is strong word and blame me – trust is important to grace and jenny, and grace doesn’t want this destabilising  Two edged sword – keeping the boundaries and keeping the respect  but also keep the relationship – grace shares this as a challenge in her work.  Providing the reassurance she needs – Im always here – theme in last interview as well  Then Graces mantra – today is a new day.  Brought her up, referring to her mood – bringing mood up. |
| **And how was the rest of the day in terms of behaviour?** |  |
| That day, it was a different day because we had a transition morning. She was a little bit rude. We did have to have movement on the chart of going down. I brought it back up as soon as I could. Yeah. And so if she's rude to me its, ‘no Jenny, don't talk that way’. um  But then if she's really polite are ‘Thank you, Miss for that’ then its ‘Oh, thank you for those lovely manners’ and bring it straight back up. | Referring to school systems and school chart – grace wanting the day to go better – brought up as soon as I could.  Rude as reoccurring theme – grace actually sees past what she describes as rudeness – but do others in the system? |
| **Yes.** |  |
| So it's kind of that does work really well for her.  So yeah, it was a bit of a up down day. But I think it was more because of how she'd been told off at home more than anything.  **Yeah, yeah, definitely. And also a bit like what you've said, the the unsettled nature of the end of the school year**  Absolutely it's kind of what I'm putting it down to to everything which you know, I'm sure there's more to it as well, but I just can't help but feel I mean, I know my own children are shattered Yeah, they're all. They're all ready for a break. And then for somebody who's also got their own struggles, it just must be exhausting. | Graces positivity does work well for jenny.  Up down day – referring to mood or chart? Attributing to home.  Reference to transition as way to interpret behaviour- grace considers is there more than this hypothesis.  Links back to experience as mother.  Reference to jenny’s past as struggles – suggesting she thinks of this often for jenny. |
| **So yeah, definitely. I will thank you. I'm just gonna stop my recording.** |  |
| **Summary  of narrative 2**  Grace describes a difficult time in their relationship and how challenging it was for her to try and maintain the boundaries but also to keep the closeness with Jenny. She describes Jenny’s behaviour as potentially rude and refusing and she makes attempts to interpret this (She describes a change in Jenny’s behaviour and her wanting to be with her more and get more support). She interprets this through end of year tiredness and relates to her own feelings of tiredness. There is contrast in some of the story where Jenny’s behaviour is described using potentially negative language however Grace talks with empathy and compassion about Jenny.  Through Grace’s describing of her support and her role, she appears to prioritise academic tasks, this could be because of the pressure from the school system. She shares that her support of helping break down tasks and helping Jenny to achieve, as well as helping her to understand the daily routines, they are managing to complete work and get through each day fairly positively. Grace thinks that an unsettled situation at home might be impacting on Jenny and that she may see her as a mother figure in school and that Jenny is attaching herself to her in school. But she recognises her interpretation may not be accurate. Being a mother and being nurturing appears to be a theme in Grace’s stories and something that she feels supports her work.  Grace often describes planning ahead and trying to think about how things might affect Jenny. Through this Grace illustrates the emotional labour of her work and how often she is thinking about Jenny.  Grace describes an incident when Jenny got a detention and that it was hard for her to give out the detention because of the impact it might have on relationships. Grace describes this as heart breaking, which could convey how she feels that pain that Jenny does. Grace worries about the impact of the sanction on their relationship and tries to consider this the next day as she interprets Jenny’s behaviour. She shares how she tries again to rebuild the rapport. Grace appears to want to tread the right balance between putting boundaries in place but also being someone who can be trusted and relied upon by Jenny and it appears that this is sometimes a tension for her. |  |

**Notes on holistic content and identity positioning**

Across all interviews.

Throughout Grace’s narratives she has a positive outlook on life and her work and aims to share her values with those around her. Grace’s narratives share the journey of her relationship with Jenny, the highs and lows and the progress that has been made both in the trust between them and the progress in Jenny’s behaviour and academic performance.  Grace presents a narrative of someone who is learning and open to learning. She regularly reflects and adapts her practice. The overall narrative is upbeat, hopeful and one of positive change

**Major themes -**

**1 - highs and lows**

Throughout each interview there are examples of times when Jenny’s behaviour has not met expectations and Grace has had to put a sanction in place, alongside special moments of progress where there are breakthroughs in their relationship ‘ *‘I can listen to anything you want to talk about*’ (said by Jenny to Grace). in interview 1 the relationship is described as intense, however as the different interviews progress, this word is used less.

**2. Inexperience v’s natural mothering skill**

At times Grace references her lack of experience and how this helps her to be open to help, which she feels is a good thing. Grace is also consistent in that she says she is open and she is (sharing examples in different interviews where she draws on advice and support). Grace comes across as humble and possibly at times she might not be confident in her abilities. However, Grace appears confident in her nurturing comforting skills as a mother and she knows that she can draw on this, through the narratives this has been key to the progress made by Jenny

**3. Academic progress as important**

Grace is nurturing and supportive of Jenny and this approach feeds into making her settled and ready to learn as the ultimate goal. Grace shares how capable Jenny is throughout the interviews and she wants her to reach her academic potential. At times it isn’t clear whether this is a school value or a personal value, but Grace sees this is as a core aspect of her role.

**Identity position**

Throughout Grace’s narratives she frequently positions herself as a mother. She relates to this in the skills that she draws on to support Jenny e.g. nurture, reassurance and care.

*‘It's just I suppose as a mum, it's just quite a natural feeling to kind of take a moment to give that child chance to open up and give them a chance to you know… pause… just as opposed to don't always open up. I'm just I suppose I'm just I am quite a comforting person anyway’ interview 1 move 6*

 Grace’s szujet also reflects the emotional labour that goes into her work with asides and reflections about her worry for Jenny and her feelings of guilt about maintaining boundaries but keeping trust, for example, she is ‘*heartbroken’* when Jenny is upset.

Grace’s positions herself as being part of a strong school team that she can draw on for support and guidance. As part of this she wants to meet the expectations of the team and provide the best support for Jenny academically. Linked to this, is Grace’s identity position around being inexperienced - she reflects that this can mean she needs to draw on support but this is also a positive as it means she is open to and accepting of support.

*‘Especially with the class teacher we do work really closely together. And you know, he will, if he can advise me, I mean, he's advised me a lot. And to be honest, because this is my first role in this as one to one so I've learned a lot in this last year and yeah, really ‘*

Grace positions herself as being tenacious and positive in her role.

*‘So I don't like to give up (laughs). I'm quite stubborn. I think I have been quite stubborn with it really, to just keep persevering’ interview 1 move 1.*

She describes the hard work and time it has taken to build her relationship with Jenny and she does not give up. Her mantra of every day being a new day, is both for Jenny and herself and this supports her in her attitude renewal each day.

**Appendix 3  – Julia interview 2 analysis stage 1, 2 and 5 excerpt**

Key

Sjuzet = underline

Yellow = areas of interest

**Bold and underlined – interviewer**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |
|  | My notes and comments as part of analysis |
| **Julia 2** |  |
| **And so I'm just, as Barry's not been in school. I'm just wondering if we can think about and reflect on a time when you've mentalized with Barry. So for example, he's acted in a certain way and you've kind of read the situation thought about how he's feeling and then use that to kind of figure out what's going on.** |  |
| 1. The school trip   It was a school trip to a museum  cant think, it was sometime earlier this year. And he didn't like the fact that basically I’m his shadow on a school trip. I have to, I can't let him out my sight. So he didn't like the fact that if he went to the left, I went to the left. And because there were a couple of other characters in the group that he needed to be kept away from we’d kind of battled with it all morning. And then he ran off. I don't know if you've been to that musuem, but you go in one door at one end and you come out at the other end. So in the end, I ended up, because he was not very happy with me he didn't want me to follow him.  But I Had to follow him and I found him by, in the car park. They've got a big statue. And he’d got over there. So I made a joke of it and let him pose you know, some photos on the statue. And we just sat and talked and said I said ‘look, I have to, this is the reason why. You know, there is already a tension between you and these other children’. ‘But yeah, but why do you have to follow me? Why can't you be following them and watching what they're doing?’ And point was because you're my responsibility today? Mr. X has said to me you know, you're one to one with Barry, so there's somebody else's responsibility. And eventually I said what if, when the group that we're supposed to be staying with, if they go in the front door and out the back if we come in the back door, and go out the front door? So yes, we've got to pass these people, but you're not sort of going around looking at things with them. And that worked absolute wonders. He was soon very quickly back to his, you know, you're my best friend sort of self and went to having a really good day then. | Choice of word battled describes how hard it was.  Acknowledges that she has made him not very happy through her responsibility  Using humour as a way to build connection.  Talking and explaining  Direct speech sharing barry’s frustration.  Sharing reasons and that he responsibility.  Reasoning with him, making a deal – worked wonders – her approach led to a good day  Back to his, you’re my best friend sort of self.  Relationship between boundaries and trust hard to tread at times perhaps? |
| **Oh, good. So you sort of picked up you said that he wasn't happy? And he said he ran off? What do you think he was feeling**? |  |
| Smothered. |  |
| **Right.**  **And was there anything in what he said?** |  |
| That he was smothered? because if it was the constant ‘Why'd you have to follow me? Are you following me?**’**  **Yeah,**   and I'm not I'm not following you. I have to be with you.  It's hard. I can understand that. Nobody likes to be you know, followed you. So when you as a parent, at home, you can't go to the toilet in peace. It does. It gets you like (gesture in face strained with noise) just give me a minute. Yeah, just give me some space. And I know that I could see that. That was what he was thinking. | Sharing conversation and his speech and she interpreted that.    Linking to own feelings of being followed and smothered as a parent  Confident that that was what he was thinking. |
| **So. So you sort of identified this that he was feeling sort of smothered? And actually you thought about how that feels for you as a person at times. And then you sort of went to him and you had that one to one conversation with Barry where you then, sort of correct me if I'm wrong, but you sort of explained to him what was going on. And what was the impact of you having that conversation with him?** | Recapping and leading to next question |
| Well, eventually, he did calm down. he did come back and he did end up having a good day because as far as he was concerned, at the time when he was feeling smothered, he wanted to just go and sit on the coach for the day.  You know, I think it was because in his eyes, i felt like he thought me being there was sapping the fun out of things for him. You know, because all the other kids were allowed to you know, go off a little bit on their own and he's not allowed to do that. Which I can see. He'd feel, you know, that's not fair. Why, why do they get to go round that corner on their own? And I'm not allowed unless you've got your eyes on me. Which is unfortunate, but because of his you know, because he loses his temper. We don't have a choice. | ‘Eventually’ – sharing this approach took time and patience.  He came back – physically returning to self?  Sharing in his eyes – from his perspective – ‘I felt like he thought’ – interpretation.  Sense that she genuinely wants him to have a good day. |
| **Yeah, and I think it sounds like on that day, you were using those mentalizing skills a lot. You know, you just said so many different things about what you interpreted from him, you know that he was feeling smothered he was feeling it wasn't fair. So when they actually did the action of running off I guess you already had an idea of what you thought was going on for him. So then you you know you altered sort of what you what you were doing what do you think could have happened if you hadn't have had that chat? And that sort of explanation** |  |
| 1. Consequence of  interpreting and chatting/not doing it   He would have definitely, we would have been sat on the coach if I just said right, that's it. You know, you've run off now. Others think your chances have blown, but I don't, I know better, and you've got the rest of the day to get through. So let's try and turn it round’. That's what we did. And it didn't take much tweaking with the day, you know, just coming in from a different entrance. To me was quite straightforward and simple. And it was, you know, for him, he didn't like it at first that the first hut that we went in, because it was just like, I don't know, I guess sometimes it sees me a bit like mum. So I think he thought it's just a boring trip, you know, going around all these old fashioned things with my mum. I'm quite good at making fun out of things rather than it just be right going read that bit of information. I also, we’d been given a pack of things to them to tick off and find while they were in these huts. And he didn't want to do that. And it was because it was in my hand. I ended up, I put it in the bin. Because it was me carrying it. I think he kept thinking, ‘Oh, I've got to do that when I get back or I've got to do that later’. So I just went ‘it's in the bin now Barry don't worry about it’. Yeah | Sharing what she had said – sharing that confidence in him.  Tweaking and adjusting the day there and then – julia thinks this is straight forward and simple.  Sees me like a mum – bringing it back to that relationship and her experiences of boring museums.  Julia recognises her own skills at making things fun – removed barrier of work and through it in the bin  ‘I think he kept thinking ‘ interpreting that this was a barrier or source of worry so she removed it |
| **And and did that help?** |  |
| Yeah.  Yeah |  |
| **So I think this is a really, really good example of what I'm sort of looking into because you're like you're noticing signals you notice something from them again and thought oh, is this about this worksheet? Is this what he’s sort of thinking so I'm just going to do something and then see what** **impact it has. So chucking it away. Getting rid of that then helped sort of, like you said have have more fun, I guess. Yeah. And enjoy himself.** | Re capping what she had said and inviting agreement. |
| yeah |  |
| **Was, when you were there on that day. Was that easy for you to use that skill? Or how did that feel for you?** |  |
| 1. Natural skill / being able to use the skill / what prevents.   No. I just I find it quite natural. Yeah. Maybe because for the last 10 years, I have worked with difficult children. It's just I pick my battles. That's my sort of my header. You pick your battles, if it's not going to hurt them. It's not it's not gonna harm them in any way. Then let's do whatever it is. Yeah, rather than I have known other members of staff if for example, Barry's got a pen in his hand, and he might be, just waving it about not so much tapping it and being a nuisance, but they'll take it off him and im like ‘why’ (frustrated tone) he wasn't actually, yes he shouldn’t have it in his hand because you've said pens down, but it's not actually creating fuss. | Natural skill  Length of time and experience – last 10 years .  Has a mantra about picking battles – juxtaposing this to the system – julia is frustrated about this.  On barry’s side and advocating for him |
| **I think that's an interesting thing if it's alright to come back to his thinking about staff and other staff and you say in picking, picking your battles. How, what was staffs response, you know, on those times when you make those adaptations for Barry, how do they respond to that?** | probing further into this |
| Some members of staff don't like it. There are still people around the like you know, they're not following the rules. So as far as they're concerned, they're being mardy. They are the you know, oh, he's just in a mood. Whereas, yeah, maybe they are but it's going to be an extremely long day. If we start this battle now. There's there's been many times when I have seen somebody physically takes something out of his hand, which is then caused him to push a table over or, especially when I first came and I was just kind of observing from a distance to begin with. You know, I've worked with children that will do anything they can to disrupt that class through making a noise in particular. And, yes, that's annoying, but if you ignore it, nine times out of 10, They'll stop doing it faster than if you sort of given them reaction. | Staff don’t understand – they have focus on the rules  - there are pressures in the system.  Understanding consequences of how staff respond and how this might impact barry.  Sharing her experience and how some strategies she uses can help to deescalate. |
|  |  |
| **Yeah** |  |
| So for me if he needs a whiteboard in front of him to be doodling on, while he's listening to, you know, whatever the teacher is teaching at the time, then let him do that. It doesn't mean he's not listening. He actually is listening. He just needs to occupy his hands. Yeah, and I think a lot of children are like that. | Assertive towards staff?  Understanding children and what they need. |
| **Yeah. So it's having that you've got that experience that you bring in and having that understanding, I guess about children's needs. Has there ever been a situation and again, I'm not encouraging you to say anything that would make you feel uncomfortable, but has there ever been in a situation where you felt sometimes those pressures have stopped you from mentalizing and where there's been different pressures that have stopped you from mentalizing? Like, you know,** |  |
| I wouldn't say stop me from mentalizing. It might stop me from acting, something that may be or has been occasions where I've felt, now's not the time for me to say anything or to give Barry the direction because it might be that he's been told to do something. And Ive thought, well, maybe we could try doing it this way. So rather than going against what somebody else has said, I sort of bide my time until he’s not within ear distance because I sometimes feel it's a bit of a battle sometimes between me and this class teacher that she wants him to do it this way. And I know he's not going to do it that way.  **Yeah. Yeah.**  So sometimes I might have to go over and have a quiet word and say, ‘Look, he will do it. But can I take him to a different place or can he just do this much today? And we can see if we can get the rest of them later’. Dependent on that teachers mood sometimes it might be a yes, sometimes it might be a no but I do find that that's got better. Yeah. And I think that's because lots of staff, especially the senior team, have noticed the difference in Barry. Since I've been with him. Some children I just think it takes a lot of patience. A lot of listening and a lot of you know, a lot of time and nurturing. Like I said last time, I'm just gutted that Thursday that will be it. He's gone from primary and you know there is no more one to one support. Its um,,, I think he'll do okay, I think he may himself turn it round at secondary, but I do think for at least his first probably through his first year. That he could do with somebody like me. He's not gonna get that. | Systems doesn’t stop mentalising but might stop her from acting.  Notices what might start to happen or what could happen, but has to bide time in order to share with teacher away from Barry to preserve relationships and be respectful of those around her.  Possible tension between her and staff to make adjustments – there are pressures in the system.  Quiet word – to be respectful.  Teacher’s approach may impact on whether julia can act on what she’s noticed. Got better as julia has gained respect from staff.  Repetition of ‘a lot of’ patience, nurturing, listening.  Gutted he’s gone – sadness at Barry leaving primary – appears she is trying to reassure herself – turn it round – the relationship she has built is important to her too.  Needs someone like her – sharing how her approach works and wanting barry to have continued success. |
| **When you say about the progress that he's made, sort of from your work within that relationship, you know, the way that you know you're working with him. It must be hard for you and hard for him to go somewhere else to be you know, to be without that and like you say, we can just be hopeful about the future that that having that support that he's had with you guys is set him up for the best possible chance he can have.** | Validation at sadness |
| Yeah yeah  **But yeah, it's interesting about you know, it's, it can be it can be challenging working in a team, you know, within a school sometimes and like getting those getting that balance, right when you're working with somebody and being able to like you can mentalize, you know what's going on, you know what you need to do but sometimes because of the relationships and the team, you know, that can can make things tricky, is sort of what I'm hearing and I think I think that's the same everywhere.** | Asking for agreement on my interpretation. |
| 1. Her role v’s teacher role.   No, it is definitely yeah, definitely. Over my 11 years, I've worked with various different teachers and some work with you yes, some some don't work with you so well.. I understand that the end of the day, they've got a job to do. They've got to get these children to ARE, and that is their focus and that is their job. Whereas for me, it's not my job. I think schools that don't have TAs, I don't know how they nurture because teachers don't have time to, they do but they don't have the time to focus on it. Like the teaching assistants do. Or the HLTAs. | Repeat definitely – adds amount of time – sharing her experience.  Role of teacher to get to ARE – not her job, her job is to nurture – teachers don’t have time to nurture – TAs do – but this can work together to support all cyp. |
| **Yeah, and what saying about like you said seeing that role of a teacher is kind of having the academic focus. What do you see your role as in school?**  . |  |
| My role is to support the academic side of it by taking on more of the nurturing side and I also think, for me, and I know most TAS wouldn't agree with this. I tend to, I'm very good at behaviour control. On a whole class basis, not not just one to one. Because I'm not obviously I'm not employed as Barry's one To one of the one of the HLTAs of the school. So I am here, there and everywhere. And I think TAs, I think children will always like the TAs more than the class teacher. Because again, it's the nurturing it's the emotional side that we give. Teachers don't often have the time to give | Support the academic side by nurturing – this allow teachers to teach. Work together to support all cyp  Julia shares her opinions might be different and is able to reflect on how people think differently. |
| **Yeah yeah definelty. And what what skills do you have? So they might be skills at work or personal skills, but what skills do you have that help you to work with young people like Barry?** |  |
| I just think it's experience yeah, I've never, apart from doing the HLTA training, I've never had any, you know, outside, education training for anything to do with working with children or children's mental health. I think a lot as we said in the last meeting goes on my own childhood, and then just my experience of, you know, working in schools for a long time. | Experience is key  No formal training . |
| **So I'm just gonna come back with your permission to something that you mentioned in the last interviews when we'd stopped the recording. And I said, Thank you for sharing your experiences and you've said that after your experiences with your mum, it made you I think, I'm not sure if the word was determined, but determined to be different.**  Yeah.  **And you talked about being a mum yourself. And I just wondered, when you talk about being different to your mum, is that something that is important to you as a mum at home? And is that something that you bring into your professional role at all?** | With permission to explore something that was said off interview last time. |
| 1. Childhood experience and impact   Both, it begins at home. Obviously, I didn't work in education when I when I became a mum myself. And in fact my daughter was she was in year six during my first year in school. So it's probably more to be to do with being a mum and just wanting the best for my daughter. And she's had all the chances that I didn't have it, it's (pause) - just where my mum's concerned because we didn't have a relationship that was you know, I wouldn't say it was unloving, but it wasn't. You know, a lovey dovey as most mums , all my friends you know that go shopping with the mums and their mum would take them to buy their first bra and things like that. I never I never had that. I think that when it came to the time that I was wearing bras, I'd pinch them off my best friend, you know, because there was no point me asking my mum because I knew I wouldn't get one. My sister had a child before me, and she's stuck at one as well. She doesn't want more than the one and I don't know if that's her reason. Because she actually was closer to my mom than I was because she was the baby of the family. But I decided I mean, I moved out the day I turned 16 I managed to get myself a little Council flat. So I've lived, I had to grow up pretty fast. | Wanting to be different to her mum as a mum at home – daughter given what she didn’t have – love/nurture.  Her mum not like most mums – didn’t do land mark things with her – sharing personal difficult information.    Only wanting one child – to support it properly (referenced at the end of the last meeting).  Growing up fast – sharing life experiences. |
| **Summary**  **Julia as hard working/resilient.**  **Julia as child advocate and separate to system**  Julia tells a story of a school trip where she mentalised with Barry, she interpreted his behaviour and interpreted what he might be feeling from it. She altered her behaviour e.g. throwing the work sheets away and this helped the day to go from a bad day (Barry running away) to Barry having a good day.  Julia shares the challenges of teachers focussing on the rules, whereas she picks her battles. She sometimes mentalises and wants to make a change for Barry but she cant share this with the teacher as she might not like it – this can prevent her from acting on the mentalising. However this has improved as she has gained respect from senior staff.  Julia shares the role of the teacher is on academics and the role of the TA support staff is the nurture and this means children will favour the TA in the nurturing role.  Julia discusses wanting to be different to her mum and shares more information about her childhood. This gave her the drive to give her daughter the experiences she didn’t and also to be a self made, hardworking person with a successful career. |  |

**Notes on holistic content and identity positioning**

Julia narratives illustrate her resilience and hard work to get to the place she is today. She shared challenging life experiences which she feels has helped her to understand and empathise with young people. Julia’s narratives make meaning from her challenging life experiences and share how through these experiences she is better able to understand young people - her story is one of resilience and hope. Julia’s story shares the progress in her relationship with Barry and the positive change Barry has made. At times, there is a regretful, possibly sad element to the narrative that her time with Barry has been short and is drawing to a close as he goes to secondary school.

**Major themes**

1. **Experience of being Mothered** - Julia has a clear perception of what a mother is to her. Her mum didn't fit with this and she sometimes feels she doesn’t fit with what is traditionally thought of as maternal. She shares how she wanted to be different to her mum.
2. **Experience**  - Julia discusses her previous experience with young people and how this supports her in the role she is in now. She shares that she doesn’t have any formal training for working with young people and that it is her lived experience and approach that has helped her to support Barry and drive change.
3. **Teacher versus support staff** - Julia shared that there might be different roles within a school and that staff may have different aims for young people, sometimes this may cause a tension and means that she may need to wait until the time is right to advocate for a young person.
4. **Resilience** - throughout Julia’s story she demonstrates that she is resilient, she has overcome a challenging childhood and has worked hard throughout her life to get to where she is currently.

**Identity position**

Within the narrative Julia positions herself as someone with life experiences and job experience. She shares how these experiences are useful to her in her role,

*‘I’ve always work with children like that.’* (in relation to professional role). interview 1 move 1

*‘ Maybe because for the last 10 years, I have worked with difficult children. It's just I pick my battles’ interview 2 move 3*

The way Julia positions herself in relation to adversity is that she has learnt from it and uses in in her daily work to empathise with young people.

*‘for example, when Barry says, oh, what would you know? I can actually say to him, Well, actually, I was in that position myself. And I do know how it feels.’ ( in relation to child hood experience) interview 1 move 4*

Further to drawing on her life and professional experience, Julia positions herself as hard working and resilient. She has overcome adversity and she has worked hard to get to where she is today.

*‘I've been through, you know, the ups and downs of not so good childhood myself, and perhaps not so good teenage years because, obviously, I didn't do all the partying because I couldn't afford to, you know, bills to pay. And so yeah, so I think starting work as well at such an early age makes you a more rounded person.’ interview 2 move 5*

Through the use of her sjuzet, Julia positions herself as working with the team at school, however, sometimes she feels her role is different to the teaching staff and it is to nurture as opposed to focussing on academic work. At times these two different ways of viewing the purpose of education may be juxtaposed which positions Julia as separate to teaching staff.

 Julia positions herself as ‘*not particularly maternal*’ (interview 1 move 2) however, despite this, at times she shows a nurturing side where she is physically affectionate with Barry and how she might be perceived as ‘*family’* to him.

**Appendix – 4 - Betty  - Categorical Content excerpt, analysis stage 3**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Notes |
| **Right so first of all, can you just tell me some general information about your relationship with Belinda** |  |
| 1.  Right well, Belinda is very Id say she's very word very attached to a her mum, very attached she's had quite I don't know the ins and outs because I don't need to I just know she's had a lot trauma in her background. And though she is adopted, and struggles to separate herrself from her mom she's also quite low ability. And she's now seeing that difference in significantly I'd say now because she's moved from, into year five, and the work as you know, becomes progressively harder. So now the gap between her and peers is becoming wider. And she's now becoming more self aware as well. So basically, that, in nutshell is is what I know about her. She's lovely, really lovely girl. She does get quite anxious. She's on a part time. Oh, she's on a part time timetable as well. And she gets anxious and she shows this in ways like she'll start to become disruptive in class and whistle, and make sounds and genuinely just get up the ante. So she'll want to know what time she's going home. She'll want to know what that what the time is. And then she'll ask you about two minutes later so you can see when it comes to need to home time that the anxiety builds with her. So once she's on task, and she's doing work, it has to be heavily sort of  scaffolded for her and what we tend to try and do is get the work done with it before the others start work and then she can have like a sensory break whilst that like whilst I help with the other children as well. So it's best of both worlds, especially in like maths when there's a couple of them that need that support. I'll take them to a quiet place and do the work and then they'll come back in and they'll have a minute | child background and understanding |
| **So why did like in terms of your relationship with their How do you get along with each other? How do you feel but you have well tell me about your relationship with her. Do you get on well is it a close relationship?** |  |
| Yeah, I think, I think she trusts me. I think now, Mom, mom, trusts me, which I think is quite important because I think Mom finds it difficult to I mean, I'm okay saying this she does find it difficult leaving Belinda, when, especially in the beginning of the day, and we have put things in place for that Belinda has her own charts and things like that to sort of encourage you to come in and then gets a prize at the end of the week. I think she knows Belinda knows that I'm very consistent. I always fulfil what I'm saying. I'm going to do so. I will always be at reception in the morning to collect her and I think it's that we have got good. We've built good trust trusting relationship. I think I'm a trusted adult to to Belinda. And she will come to me. Now Belinda doesn't really open up that much. And I don't know whether it's because she doesn't know how to really but she's normally quite honest if she needs to be you know, if we ask her Have you done anything? Or something happened and she will normally tell me but, in terms of trying to unpick things with Belinda it's quite difficult to do that. She’s quite complicated. I don't know whether it's that she hasn't got that capacity to do that, the maturity. To do that, to be able to self reflect or anything like that. I think that um, I know her, we're very well. I think that I understand that she finds it hard and she needs that sort of nurturing sort of adult to be there for her as that transition from home to school. I think I've got good understanding of what what she needs, and I always try as well, to communicate with mom as well after, after she's been into school, especially if shes had a tricky morning over that relationship that's with mom as well to say, I know she was upset. It lasted two minutes. It's sorted. She's fine. She's getting on with the work. And I think that's important as well. Because then it reinforces the relationship between home and school. |  |
| **Yeah, definitely. So in terms of the things that you've sort of mentioned there, so it's, it's on to the questions about mentalizing. So this is that sort of ability where you're thinking about a Belinda's thinking and he's thinking about what's going on in her head, and how that might sort of translate into her behaviour. So can you tell me or give me an example about a time when you've mentalized with Belinda?** |  |
| 2.  Well, it was the other day actually, I don't know whether this just tells me I'm off track here but mom mentioned to me, because we had this we had a situation last week where Mr. X Teacher He was out for the last two days of the week. Yeah, so sir was out anyway, last two days. I was in on Thursday and then I wasn't in on the Friday because at the funeral. So anyway. Belinda was coming in Thursday, Friday, because she wasn't going on the trip that we were all meant to be going on. It was a residential and some of the children didn't have she didn't go and she didn’t go, and I can't remember but, somebody mentioned to me that. Oh, it's a mom. A mom said that Belinda was due to get star of the week, sir and said to mum, that Belinda is going to get star in the week. I was told this on the Thursday. So I'm at home anyway, I've forgotten about this. Friday morning. I thought ‘oh my god’. She needs star of the week. And I could have just left it because I want in on that day. But I thought you know what the impact that that is going to have on that child is massive because mum knows she was going to get it If she hadn't got it and mum knew and asked her about it. She hadn't got it. And then that would have really sort of put barriers and her barriers would have come up and she just struggled. And so what I did was I was on the A1 and Id left my phone at home because im a I'm an idiot. So I borrowed Steve’s and rung up and said right? You need to make sure that this happens and it happens before the time she goes home because she goes home at this time. Anyway, it all happen and she was absolutely well over the moon, because it was about her resilience of coming into school. So it was establishing that strengthening that sort of belief that we have in her and she's doing fantastic and she's coming in. Actually, over the last couple of days. She came in through the main entrance rather than through the reception with all the other children that came in. So that's progress into how long and I'm I am aware that sometimes, you know, you'll take a step forward and two steps back, you know when you do, but you have to, you have to sort of congratulate the wins don’t you . And if I hadn't done that, I felt awful for one, and then it would have had a knock on effect with mom, and mums trust and Belinda's trust |  |
| **So you were thinking about what it would sort of feel like to be her and you knew the impact of it. Yeah. That's brill. So what about is there a time that you've been together? You know, when you mentioned like the whistling? Yeah. And how you've interpreted that. Can you tell me a bit more about that?** |  |
| 3.  I'm quite good at doing this. I think I'm quite good at doing this mentalizing because for one of my son being autistic, high functioning, as it were bought, you're always anticipating behaviours, you're always anticipating triggers and you're looking for what might happen in certain situations. So it's like walking in somebody else's shoes, being empathetic, trying to understand their point of view. And actually, that the behaviour is communication. It's nothing else. You know, you're always going to have some sort of behaviour whether it be negative or positive behaviour aren’t you. So from, from the whistling it is usually, it's usually when either she finds something too hard, or she gets to the end of end of her sort of threshold in terms of what she can cope with in a day. And I think it hasn't been happening that often. Lately, and I think it is maybe because we've reduced the length of time she's in school, and she has got that right you starting then and you are finishing then. Sometimes it happens when like one of us is out of the classroom like if I'm if I'm teaching sometimes I do cover and if I'm teaching then sometimes because she's not got that one to one support full on, then she does sort of start using these distraction techniques, you know what I mean? Just detract from doing the work I think and and because she cope with it. I think that's when the whistling starts. And it is a form of her trying to tell us nothing, but actual Im finding this really hard. | using first person as belinda’s voice |
| **Yeah. And what what do you do when she starts so you're interpreting that behaviour? And you notice it like you said the behaviour is communication, then what do you do?** |  |
| I ask her if she's alright. Don't tell her off. So, you know, are you alright, is there anything we can do? Or I'll give her something to do? That's nothing to do with the, what she's doing in the class, you know? Why don't you just take that, you know, that type of thing, get moving. Give her a sensory break, that type of thing. |  |
| **And what so you you've mentalized you've then gone in and supported her in that way. And then what's the impact of that?** |  |
| 4.  She settles back down then. From that. It is really important that you can do this, I think in a job like mine, because it saves it saves the child getting to a crisis point where they can't cope. And then and then it all ends up in a big mess. Whether it be a meltdown, a physical assault, whatever they do whatever they display, you know. I think if you can anticipate and you can read the signs and understand how that child might be feeling at that time. You can intervene before it gets to a boiling point and bring them back down. And that's what I'm trying to do sort of deescalate things and think actually, and think I know this will really stress someone so out whether it be Belinda or not. But the children that I work with, you know, let's see what we can put in place and let's anticipate what might happen. Whether it be the day before I mean, obviously I'm not got consent with it. But there is another person that I'm working with and I'll just I will just vaguely talk to you about where what we've tried to do is just timetable them, but tell them the next day and say right tomorrow, this is happening. So they've got that understanding and I think really especially when it's something like sports day which is tomorrow, wish us luck with that. Might rain. So we have a sports day tomorrow. So things like that even I mean we Belinda, Belinda wasn't here today. So we were unable to then do that because she she was genuinely poorly because Belinda loves swimming and it was swimming today. Now, she would have been they will Bells on smiling, happy as Larry and I think that has really helped her to come in actually to school so that type of thing that she really enjoyed. And also we do activities sort of at break time with that. If I'm not on duty, I'll sit with her and we will play a game or whatever. She has a colouring, colouring big colouring sheets and stuff like that. So yeah, I've gone off on a tangent. |  |
| **No no that makes sense. And what you what you've said about the impact of basically you need to be good at this skill in your job because the impact of that is stopping things from reaching a crisis point. And that is you're, you're interpreting the behaviour you're putting yourself you know, and you're thinking about what it's like to be them and what might be going on in their head and you interpreting that so that's, that's brilliant. So you will have touched on it a little bit. saying about your life experiences have helped you to be good at this skill. Could you give me a little bit more information on that or anything else that you think helps you to be good at that?** |  |
| 5  I think yeah, me life experiences, I’ve had loads of  life experiences and loads of stuff that I've been through. Yeah, I mean, I mean a son with with high functioning autism is hard, hard, hard, hard, because they've got the self awareness. They've got the capacity to learn and you don't really get much help from services, if I'm brutally honest. And but that's not the point. I mean, in terms of me being able to manage a household with two children in, on my own, which I ended up doing because we got divorced, so I was with two boys on my own and being able to then keep her safe household. You have to be able to do that. Because it could end up being critical. You know, we could end up and it did even I when I did and anticipated what was going to happen. I couldn't control other people in there. What they did. So say my oldest son, he might trigger the younger one, to then go to a real high level of sort of danger, you know, within the household and trying to then try to explain to another person, how to do that how to mentalize how to anticipate behaviours, how to empathise, how to understand when they're still growing up themselves. It's very difficult, but I think that I, my ability to do that saved a lot of problems in terms of what could have happened within the house, so it was basically survival. Imagine yourself, I mean, and I've heard this Imagine yourself on a battlefield and you're a soldier and you're anticipating and scanning the environment. That's what it's like to be an autistic mum. You're scanning for all those bombs and everything else that could throw everything off course. And also having the flexibility to be able to say this ain't gonna work for them. And and and it's not a failure. It's just not going to work. You know, I think that's having the understanding that some kids can't cope with that. And you need to then think of doing it doing something a different way or not doing it at all. Like, oh, let's go to fair. Let's Not, let's just not because that is going to be too much. Let's go to blah, blah, blah. Now, that isn't gonna work. So it's having that foresight into things like that, you know? And to do that you have to step into their shoes. And think actually, it's just gonna be too much. Even though, they're not verbally telling you that they can't cope with that, you know, from experience and, you know, from learning about what the triggers are with certain children, you know, what's going to trigger them and you know, what's gonna help, you know, and I think it's having that knowledge and understanding of that child..  Yeah . So I think that has helped me. Also the ability for me to be able to self reflect and think right, I could have done that better. Yeah. Massive. To understand my, my sort of part in things understand that I'm not right all the time |  |
| **Oh, yeah, definitely** |  |
| And don’t have that ego and pride. That stand in your way of saying I'm wrong. I've messed up. |  |
| **So going back to Belinda Is there anything in particular that you can spot in her behaviour? That tells you what's going on or you know, helps you to interpret so we've said about the whistling is there any other behaviours that you….** |  |
| 6  Sometimes winks? Yeah.  When she's not telling truth, right. So you'll say,  ‘really is that what you're saying’ and she’ll go (makes winking face) and it helps to be a little bit mad |  |
| **Definitely, definitely. Thinking is that any thing within schools so you've got your experience as a mum anything within school that helps you to be able to mentalize?**  Unknown 24:18 CHECK THIS  **And that might that might link on to the next one, which is Is there anything that stops you from being able to do it at all as well?** |  |
| 7  I mean, you know, in our class I've got good relationship with teacher. I think that helps because we work together and we're able to then try and work out, I'm quite patient though me so I think having that unspoken relationship with somebody, the other adult is really important because you can you can sort of go (make gesture or eyes pointing to child) or whatever. Sign language across the thing, and we both know. And I think he never says like, I'll say to him, I'm just gonna take them out. Or I'm just, just for a minute and he never says ‘no your not’. And that could be a barrier. That could be a barrier, times a barrier. Because there's lovely ideas. Oh, if the world only had time, you know, we could, we could sit there. Weaving with the children and talk to them about you know, **as if**! you've not got time. I mean, I put a nurture group in place, which Belinda did come to when she was when she was full time. Or if she comes in for an afternoon she comes in and we do some activities in that but the main thing, I think the main thing I've found is the mutual understanding of the staff. You've got to all sing from the same hymn sheet if you want the school to be nurturing. You want the school to be what is it trauma informed? That old Chestnut, which is which we do do, suppose already to level through thrive. I mean, yeah, that easily. It's time again with that, time and  staffing. I think this from my experience of working in different areas and different schools. I think this school is, you know, it's quite proactive when it comes to, to working with children that need additional support, and to be to be empathetic towards them, rather than just branding them, right. They're just being naughty. You will get that in every school. And that's a barrier you will get people's perceptions of children's behaviour or anybody's behaviour. being naughty and **that has to  be smashed**. And the way to do that is to employ like minded people who have got that empathetic sort of way of thinking. But as you know, schools, you can't do that.look at me Im putting the world to rights now. Because you've all you've got historical staff haven't you that have been there a long time. We've always done it that way, blah, blah, blah. Some of them are really up for change. Some of them aren't. And, again, you can't control people, places and things. You can manage them out but you can't control. | different approaches    change the system |
| **So is there a time when you've been working with Belinda, specifically when you found it hard to think about and interpret her her thinking and her behaviour** |  |
| 8  it's hard when she closes up and she she won't actually she, This is what she does. So when when you ask us something that is quite significant, like you know, why is it that you don't want to come? into school? Belinda, she'll go ‘I don’t know’ and she just won't talk about it. And she won't. If you had time to sit with her and maybe go through it, but it would I think with Belinda because the trauma is so deep seated within her. I think it will take a lot of counselling and she Belinda does have that external. So externally, she is also receiving support which is good for Belinda but I think she doesn't, whether she doesn't have the capacity, I don't know but she doesn't seem to want to talk about anything. Feelings wise, emotion wise in terms of why she doesn't want to. Basic the basic thing I can see is that she struggles to leave her mum and its attachment. That's what I perceive it as that and I think that mom is on board and now mum, is is sort of like Right. That's it Your staying to school. And I think that's made a big difference to belina. Mom is sort of, everybody's singing from the same hymn sheet and we're all working together and I think that's really important as well. |  |
| **Definitely** |  |
| that’s when Ive struggled when she just not prepared to you know, open up about why. Why she's struggling with certain things at school, that they're not the main one with her she never talks about she never gets cross over anything about learning she just distracts with the kicking table, sometimes she'll kick table or whistling, Like ive said just to try and get your attention say, Oh yeah, I'm not Don't, Don't forget me because I'm here. You know, and sometimes it just takes that acknowledgement, just hand on the table. You know, yeah are you all right or whatever. And it's normally it's alright when I'm sat with her,  It's like I say when there's just when there's not, not both of us in there. It can be quite tricky. | talking in first person giving voice to belindas behaviour |
| **Yeah. Yeah, that makes sense. It's sort of one of my last questions. And again, you touched on this a bit earlier. So in your role, you're kind of mentalizing about Belinda. But you also talked about mentalizing about yourself. Do you know like you said about reflecting on things that you've done. And so is there a time when you've reflected on your own response to Belinda and you've thought, mmmm you know, I'm not sure that worked or yes, that worked. Really** well. |  |
| Errmmm (laugh), cant think of any off the top of my head, there will be, there will be |  |
| **it will be it'll come to you in the middle of the night tonight won't it** |  |
| yeah it will be in the back of my brain wont it and it will be there. It will be there somewhere. I suppose sometimes. I mean, like anybody. I don't tend to lose my temper. So that would just be me making it up (hufffffssss) I cant really think of owt. I have to, think about that one. |  |
| **Well, yeah, no problem. That's that's really, really helpful. I'm just going to I think I'm going to stop my recording now, I think, because that's the end of my questions. I'm just scanning through my list and just check. Was there anything else? And I think I'll stop that.** |  |
| Post script convo and asked permission to begin recording again. |  |
| Yeah. Okay.  9   So, what she tends to do as well is it's Im supporting her and theres two of us in the classroom, what she'll do is she will, it's like if it's coming up to the home time. So it'd be like, ‘miss what time is it’ (whispers), and she'll be talking to me while sirs talking. So, instead of going, SSSHHHHH I will answer because if I don't, then I know it's not going to stop. She'll keep going because it's that anxiety. It's not because she wants to interrupt what what's going on in classroom. It's because she's got that and that is all she can see. And she's aint gonna focus on anything else until that is sorted in her head. And I know that, so I will say to her, ‘right, five minutes. That's it. Five minutes’. Look, Watch the show her the watch. And it will be I'll respond to that, rather than just saying ‘shh’ which could be another way of doing it, which wouldn't work very well, because she’d just keep asking you, yeah. Its having that it's having that knowledge. I think, it's having that knowledge of the child and putting yourself in her shoes. She's frightened. She wants to go home. She wants to know when that cut off is. She wants to know when she gets her bag. She wants to know when moms come in, blah, blah, blah. So it's having, maybe we can look at a different thing where we have  timer thing at all the sort of end of the school. The School Day,Okay, you've got this. You watch that and when it gets to the bottom, and you're gonna get your bag that might work for I don't know, it might not, but it's worth trying. |  |
| **I think yeah, I think it sounds like you are recognising her emotions. And that is reassuring. So potentially replacing that with a timer might not be the same for her as you being there and being able to. I mean, it's great to build independence, isn't it but** |  |
| she needs that support, I think  I just need to say, ‘its ok its ok, not long now’ and Ill just do that and she will eventually she'll be alright, but it's quite frequent because I think she knows it's coming because after break time, then she's got time. She's got about an hour when it comes to that last half an hour, she's sort of like that I know. It's nearly home time now. I know. It's nearly home time. And she will ask quite a few times. But I never say ‘shhh’ because I think that actually it gets to that time and she's ready. She's ready to go home. And she knows it's coming. And if she finds, I don’t know, What it is its that relationship with mom, she's meeting mom and she's getting excited. I think she's getting excited about going home or going on holiday. |  |
| **And again, the impact of you say,what would that impact be?** |  |
| She'd settle down then. She'd settle down and I'll always what I'll do is if it she gets over sort of over anxious, as I'll say, right, let's go and get your bag then. And I'll take her out the classroom we'll get the bag packed, we'll get that sorted and then we'll walk down and just go to reception, even if it's five minutes earlier. It doesn't matter does it for that sort of release of her anxiety. Yeah, I think you know, it's about reading it, isn't it? And responding appropriately on that given occasion. And I think that's what that mentalizing is part of you're looking at a situation from that child's point of view, and you're able to then respond appropriately to it. Baring their sort of situation in mind. Just pretending that you're walking in their shoes just for a day, you know, just for that minute. How might they be feeling? Why are they feeling like this? If I told them to be quiet, is that appropriate? No, it isn't gonna solve anything. You're not gonna get a good response from them. And you're probably going to get sort of escalated behaviour, then you're going to have problems then, people that, you know, you're going to have responses that are not as good as, you know, if you are patient and you respond in an appropriate way. | putting her first    over lap mentalising and empathy |

**Appendix 5 – Grace – Categorical Content excerpt, analysis stage 3.**

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| **GRACE 2** |  |
| **And just to as a reminder, your grace and we're talking about Jenny So how has your week been with Jenny?** |  |
| 1  So this week has been a little bit unsettled actually.  It's kind of been a build up from last week as well and I've kind of just put it down to getting the end of the year. Very tired. Everybody's ready to finish and Jenny especially. She's worked so hard all year and she is…. I'm getting a lot of like struggle from her now to like, to get any more work out of her this week. So yeah, she's definitely on wind down. But along with that comes any frustrations if I do have to get something out. Of her in terms of work. So, so yeah, it's been a bit of a struggle.  She actually ended up on detention the other day, so… which was really disappointing. I was really I didn't really want it to go that way. But it kind of just been a few too many things. And to the point where me and the teacher both thought that she needs to, we just need to keep you know, keep the boundaries. She needs those boundaries, consistency, and we've had to transition for year six as well. So it's just that knowing you're going into year six, really need to, come so far. We need to keep that going. So So yeah, just a bit of a have a tough week, but I am understanding now that because I know how I feel. laugh | mentalising and transition    boundaries  hierarchy and pressure |
| **Yeah.** |  |
| 2  I understand. You know, she must feel really tired and drained as well. I think everybody is ready to finish. | empathy as opposed to mentalising |
| **Definitely and what kind of,, you can tell that she's struggling? What kind of signs are you seeing that she's struggling?** |  |
| Well, she can just outright just tell me no just very rudely, she, she's quite. She can be quite abrupt. And I kind of go through the steps right. ‘Okay, so now let's get your pencil. Right. Okay, let's start doing this. Let's get your Jotta book out. We're going to start doing some notes’. So it's every like step by step. And if she's not in the mood for that, to get started, it's  a ‘no’ hunched over cross her arms (makes gesture). So it's all in her body language. She's built up frustration. It just comes to the forefront. Straightaway if she's not in that mood. So I will ask you, you know, ‘just take a breath’. I always tell her what the expectations are for her work and can just prepare us as she knows how much he needs to do. And to try and, you know, bring her back. Back to me so that we can start you know, working. **Yes**, it can just be outright refusal, refusal and then rudeness. | clear communication |
| **So, so you you're seeing that she's struggling, you're seeing that things are a bit difficult for her and then that's making you kind of change what you're doing by chunking things.** |  |
| Yeah, definitely. |  |
| **Yeah. And then how how what impact does that have on Jenny?** |  |
| 3  So once she once she knows so today, for instance, we've been doing our English writing, and on the we're doing Greek gods, so the rest of the class the expectation is to do as many gods fact file about as many gods as they can. But for her, I spoke to the teacher before the lesson and said realistically, what's the expectation so I had that chat with her. So before we even started the lesson, set her out for the day,’ this is what we're doing first, this is what's going to be next. And in our English lesson, we are doing that bit of writing, and we're just gonna do three gods’ So yeah, so once she knew that expectation, then she was a bit like, ‘Ah, okay’  Did one, two more to go! It's always a bit of a….work through it. You know, let's get the, we always write the sentences out together. I have found in the last couple of weeks, she's preferred it if, if I write it out, we verbally you know, put the work together and I write it out. And then she copies it. So that's another step just to simplify it for her as well. But I do like to just break it down, ‘right now. You've done two you have only got one more to go we can do it’. You know really just like to be positive for her and keep it going. | academic work but also a strategy here too |
| **Yeah, what do you think could have happened if you didn't give her you know how you said you gave her the now and the next and you were clear what, what do you think would happen if you didn't do that?** |  |
| That's when we tend to get a lot of disruption she might shout out to the lesson. Like the start of the lesson. Shout out to the teacher wanting to know what's happening today. So by me having that conversation with her first of all, that's that first level of disruption. I tried to remove.  And also, we can just get outright refusal from her if I don't prepare her for um for that work. And if I just left her to do it without any kind of breakdown, she'd do nothing, she would just sit there and not actually have any anything written down anyway. So So yeah, and I have been finding recently that I've not been able to leave her as much as I as I used to. |  |
| **Yeah** |  |
| 4  I don't know if it's just like I say just coming to the end of the year and things like that. But yeah, she does seem to be relying on me just a little bit more just this last couple of weeks, really. But then there's also been, you know, personal changes and things like that. So, I don't know if it's, I suppose it can be a contribution to all sorts cant it really |  |
| **so yeah, definitely. And I guess you're using those skills to kind of think about well, why is she wanting me around more? What's that about?** |  |
| Yeah, yeah that’s true. |  |
| **That's sort of, from what you've said. There's two different sides to the impact. If I say anything wrong back to just say no, I didn't mean that. But sort of what I heard was that you're saying that there's the academic impact? Yeah. So if you didn't break the work down, you know, she might not make the progress you might not produce the work. But then alongside that, there's like that emotional side that if you didn't make things manageable for her, then she could, I think you said you'd be disruptive. So there's like two, two different things and actually, sort of what you said is you are you're thinking you're thinking about those factors that are impacting on her and why she needs you more at the moment. And you've said you think that's about you know, transition, and what's made you Is there anything that's made you think that that's what it might be?** |  |
| 5  Yeah, that's true.  And not just myself. Obviously, that's how I've kind of like discussed with you know, other members as well that, you know, this this is happening and this is going to have an effect on her. We're not sure how but we know that it will do, you know, we'll do and it might even come out more in you know, in time. But yeah, I think I try and do that and just a daily basis. Anyway, with the school day. Just try and plan ahead for and have a little chat with her in the morning. Just just to this isn't what's happening today. And I also have that with her this morning for the rest of the school days just because I can see how tired and drained she is. So I said to her right. This is what we're happening tomorrow. This is what we're doing on Thursday. This is what's Friday, and then Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, don't worry. | knowing child better not having to mentalise as much as you adapt in time to anticipate their needs? |
| **Yep**  We'll have some fun days and you just want you to get through this week. So I'm already preparing her for the like the next few days as well. |  |
| **How did she respond to that?** |  |
| Yeah, really good. Actually, it helped her a lot to be honest and we had that chat, because we were doing our writing before break we had break and then she came back in from break and she was a little bit unsettled and she wasn't she was a bit fidgety didn't want to sit in the classroom and get straight on with the work. So I took her outside for a little chat said what that what I just said about planning for the next few days, and it helped her and she came back into the class and we got the work done. So yeah, it really it helped her and it helped me as well because I managed to get you know the work out of her. |  |
| **Brilliant, and I'm just gonna come back to something that you mentioned. Ask a little bit more about it. So you have that role as the one to one for Jenny. But earlier on, you mentioned So you, you knew that you have this piece of writing and you were thinking right, we need to get this done, but what's the expectation? So you went to the member of staff and you said like, what's the expectation? So do you share with staff about what you notice about Jenny and what you might try and how that works at all?** |  |
| 6  Oh, yeah, definitely. Especially with the class teacher we do really closely together. And you know, he will, if he can advise me, I mean, he's advised me a lot. And to be honest, because this is my first role in this as one to one so I've learned a lot in this last year and yeah, really. Yeah. Happy to share with anything and I always like to kind of report back on how she's getting on and what have you But then she's also really proud to share with the teacher as well whenever she does do her, you know her work and and what have you and shes straight up to share that with the teacher? So yeah, we definitely do work together.   Yeah, if that's what I'm answering, |  |
| **yeah, almost a bit. A bit like, yeah, you've you've noticed something, that she might be struggling. And then do you report that back?** |  |
| 7  Oh, yes. So in terms of English writing, it's, it's quite a hefty piece of work. in year Five, it's a hefty piece of work. So we know straightaway, and I've learned this just over the year with her that it's gonna be a struggle. So I suppose it has just cost me time over the year that I've just learned that actually we do need to break it down. what's expected of her? What do I need to achieve and you know, just help her to get through that. And then she she also feels because she's finished her amount of set work. She feels she's achieved as well. So that's nice. Whereas she, she really is really hard on herself. If she feels like she hasn't achieved, so if I didn't set those expectations for her she would feel like failure if she's not finished the work. Yeah, so it definitely does help.  **You sound like you've got that understanding of her on what happens when she's been hard on herself. What kind of things would you see?**  Just start it she'll she'll cry she would literally head on the desk if shes got an answer wrong.  You know, but we'll talk about it. You know, it's not the end of the world.  We all make mistakes. We've got to learn from those mistakes and we just have a chat about it and you know, I try and say, if I've got something wrong, you know, we're all, even as adults, we all get things wrong, don't we? So just just comfort her and tell her we can just try harder. Let's let's have a look at a different way of doing that type thing you know, so yeah, but she can take a few minutes then to come back round she might have to go off for a little toilet break just to change scenery, calm herself down. We found that that works well. If she just goes off to the toilet, whereas at the start of the year, we were having a lot of, just storming out kicking the door, running out a lot of running around the whole school as well. So So yeah, so we have managed to, we can sense it now. And say, ‘Jenny, you go to the toilet, go another minute of the toilet and come back. Come back to me when you ready’ and it does work. | strategy based on knowing - more attuned - this could also be crisis averted |
| **Yeah, that sounds really amazing that using this like reading of the situations and having that understanding how much you know how much more positive things are for from what you've said, like comparing that kicking the doors and storming. Out to now**  Oh, yeah,  **Just being able to say go go to the toilet. Have a minute and she's responding responding to that. I'm just scanning through my list of questions.**  **So just in terms of thinking about Jenny struggling a little bit, has there been anything this week that has helped you to mentalize anything? So last week, you talked about actually like your personal factors, your personal life. Is there anything that has helped you to mentalize with her this week at all?** |  |
| I think when when I'm put on the spotl like that I can't think about it, but then just talk again it just comes out.  (Laughs) |  |
| **Yes. Yeah, yeah. this week in terms of how I had to think about how she was feeling, yeah, I guess in a way you've sort of already mentioned it to me. You said ‘I thought about how I'm feeling and then you know’** | Drawing interview back to previously mentioned topics |
| 8  With the tiredness? so yeah, absolutely. Yeah, yeah, I've definitely been doing that with her for the last couple of weeks. I mean, that the only other thing I'm thinking about is when we had to pass on the information that she had received a detention. She she had quite a meltdown.  Crying in the corridor and actually didn't want to leave the school, which was just heartbreaking. And, you know, the way that me and the teacher would just worded it was just that, you know, it's just been a combination of things. It's not just one thing. We've spoken about things, you know, all the way through. It's just unfortunate. It's just gone a little bit too far today. She needs to understand that the boundaries are still there. And then when she did come out, I could just see how upset she was. And I just really just tried to just try to make her think that it's not the end of the world. And yes, we all make mistakes. And I say to her over and over. We just we just need to try and learn from those mistakes.  Her ….People around here would just think far more of her she just held her hands up sometimes and said, You know, I'm just I did this. I didn't mean to do it. I'm never going to do that again. And we can only try and be better, can't we? And and I know that's where she struggles and I just said to her, you know, it's not the end of the world, tomorrow's a new day. All we can do is try better for tomorrow. So just really, but I knew that she was just so upset. And and then I couldn't help but think then it's gonna affect them her evening at home and things like that and then the next day, so I did prepare myself them for the next morning. |  |
| **And how was it?** |  |
| 9  She was quite low. So because you see she came in she was quiet ‘morning Jenny, how are you?’ ‘Fine’. And that's all I kind of got. So if ever I get that and I can see, um, you know not in the best of moods. I do like to take her out for a little bit of a chat before we go into the classroom just to see if I can bring around just a little bit find out how how the evening was and what have you just start off with general  ‘What do you have for breakfast?’  **Yeah**  Just anything to kind of get her talking and then it usually comes out then.    **So And did it work so you know you I guess it sounds like you were thinking about how her evening had gone and then sort of watching for the signals when she got in and then you notice that she was a little bit down. So then you took her out to chat to uh, did that have an impact?**  It did. Yes. So she did kind of offload to me of what happened at home getting told off so. And I always I always kind of dread that because I think she's gonna blame me. And then that might set back our trust. But then, on the other side of it, she's also got to respect you know, grownups around here and grownups at school. So it's kind of a two edged sword that that bit, but now it really helps you offloaded and just reassured her I'm always here to listen. And Today's a new day. Let's just try and be better. Our behaviour chart. It's always perfect purple, super surfer and reach for the stars. I always say you can reach for those stars whenever you want to. And it does always give her, Yeah, it brought her up a little bit and yeah, | worrying about their relationship/worry about tension around boundaries |
| **And how was the rest of the day in terms of behaviour?** |  |
| That day, it was a different day because we had a transition morning. She was a little bit rude. We did have to have movement on the chart of going down. I brought it back up as soon as I could. Yeah. And so if she's rude to me its, ‘no Jenny, don't talk that way’. um  But then if she's really polite are ‘Thank you, Miss for that’ then its ‘Oh, thank you for those lovely manners’ and bring it straight back up. |  |
| **Yes.** |  |
| So it's kind of that does work really well for her.  So yeah, it was a bit of a up down day. But I think it was more because of how she'd been told off at home more than anything.  **Yeah, yeah, definitely. And also a bit like what you've said, the the unsettled nature of the end of the school year**  Absolutely it's kind of what I'm putting it down to to everything which you know, I'm sure there's more to it as well, but I just can't help but feel I mean, I know my own children the shattered Yeah, they're all They're all ready for a break. And then for somebody who's also got their own struggles, it just must be exhausting. |  |

**Appendix 6 – Julia – Categorical Content excerpt , analysis stage 3.**

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| **Julia 2** |  |
| **And so I'm just, as Barry's not been in school. I'm just wondering if we can think about and reflect on a time when you've mentalized with Barry. So for example, he's acted in a certain way and you've kind of read the situation thought about how he's feeling and then use that to kind of figure out what's going on.** |  |
| 1  It was a school trip to  a museum  cant think, it was sometime earlier this year. And he didn't like the fact that basically Im his shadow on a school trip. I have to, I can't let him out my sight. So he didn't like the fact that if he went to the left, I went to the left. And because there were a couple of other characters in the group that he needed to be kept away from we’d kind of battled with it all morning. And then he ran off. I don't know if you've been to that Museum, but you go in one door at one end and you come out at the other end. So in the end, I ended up because he was not very happy with me he didn't want me to follow him.  But I Had to follow him and I found him by, in the car park. They've got a big statue. And he’d got over there. So I made a joke of it and let him pose you know, some photos on the statue. And we just sat and talked and said I said look, I have to this is the reason why. You know, there is already a tension between you and these other children. ‘But yeah, but why do you have to follow me? Why can't you be following them and watching what they're doing?’ And point was because you're my responsibility today? Mr. X has said to me you know, you're one to one with Barry, so there's somebody else's responsibility. And eventually I said what if, when the group that we're supposed to be staying with, if they go in the front door and out the back if we come in the back door, and go out the front door? So yes, we've got to pass these people, but you're not sort of going around looking at things with them. And that worked absolute wonders. He was soon very quickly back to his, you know, you're my best friend sort of self and went to having a really good day then. | strategy - talking, humour |
| **Oh, good. So you sort of picked up you said that he wasn't happy? And he said he ran off? What do you think he was feeling**? |  |
| Smothered? |  |
| **Right.**  **And was there anything in what he said?** |  |
| That he was smothered? because if it was the constant? Why'd you have to follow me? Are you following me? Yeah, and I'm not I'm not following you. I have to be with you.  It's hard. I can understand that. Nobody likes to be you know, followed you. So when you as a parent, at home, you can't go to the toilet in peace. It does. It gets you like (gesture in face strained with noise) just give me a minute. Yeah, just give me some space. And I know that I could see that. That was what he was thinking. | empathy/life experience and mothering |
| **So. So you sort of identified this that he was feeling sort of smothered? And actually you thought about how that feels for you as a person at times. And then you sort of went to him and you had that one to one conversation with Barry where you then, sort of correct me if I'm wrong, but you sort of explained to him what was going on. And what was the impact of you having that conversation with him?** |  |
| Well, eventually, he did calm down. he did come back and he did end up having a good day because as far as he was concerned, at the time when he was feeling smothered, he wants to just go and sit on the coach for the day.  You know, I think it was because in his eyes, i felt like he thought me being there was sapping the fun out of things for him. You know, because all the other kids were allowed to you know, go off a little bit on their own and he's not allowed to do that. Which I can see. He'd feel, you know, that's not fair. Why, why do they get to go round that corner on their own? And I'm not allowed unless you've got your eyes on me. Which is unfortunate, but because of his you know, because he loses his temper. We don't have a choice. |  |
| **Yeah, and I think it sounds like on that day, you were using those mentalizing skills a lot. You know, you just said so many different things about what you interpreted from him, you know that he was feeling smothered he was feeling it wasn't fair. So when they actually did the action of running off I guess you already had an idea of what you thought was going on for him. So then you you know you altered sort of what you what you were doing what do you think could have happened if you hadn't have had that chat? And that sort of explanation** |  |
| 2  He would have definitely, we would have been sat on the coach if I just said right, that's it. You know, you've run off now. Your chances have us has a blown, but I don't, I know better, and you've got the rest of the day to get through. So let's try and turn it round. That's what we did. And it didn't take much tweaking with the day, you know, just coming in from a different entrance. To me was quite straightforward and simple. And it was, you know, for him, it didn't like it at first that the first hut that we went in, because it was just like, I don't know, I guess sometimes it sees me a bit like mum. So I think he thought it's just a boring trip, you know, going around all these old fashioned things with my mum. I'm quite good at making fun out of things rather than it just be right going read that bit of information. I also, we’d been given a pack of things to them to tick off and find while they were in these huts. And it didn't want to do that. And it was because it was in my hand. I ended up, I put it in the bin. Because it was me carrying it. I think he kept thinking, ‘Oh, I've got to do that when I get back or I've got to do that later’. So I just went ‘it's in the bin now Barry don't worry about it’. Yeah | different approaches  her strategy - talking and reassuarnce    strategy making a change for Barry - child first |
| **And and did that help?** |  |
| Yeah.  Yeah |  |
| **So I think this is a really, really good example of what I'm sort of looking into because you're like you're noticing signals you notice something from them again and thought oh, is this about this worksheet? Is this what he’s sort of thinking so I'm just going to do something and then see what** **impact it has. So chucking it away. Getting rid of that then helped sort of, I don't like you said have have more fun, I guess. Yeah. And enjoy himself.** |  |
| yeah |  |
| **Was, when you were there on that day. Was that easy for you to use that skill? Or how did that feel for you?** |  |
| 3  No. I just I find it quite natural. Yeah. Maybe because for the last 10 years, I have worked with difficult children. It's just I pick my battles. That's my sort of header. You pick your battles, if it's not going to hurt them. It's not it's not gonna harm them in any way. Then let's do whatever it is. Yeah, rather than I have known other members of staff if for example, Barry's got a pen in his hand, and he might be, just waving it about not so much tapping it and being a nuisance, but they'll take it off him and im like ‘why’ (frustrated tone) he wasn't actually, yes he shouldn’t have it in his hand because you've said pens down, but it's not actually creating fuss. |  |
| **I think that's an interesting thing if it's alright to come back to his thinking about staff and other staff and you say in picking, picking your battles. How, what was staffs response, you know, on those times when you make those adaptations for Barry, how do they respond to that?** |  |
| Some members of staff don't like it. There are still people around the like you know, they're not following the rules. So as far as they're concerned, they're being mardy. They are the you know, oh, he's just in a mood. Whereas, yeah, maybe they are but it's going to be an extremely long day. If we start this battle now. There's there's been many times when I have seen somebody physically takes something out of his hand, which is then caused him to push a table over or, especially when I first came and I was just kind of observing from a distance to begin with. You know, I've worked with children that will do anything they can to disrupt that class through making a noise in particular. And, yes, that's annoying, but if you ignore it, nine times out of 10, They'll stop doing it faster than if you sort of given them reaction. |  |
|  |  |
| **Yeah** |  |
| So for me if he needs a whiteboard in front of him to be doodling on, while he's listening to, you know, whatever the teacher is teaching at the time, then let him do that. It doesn't mean he's not listening. He actually is listening. He just needs to occupy his hands. Yeah, and I think a lot of children are like that. | strategy |
| **Yeah. So it's having that you've got that experience that you bring in and having that understanding, I guess about children's needs. Has there ever been a situation and again, I'm not encouraging you to say anything that would make you feel uncomfortable, but has there ever been in a situation where you felt sometimes those pressures have stopped you from mentalizing and where there's been different pressures that have stopped you from mentalizing? Like, you know,** |  |
| I wouldn't say stop me from mentalizing. It might stop me from acting, something that may be or has been occasions where I've felt, now's not the time for me to say anything or to give Barry the direction because it might be that he's been told to do something. And Ive thought, well, maybe we could try doing it this way. So rather than going against what somebody else has said, I sort of bide my time until he’s not within ear distance because I sometimes feel it's a bit of a battle sometimes between me and this class teacher that she wants him to do it this way. And I know he's not going to do it that way.  **Yeah. Yeah.**  So sometimes I might have to go over and have a quiet word and say, Look, he will do it. But can I take him to a different place or can he just do this much today? And we can see if we can get the rest of them later. Dependent on that teachers mood sometimes it might be a yes, sometimes it might be a no but I do find that that's got better. Yeah. And I think that's because lots of staff, especially the senior team, have noticed the difference in Barry. Since I've been with them. Some children I just think it takes a lot of patience. A lot of listening and a lot of you know, a lot of time and nurturing. Like I said last time, I'm just gutted that Thursday that will be it. He's gone from primary and you know there is no more one to one support. Its um,,, I think he'll do okay, I think he may himself turn it round at secondary, but I do think for at least his first probably through his first year. That he could do somebody like me. He's not gonna get that. |  |
| **When you say about the progress that he's made, sort of from your work within that relationship, you know, the way that you know you're working with him. It must be hard for you and hard for him to go somewhere else to be you know, to be without that and like you say, we can just be hopeful about the future that that having that support that he's had with you guys is set him up for the best possible chance he can have.** |  |
| Yeah yeah  **But yeah, it's interesting about you know, it's, it can be it can be challenging working in a team, you know, within a school sometimes and like getting those getting that balance, right when you're working with somebody and being able to like you can mentalize, you know what's going on, you know what you need to do but sometimes because of the relationships and the team, you know, that can can make things tricky, is sort of what I'm hearing and I think I think that's the same everywhere.** |  |
| 4  No, it is definitely yeah, definitely. Over my 11 years, I've worked with various different teachers and some work with you yes, some some don't work with you so well.. I understand that the end of the day, they've got a job to do. They've got to get these children to ARE, and that is their focus and that is their job. Whereas for me, it's not my job. I think schools that don't have TAs, I don't know how they nurture because teachers don't have time to, they do but they don't have the time to focus on it. Like the teaching assistants do. Or the HLTAs. |  |
| **Yeah, and what saying about like you said seeing that role of a teacher is kind of having the academic focus. What do you see your role as in school?**  . |  |
| My role is to support the academic side of it by taking on more of the nurturing side and I also think, for me, and I know most TAS wouldn't agree with this. I tend to, I'm very good at behaviour control. On a whole class basis, not not just one to one. Because I'm not obviously I'm not employed as Barry's one To one of the one of the HLTAs of the school. So I am here, there and everywhere. And I think TAs, I think children will always like the TAs more than the class teacher. Because again, it's the nurturing it's the emotional side that we give. Teachers don't often have the time to give | time as a theme for teachers |
| **Yeah yeah definelty. And what what skills do you have? So they might be skills at work or personal skills, but what skills do you have that help you to work with young people like Barry?** |  |
| I just think it's experience yeah, I've never apart, from doing the HLTA training. I've never had any, you know, outside, education training for anything to do with working with children or children's mental health. I think a lot as we said in the last meeting goes on my own childhood, and then just my experience of, you know, working in schools for a long time. |  |
| **So I'm just gonna come back with your permission to something that you mentioned in the last interviews when we'd stopped the recording. And I said, Thank you for sharing your experiences and you've said that after your experiences with your mum, it made you I think, I'm not sure if the word was determined, but determined to be different.**  Yeah.  **And you talked about being a mum yourself. And I just wondered, when you talk about being different to your mum, is that something that is important to you as a mum at home? And is that something that you bring into your professional role at all?** |  |
| 5  Both, it begins at home. Obviously, I didn't work in education when I when I became a mum myself. And in fact my daughter was she was in year six during my first year in school. So it's probably more to be to do with being a mum and just wanting the best for my daughter. And she's had all the chances that I didn't have it, it's pause - just where my mum's concerned because we didn't have a relationship that was you know, I wouldn't say it was unloving, but it wasn't. You know, a lovey dovey as most mums , all my friends you know that go shopping with the mums and their mum would take them to buy their first bra and things like that. I never I never had that. I think that when it came to the time that I was wearing bras, I'd pinch them off my best friend, you know, because there was no point me asking my mum because I knew I wouldn't get one. My sister had a child before me, and she's stuck at one as well. She doesn't want more than the one and I don't know if that's her reason. Because she actually was closer to my mom than I was because she was the baby of the family. But I decided I mean, I moved out the day I turned 16 I managed to get myself a little Council flat. So I've lived, I had to grow up pretty fast. |  |
| **Yeah.** |  |
| And it was from from the day moving out. I was like right that's it. Is my life now. I don't have to answer to anyone. I can do what I want, when I want. And that's what I did. And I just I was determined because my mum had taken us out, well, not all of us took me my brother out of school, I think on and off about the last two years Of Education, so I never actually sat in exams. And by that time we were living in a caravan i because my mum's a bit of a bit of a traveller and decided that it didn't matter about our education, you know, it's what she wanted to do. So let's go on, dump this caravan in the middle of a field. So I then went back to college. And, you know, I was working at college, working at college, because obviously, you know, lived on my own and didn't have any choice. And then slowly I've just built myself up you know better jobs. Yeah, well college courses. And then I have my own hair salon for six years studied for three years to get to do that. |  |
| **Yeah, well, it just shows sort of, I guess what resilience you have and like a really strong sort of personal drive to sort of take that, you know, take well, it's just amazing. I think when someone has that drive within themselves to think no, I want this and I'm gonna go for it. So yeah, that's amazing. And probably all the different experiences that you've had, have made you the really strong support you are for young people, like you said last time**, |  |
| Yeah I think im quite rounded because like I said, because I've been through, you know, the ups and downs of not so good childhood myself, and perhaps not so good teenage years because obviously I didn't do all the partying because I couldn't afford to, you know, bills to pay. And so yeah, so I think starting work as well at such an early age makes you a more rounded person. Because you're spending more time with older people. Other people that have got an experience that they can, you know, pass on and share with you. I just think all these things help |  |
| **Yeah, definitely. And they bring, like feed into those as what you were saying earlier, your skills are from your life experience. So yeah, I think that's really, really interesting.** |  |

**Appendix 7**

**Master key of themes for categorical content**

Examples of Mentalising

Hard to mentalise

impact

Words used around though and mental verbs

Academic focus

Being close in the relationship

empathy

Behaviour that challenges others

Home school communication

Averting crisis

Positive change

Child centred/child first

Challenge in the relationship

Different approaches to supporting children

Emotional labour of job

Mothering

Experience professionally

Life experience

Natural ability

Nurture

Hierarchy pressure from system

Body language

Transition in education

Strategies - could this encompass a few different things

Support from others

Implementing oundaries

Child background and understanding them

Consistency

Change the system

Sustainability

**Appendix 8**

**Summary table of categories for each participant**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Key themes | Grace  - | Betty | Julia |
|  | * Being a mother * Natural skill * Lots of shared strategies * Knowing the child and adapting * Hard to mentalise when hurts others or allegation * Support from others * Little professional experience * Focus on academics * Body language * Using knowledge and experience of child - knowing them well * life lessons - tomorrows a new day * Reassurance as strategy * Teaching life lessons and mantras | * Home school communication * Averting crisis * Cant mentalise when apart * Life experience * Experience as mum * Natural skill * Using knowledge and experience of child - knowing them well * Encouraging others to mentalise - kids and staff * Moral purpose and sustainable skills - life lessons * Different approaches to working with children * Child centred and putting them first * Wanting to teach sustainable skills | * Personal experience * Life experience * Emotional labour * Advocacy for child * Mentalising and interpreting behaviour and positive change from this * Different approaches to working with children * Closeness with key child * Hard to mentalise or act on it if away * Humour * Empathy - trying to see through their eyes * Body language * Cant mentalise when apart * Reassurance as strategy |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

**Appendix 9 – Google jam board for sorting sub categories into categories**



**Appendix 10**

**Table showing frequency and location of subcategories and principal sentences for Betty in overarching category of *what factors support mentalising.***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Helps Mentalising** | |  |  |
| **Sub theme** | **Quote** | **other examples** |  |
| Being  a mother | 1.3  I think I'm quite good at doing this mentalizing because for one of my son being autistic, high functioning, as it were bought, you're always anticipating behaviours, you're always anticipating triggers and you're looking for what might happen in certain situations | 1.5, 2.6, 2.5, 3.7, 3.9 | For Betty, this is a prominent sub category in her narratives. In her work with young people she draws on this frequently to help her to make sense of and use strategies to support young people. |
| background knowledge | 1.9 And it will be, I'll respond to that, rather than just saying ‘shh’ which could be another way of doing it, which wouldn't work very well, because she’d just keep asking you, yeah. Its having that it's having that knowledge. I think, it's having that knowledge of the child and putting yourself in her shoes. | 1.1, 1.5, 1.8, 1.9 | Within this category Betty shares her knowledge of Belinda and she uses this to help her and interpret her behaviours. For example she knows she finds it hard to separate from her mum, therefore when it is getting closer to home time she attributes her behaviour to anxiety around wanting to be with mum and she uses this to adjust her behaviour. |
| Using body language | 3.4  Because she was just a bit restless and moving about and things like that. | 1.6, 2.1, 2.3, 3.4 | Often when Betty talks about how she mentalises and she draws on reading signals from Belinda’s body language. |
| viewing behaviour as communication | 1.3   I think that's when the whistling starts. And it is a form of her trying to tell us nothing, but actual Im finding this really hard.  3.8  So because the shutdown, and I'm aware of that, and I try and keep that type thing at forefront. Of my mind rather than ‘their naughty they’re doing this and it's not right’. The way I look at it is right, that behaviour is trying to tell me something is communicating. That's a way of communicating and I need to keep that in the forefront of my mind. | 1.1, 1.9, 2.1, 2.1, 3.4, 3.8 | This is a really prominent category for Betty, first of all in the amount of times that it is mentioned but also in how important it is for her to do her job. I believe this illustrates just what a highly skilled job supporting a young person with SEMH needs is. |
| reflection | 1.5  Yeah . So I think that has helped me. Also the ability for me to be able to self reflect and think right, I could have done that better  2.3  However, a long term solution if there's something that is an ongoing issue, and I'm always looking for that solution and thinking right, well, do you think that could be why Belinda's really like that or Do you think we should try this to see whether we can help her with this? And I do do this, Ill tell you when I do this It's it's a lot of time. It's when I'm walking dogs. |  | This subcategory illustrates the amount of mental effort that goes on to support a young person. This might be done at school or also at home. This might demonstrate the emotional labour of the role and that staff are constantly keeping children in their mind. |
| life experience | 1.5  That's what it's like to be an autistic mum. You're scanning for all those bombs and everything else that could throw everything off course. And also having the flexibility to be able to say this ain't gonna work for them. And and and it's not a failure. It's just not going to work. You know, I think that's having the understanding that some kids can't cope with that. And you need to then think of doing it doing something a different way or not doing it at all. Like, oh, let's go to fair. Let's Not, let's just not because that is going to be too much. Let's go to blah, blah, blah. Now, that isn't gonna work. So it's having that foresight into things like that, you know?  3.8  And if something does happen, I don't tend to react if it's something that others, this sounds not being dismissive of other members of staff, but some people aren't as exposed, I suppose, or haven’t been exposed to things that are (pause) difficult Ill put it like that or challenging, challenging situations, and I think people panic, and actually, you can't because you lose focus then and I don't tend to panic or anything really. Because there's no point and sometimes unfortunately, it's a situation where it's gone to a level that can't be sort of brought back down | 1.3, 1.5, 2.5, 2.6, 3.8,, | This subcategory links to the category around being a mother. Within her narratives this category was prominent and Betty discussed how she drew on life experiences as a mum and how these helped her to be resilient and calm. It appeared that Betty feels it was important in her role as children need adults to remain calm when they are dysregulated. |
| thinking together | 1.7  I mean, you know, in our class I've got good relationship with teacher. I think that helps because we work together and we're able to then try and work out  1.7   I think the main thing I've found is the mutual understanding of the staff. You've got to all sing from the same hymn sheet if you want the school to be nurturing. | 2.4, | Team work appeared to facilitate Betty’s ability to mentalise and more importantly, that she knew that she had the member of staff's support to act on her thoughts. |
| empathy | 3.9   But then it's about putting yourself in that kid's shoes and thinking, Christ if there was 10 adults around me, would I like it? Would that make me feel calm and safe? No? I don't think so. I'd kick off even more, you know. | 3.8, 3.7, 3.4, 2.2, 1.9, 1.9, 1.5, 1.3, 1.2 | This category came out prominently within this phase of the analysis. It was significant for Betty and she spoke about this passionately. It was also mentioned very frequently. Betty was reading and interpreting Belinda’s behaviour but also she was taking her perspective and engaging in cognitive empathy. This could highlight the link between cognitive empathy and mentalising. |

**Appendix 11 - Betty categorical form analysis stage 4**

**Focus - mental verbs, reported speech**

**Key**

**Blue = mental verbs**

**Pink reported speech**

**Underlined = sjuzet**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Chosen extract** | **Linguistic features** | **Paralinguistic**  **features** |
| **Interview 3, move 4**  Because I knew she needed that. But that helped her. But again, it's noticing the fact that she's not sitting still, she's, she's talking over you, you know, she's just a bit it's like an anxious state I’d say.  **what was making her anxious. Do you think?**    I don’t know, Sometimes she just is. Sometimes she is, and I think maybe that now it's going to end of term and  things are going to change. And, you know, we've had that transition and that'll be playing on her mind, I would imagine. Because it's not easy for anyone is it really, change. I don't even know where I'm going now. I'm not bothered, really. But you know, you don't know what's going to happen. So yeah, so I think it might be that.    **Interview 3, move 8**  You have to bring that child back down to a level where they're going to be responsive because their brains telling them ‘oh my god I need to choose now am I gonna stay here or I'm gonna run’. You know, You know, it's that fight or flight into it gets to a stage where they they're in they're in crisis, and they they shut down. So because they shutdown, and I'm aware of that, and I try and keep that type thing at forefront of my mind rather than ‘their naughty they’re doing this and it's not right’. The way I look at it is right, that behaviour is trying to tell me something it’s communicating. That's a way of communicating and I need to keep that in the forefront of my mind | Betty uses a lot of words to express the amount of mental effort she is going to to interpret belinda’s thoughts and behaviour - the word mind is used over both extracts in relation to betty’s mind and Belinda’s mind.  Repetition of the word ‘she’ - this might be bringing it back to being about belinda and the focus being on her - reinforces bettys focus on belinda and how shes noticing little things.  The word imagine and think are also used to suggest the ‘conscious mental processing’  ‘Forefront of my mind’ is repeated and this could be to demonstrate the importance of this in her work as opposed to those who might say a child is ‘naughty’  These sections show the conscious mental processing that is happening to make sense of Belinda’s behaviour and to enter her ‘mental life’.  There is some language to suggest that her hypotheses are tentative e.g ‘it might be that’, ‘I don’t know’  Betty uses reported speech my interpretation of this is that she does this in order to show the juxtaposition of how some people in education may view a childs behaviour compared to her approach. Reported speech can be seen as rhetorical device that maybe used to support the factuality of a claim (Potter 1996) Woofitt (1992) also suggests that this might not be a direct quote but one that is ‘emblematic’ as the kind of thing that people may say.  Discusses their ‘brain is telling them’ - actually going into neurological level to interpret behaviour | Time 8.06   you know, she's just a bit ….. Pause for thought   ….it's like an anxious state I’d say thie pause here might be suggestive of Betty thinking and finding the words.    Longer pause after ‘I would imagine’ - taking time to imagine and time to reflect  Words around her own feelings said in a slightly lower tone as an aside - almost as if her feelings are not the important ones to discuss    21.30  Oh my god - extra emphasis in voice - displaying how bad it feels for the child.    Tone changes when she gives voice to other staff - more abrupt and quick - the next section about communicating is said more slowly and calmly converting Bettys calm and well thought out approach |

**Appendix 12 - Grace categorical form - analysis stage 4**

**Focus - Mental verbs, de-intensifiers**

**Key**

**Blue = mental verbs**

**Green = deintensifiers**

**Underlined = sjuzet**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Chosen extract** | **Linguistic features** | **Paralinguistic**  **features** |
| Interview 1 move 3  I had an illness, I caught COVID A couple of weeks ago. So I had a week off and she was quite, she was quite rude to me when I came back. And it took me a bit of time to actually think about actually, I understand why you've been rude to me because she felt like Id left her for that week, while I was at home and she obviously just had, she didn't know who she was having on a daily basis. So when I came back, she took it out on me a little bit but I didn't have to step back to, took me a day and so to realise actually, ‘Oh, I understand now’. She, she felt like had abandoned her. But I'm back so I just started to reiterate to her again. I was you know, ‘I was poorly I couldn't have helped it but I'm back now I'm not going anywhere’  I think I was just reflecting on that first day, back after COVID And then suddenly thought, ‘oh, what's different, what's changed?’ And the fact was that I had left her, um, for unforeseen circumstances that I imagine she she would have just seen it as I've abandoned her. | Grace uses a lot of words to express the amount of mental effort she is going to to figure out why Jenny acted in a certain way - think, realise, understand in relation to jenny’s actions and feelings - she uses reported speech to share her light bulb moment of when she realised what was happening for Jenny.  These sections show the conscious mental processing that is happening to make sense of Jennys behaviour and to enter her ‘mental life  Grace uses de -intensifiers when she talks about Jennys behaviour - ’‘Quite rude’ , ‘took it out on me a little bit’ - I feel this might be done in order to continue to advocate for Jenny and and de intensify what someone might think is unacceptable behaviour - this idea is supported by  ‘She didn’t know who she was having on a daily basis’ which provides further rationale and explanation for why Jenny was acting in the way that she was - i think this could suggest she is trying to advocate for her and help others to understand her the way she does.  The word ‘suddenly’ also suggest that this came as a bit of a surprise for Grace.  The word reflecting also suggests how Grace is thinking about something after it has happened and this may take time and space to be able to do this.  Abandoned is a strong word for grace having day off for being ill  - this might again be linked to her feeling bad for being ill - this illustrates the emotional labour | Time **5.34**  She was quite… rude to me before - slight pause - finding the right word.  Felt like I’d ‘left her’ - extra emphasis on left her - like the realisation makes her feel bad/sad/guilty    When Grace speaks and shares in her own words what she has said - she uses a positive up beat tone - using prosody that she might use with child.    6.00  When Grace voices her own thoughts she uses her normal voice  When she says left her - she pauses, and adds for unforeseen circumstances- quickly and with emphasis - this might again be linked to her feeling bad for being ill - this illustrates the emotional labour. |
|  |  |  |

**Appendix 13 - Julia categorical form - analysis stage 4**

**Focus - mental verbs**

**Intensifiers and de- intensifiers**

**Key**

**Blue = mental verbs**

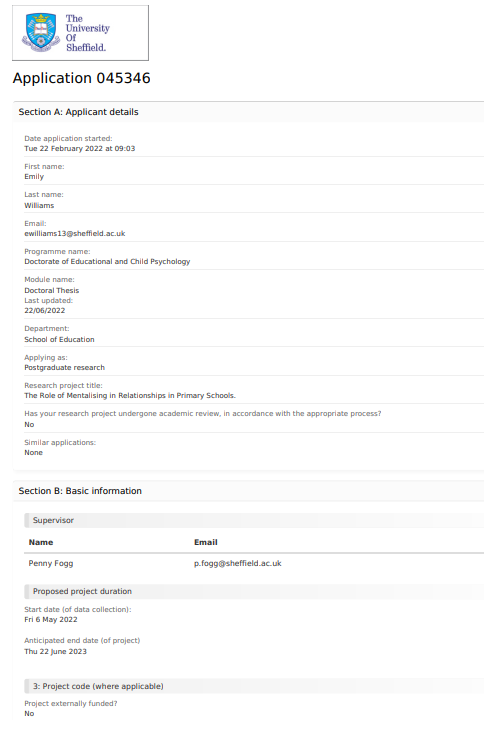
**Green = intensifiers/deintensifiers**

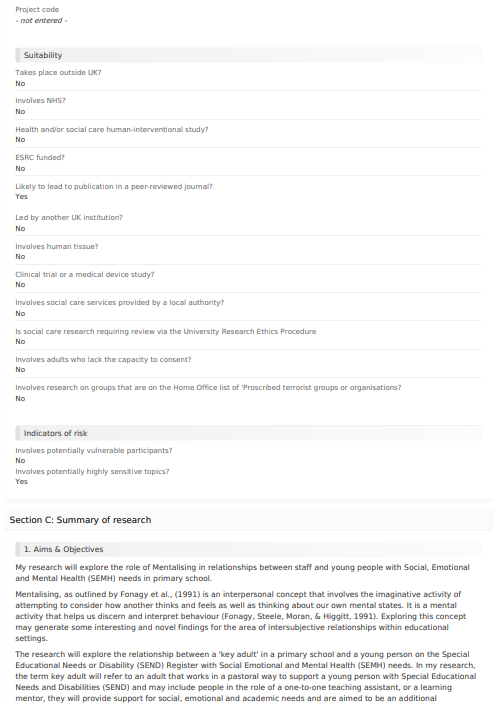
**Underlined = sjuzet**

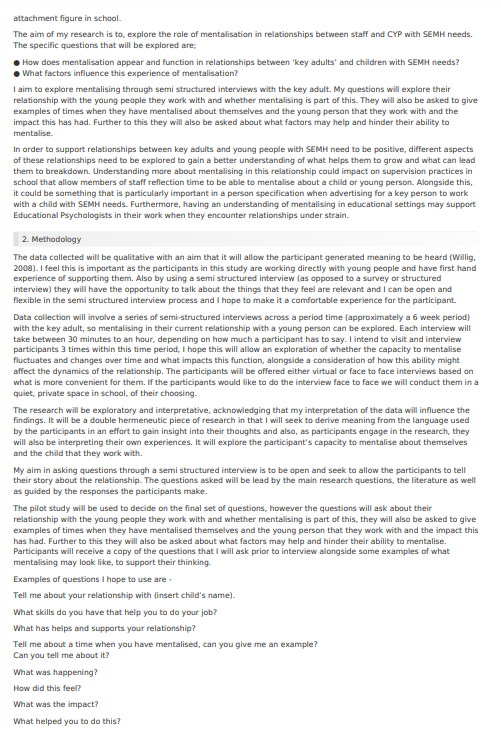
|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Chosen extract** | **Linguistic features** | **Paralinguistic**  **features** |
| **Interview 2 move 1**  Well, eventually, he did calm down, he did come back and he did end up having a good day because as far as he was concerned, at the time when he was feeling smothered, he wants to just go and sit on the coach for the day.  You know, I think it was because in his eyes, i felt like he thought me being there was sapping the fun out of things for him. You know, because all the other kids were allowed to you know, go off a little bit on their own and he's not allowed to do that. Which I can see. He'd feel, you know, that's not fair. ‘Why, why do they get to go round that corner on their own? And I'm not allowed unless you've got your eyes on me’  Which is unfortunate, but because of his you know, because he loses his temper. We don't have a choice.    **Interview 2 move 2**  And it was, you know, for him, it didn't like it at first that the first hut that we went in, because it was just like, I don't know, I guess sometimes it sees me a bit like mum. So I think he thought urgh it's just a boring trip, you know, going around all these old fashioned things with my mum. I'm quite good at making fun out of things rather than it just be right going read that bit of information. I also, we’d been given a pack of things to them to tick off and find while they were in these huts. And he didn't want to do that. And it was because it was in my hand. I ended up, I put it in the bin. Because it was me carrying it. I think he kept thinking, ‘Oh, I've got to do that when I get back or I've got to do that later’.  So I just went ‘it's in the bin now Baz don't worry about it’. Yeah | Julia uses the term ‘he did come back’ to describe him changing his behaviour and calming down - this might suggest he is more like the Barry she knows and when he is calm they can go back to their relationship  ‘In his eyes’ Julia makes the effort to see things how Barry might see things and uses this to interpret his behaviour.  Julia uses a lot of words to express the amount of mental effort she is going to - thought, see, think’  Julia shares that it is ‘unfortunate’ that she has to stay close to Barry - I feel that she thinks this is unfortunate for Barry as she is on his ‘side’ and wants to advocate for him and for him to have the same experience as others.    These sections show the conscious mental processing that is happening to see through Barrys ‘eyes’ and  to enter his ‘mental life  Julia uses ‘i dont know’ ‘i guess’ as way to suggest her claims are tentative and could be wrong.  Julia reports Barry’s speech - this might not be a direct quote but one that is ‘emblematic’ to show and give voice to what she thinks Barry was feeling. Julia also reports what she says this could be seen as rhetorical device supporting the factuality of a claim. | Time 4.30  He did he did he did - short sentences for impact - julias sentences are often concise and to the point.    Speaks in Barry’s voice and changes body language to be like Barry - showing he was upset. Links to language of seeing things through his eyes.  Pauses more in this last paragraph - perhaps harder to say - thinking more about professional language to describe him being dysregulated.    6.22  Mimics the body language and speaks in barry voice ‘urgh its just a boring trip’    Julia’s speech to Barry illustrates her clear simple language that appears to help barry. |
| Interview 1 move 10,  I've been on all these transitions with him. Up to secondary. And the day before his first transition day and He did have a **bit of a major flipout**  in the classroom.  **He didn't throw anything** but he was banging his fists and **I think** and the head himself thinks that. That was due to the fact that, you know, he's leaving the school so he's leaving me he is leaving be Mr. Jones. And you know, everybody else, and he is just that frightened little boy inside. He made me **so** proud. On the three days that we've been up to secondary, he was an **absolute model** student | Bit of a major flip out - de intensifier and then intensifier - hard to find the balance between sharing what happened but being on Barry’s side.  He didn’t throw anything - said in order to show it wasn't as bad a as it could be.  Intensifier  So proud  Absolute model student | 24 mins 43 secs  He didn’t throw anything - said more quickly  I think - pause -  Absolute model student - said with laugh and smile - genuine pride - invested. |

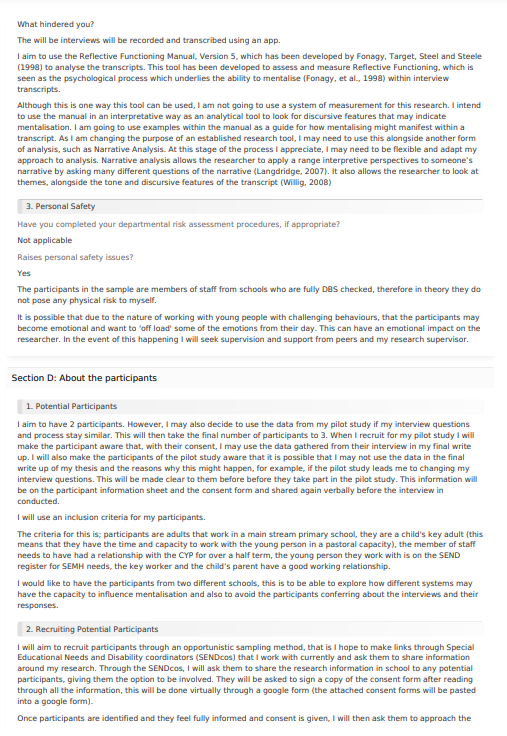
**Appendix 14**

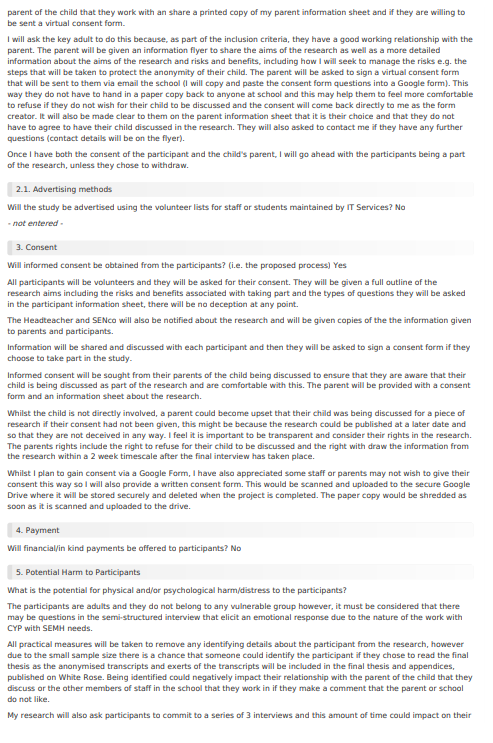
**Ethics application**

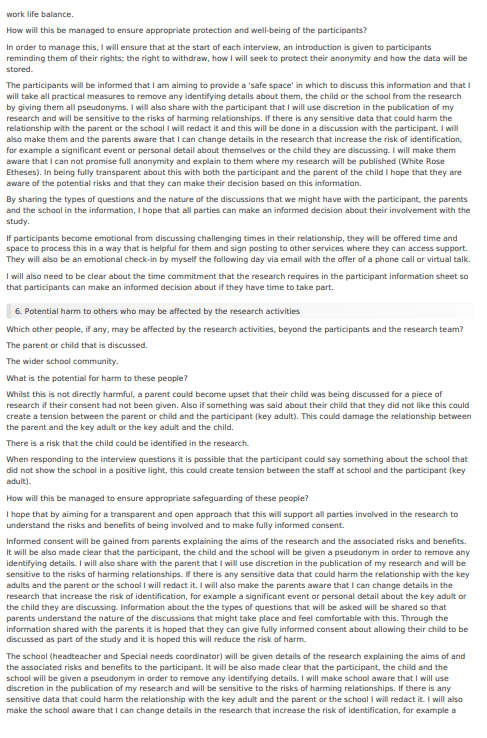


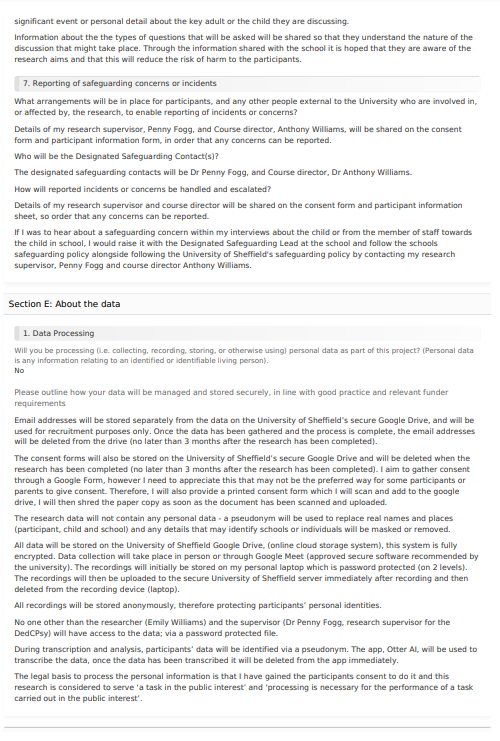


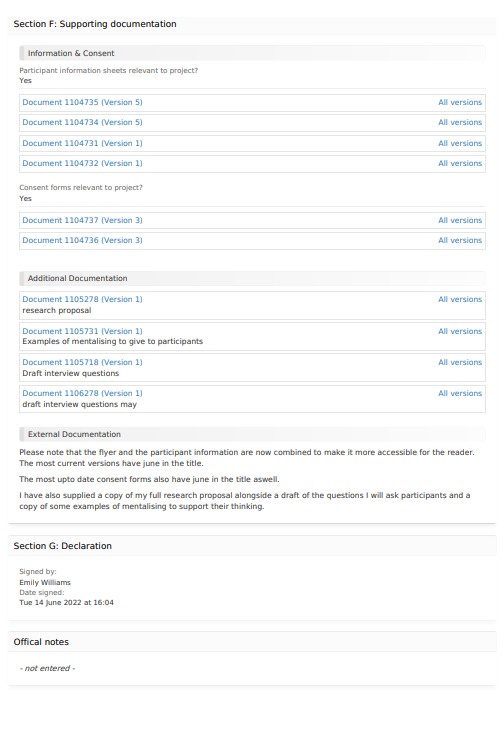




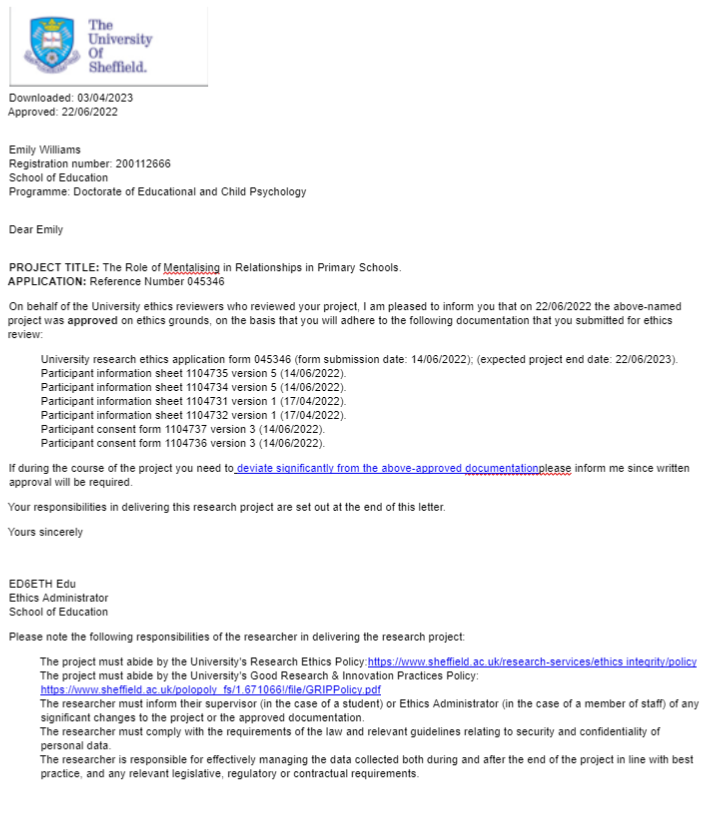








**Appendix 15 – letter granting ethical approval.**



**Appendix 16 - Participant Consent Form**



**An exploration of mentalising in primary schools between key adults and children with Social Emotional and Mental Health needs**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Please tick the appropriate boxes*** | **Yes** | **No** |
| **Taking Part in the Project** |  |  |
| I have read and understood the project information sheet and the project has been fully explained to me.  (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.) |  |  |
| I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project. |  |  |
| I agree to take part in the project.  I understand that taking part in the project will include taking part in an interview with a trainee educational psychologist.  The will be audio recorded and it will be transcribed by the interviewer using an APP. |  |  |
| I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield. |  |  |
| I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw. |  |  |
| **How my information will be used during and after the project** |  |  |
| I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project. |  |  |
| I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this. |  |  |
| I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form. |  |  |
| I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form. |  |  |
| **So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers** |  |  |
| I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield. |  |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |
| Name of participant  [printed] | Signature | Date |
|  |  |  |
| Name of Researcher  [printed] | Signature | Date |
|  |  |  |

**Project contact details for further information:**

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**Appendix 17 - Consent Form Pilot Study**



**An exploration of mentalising in primary schools between key adults and children with Social Emotional and Mental Health needs**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Please tick the appropriate boxes*** | **Yes** | **No** |
| **Taking Part in the Project** |  |  |
| I have read and understood the project information sheet and the project has been fully explained to me.  (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.) |  |  |
| I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project. |  |  |
| I agree to take part in the project.  I understand that taking part in the project will include taking part in an interview with a trainee educational psychologist.  The will be audio recorded and it will be transcribed by the interviewer using an APP. |  |  |
| I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield. |  |  |
| I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw. |  |  |
| I understand that if I am involved in the pilot study that the data may or may not be used in the final thesis and the reasons have been explained to me. |  |  |
| **How my information will be used during and after the project** |  |  |
| I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project. |  |  |
| I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this. |  |  |
| I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form. |  |  |
| I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form. |  |  |
| **So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers** |  |  |
| I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield. |  |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |
| Name of participant  [printed] | Signature | Date |
|  |  |  |
| Name of Researcher  [printed] | Signature | Date |
|  |  |  |

**Project contact details for further information:**

**Researchers - University of Sheffield Trainee Educational Psychologists**

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**Project Tutor - University of Sheffield:**

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**Appendix 18 – Consent form for Parents**



**An exploration of mentalising in primary schools**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Please tick the appropriate boxes*** | **Yes** | **No** |
| **Agreeing for your child to be discussed in the project** |  |  |
| I have read and understood the project information sheet and the project has been fully explained to me.  (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.) |  |  |
| I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project. |  |  |
| I agree to let my child be discussed in the project using a pseudonym.  I understand that the interview of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ will be recorded and transcribed |  |  |
| I understand that by choosing to allow my child to be discussed in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield. |  |  |
| I understand that I can choose to withdraw the anonymous information about my child from the study at any time; I do not have to give any reasons and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw. |  |  |
| **How my information will be used during and after the project** |  |  |
| I understand my child’s details such as name or school name or the name of the key adult, will not be revealed to people outside the project. |  |  |
| I understand and agree that the key adults’ words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs.   I understand that my child will not be named in these outputs. |  |  |
| I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form. |  |  |
| I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form. |  |  |
| **So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers** |  |  |
| I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield. |  |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |
| Name of parent  [printed] | Signature | Date |
|  |  |  |
| Name of Researcher  [printed] | Signature | Date |
|  |  |  |

**Project contact details for further information:**

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**Project Tutor - University of Sheffield:**

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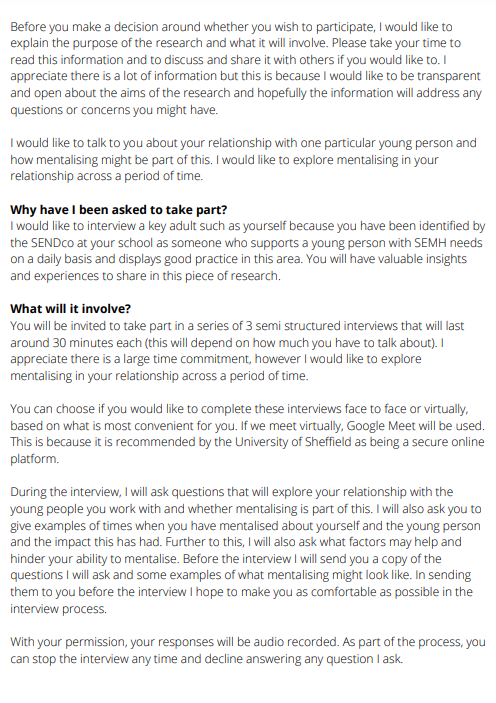
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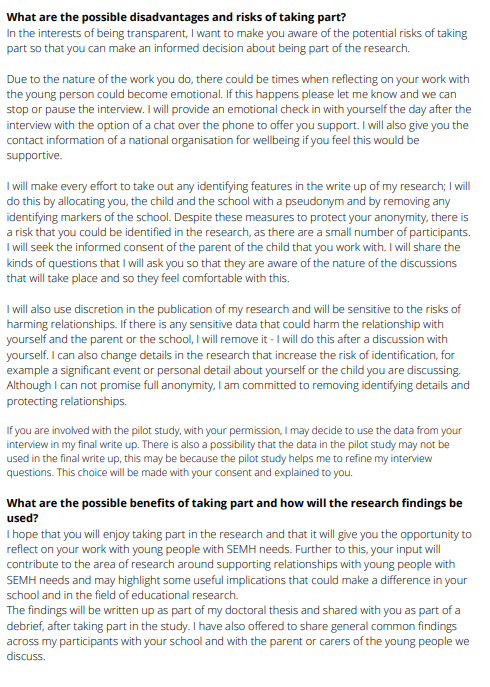
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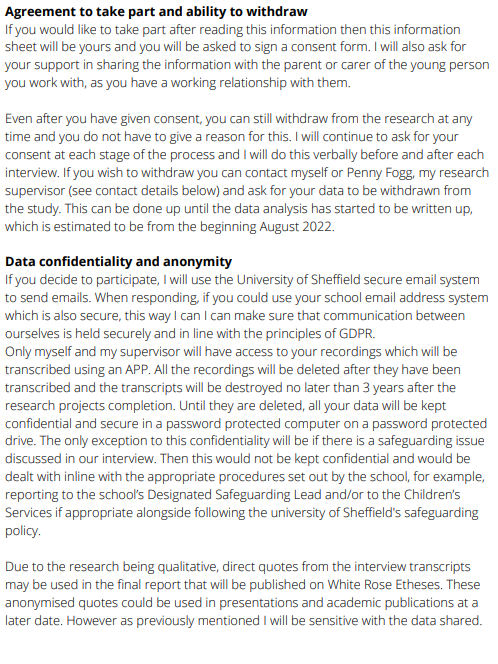
[**Anthony.Williams@sheffield.ac.uk**](mailto:Anthony.Williams@sheffield.ac.uk)School of Education  
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S10 2GW

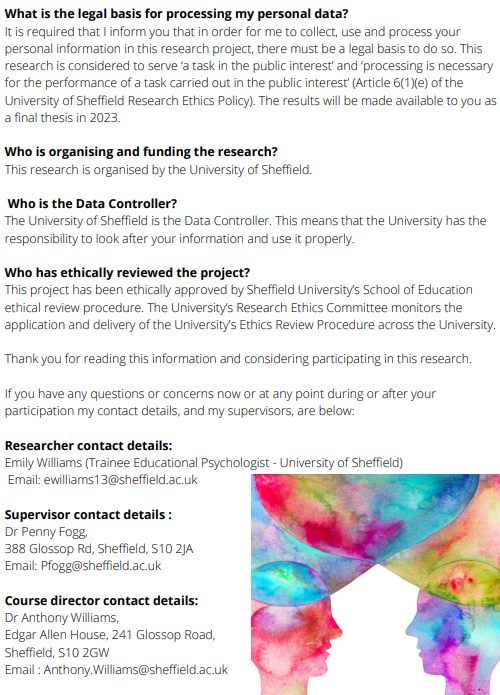
**Appendix 19 - Participant Information Sheet**





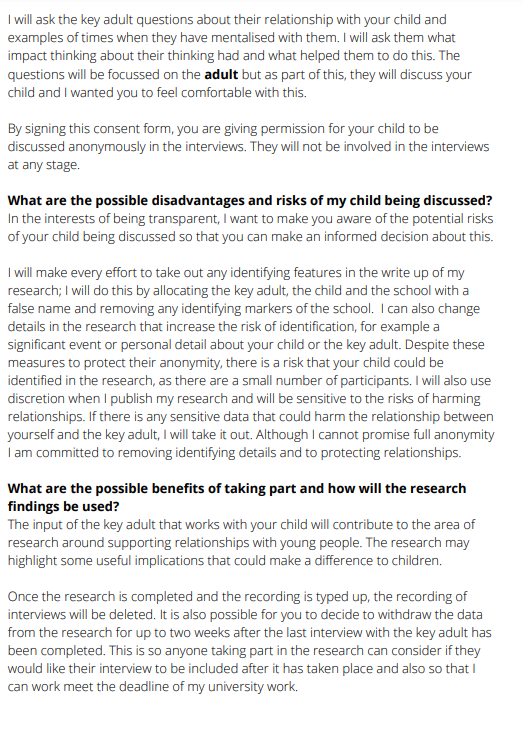


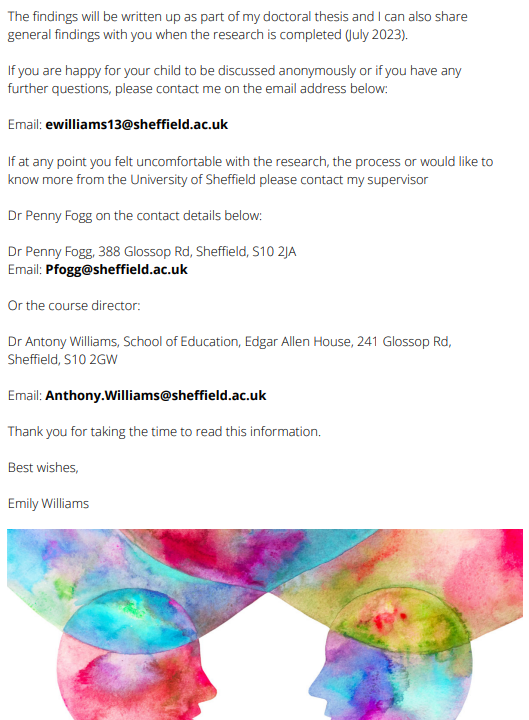




**Appendix 20 - Parent Information Sheet**







**Appendix 21 - Interview Questions and Prompts**

**General questions**

Tell me about your relationship with X

What has helped you to a have a good relationship?

**To be repeated at each interview**

**How does mentalising appear and function in relationship?**

Tell me about a time when you have mentalised with X can you give me an example?

My prompts

* What was happening?
* Why did you need to?
* What do you think they were feeling?
* What were they doing?
* How did you know that?
* What clues were there?
* Why did you get involved, what happened?

**What impact did mentalising have?**

What happened after?

How did it help/not help X?

**What helped you to mentalise?**

Reflect on Personal factors

Reflect on Systemic factors

**Has there been a time when you found it hard to mentalise? Why?**

Reflect on Personal factors

Reflect on Systemic factors

**When does mentalising happen?**

**Further questions at subsequent interviews.**

How has your week/weeks with X been.

Repeat above questions as prompts and follow ideas shared by participants

What skills do you have that help you to do your job?

**Appendix 22 - Examples of mentalising given to participants -** some examples used have been taken from the Reflective Functioning Manual, Fonagy et al., (1998) (example 2 page 15, example 10 page 15, example 5 page 16, example 16 page 18).

**Examples of mentalising about others .**

**Some examples are about relationships in schools and some are related to other relationships e.g familial.**

“I saw her smiling on the carpet, but I wasn’t sure that’s how she felt on the inside, I could tell she was worried because she was picking her fingers.”

“My mother always kept everything controlled and calm, but I think underneath she often felt very angry.”

“I could see that the class teacher was struggling with him but that she didn’t want to show it or ask for help.”

“They said they were fine, but I could tell in the tone of her voice that she wasn’t, I was thinking about why she wasn’t.”

“My Mum would say ‘Wait till your Dad comes home!’ Then he would shout at us. But, I think he felt obliged to do that because she had to be with us all day, he felt he had to back her up. I’m not sure he really wanted to.”

“I saw that he just needed a bit of reassurance, he was being challenging to test his parents’ love for him.”

“I could see that he was struggling to join in and wasn’t confident with the activity so I went and held his hand”

“I think I am beginning to be able to spot when he is about to become angry and upset, first he goes really quiet and puts his head down, then he starts to kick the chair leg, that’s when I know I need to take him to a safe space.”

“I was trying to figure out, why had she done that, what was the purpose of that behaviour and what did it bring her.”

**Examples of mentalising about ourselves**

 “I had a real go at her, but I think I was just frightened that she didn’t care about me.”

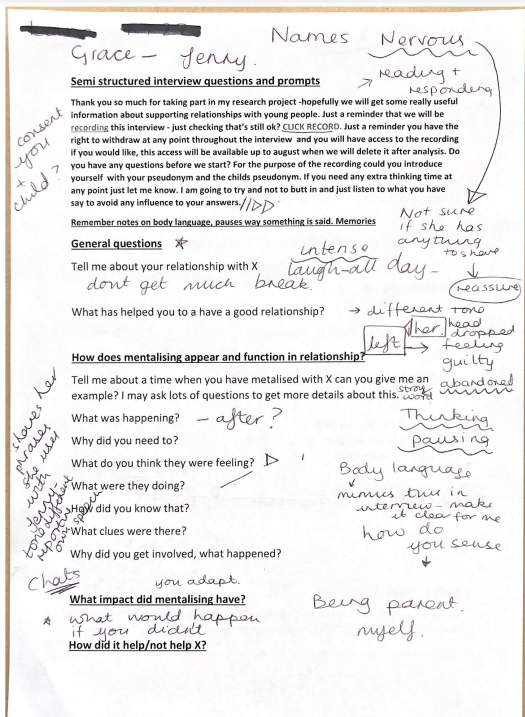
“I’ve not been great with my patience with my class, it’s been very hard. But I’m only finding it hard because I’m a bit unhappy with certain other aspects of my life at the moment, like my home life.”

“I saw him as behaving in an uncaring way but actually I was very angry with him at the time because of the way he treated my friend and that effected how I thought about him”

“At the time I saw him as being naughty, or badly behaved but now I know what he went through, I see the situation totally differently”

Some examples taken from Fonagy et al. (1998).

**Appendix 23 - Notes made during the interview for Grace.**



**Appendix 24**

**Personal reflections**

Throughout my research there have been different reflection points, these have both been around the process of the research and my thoughts and feelings at those times. At the start of the journey, my understanding of qualitative research was limited and this was something that I needed to overcome. This was possibly influencing and limiting initial ideas around my thesis.

The focus of my research was to explore relational practise and how this can be encouraged and nurtured in staff working with young people with challenging behaviours. I initially started with ideas around empathy and how this supported relationships. This came from experience in my TEP practice and prior experience as a teacher and how this intersubjective process appeared to support relationships when situations become challenging. My main drive in my research was to support a vulnerable group of CYP through relational practice. As I began to explore and search the literature in this area, the more it became apparent that this was a complex phenomenon that was hard to research due to its tautological nature. As part of my literature review, I came across a paper that was key in driving my research forward, which was the work of Swan and Riley (2012; 2015) who made the link between the cognitive aspect of empathy and mentalising. From this I was able to find a concept that was more clearly defined and that possibly has less associated desirability. I decided that I wanted to explore this intersubjective process and how it appeared and functioned in the relationship between a key adult and CYP with SEMH needs.

At this point, I then began to engage with how I might research this concept. At first, perhaps linked to my previous research experience, I began to consider how this might be measured. I engaged with the work of Fonagy et al., (1998) and the Reflective Functioning Manual where a system has been devised to measure mentalising in a different sector. However, the more I considered this approach with my growing understanding, I realised that I wanted to be more transparent in the process with participants. As my research was an initial exploration into mentalising in this specific relationship, I decided that I wanted to ask participants directly about this. This was with the aim not to conceal my research methods or to quantify or measure the participant. I wanted to explore the intersubjective process with them. This was a key turning point in my ontological and epistemological position in this piece of research.

On reflection, having worked in schools for many years, I perhaps had valued statistical data over listening to people’s experiences. Furthermore, my previous undergraduate and master’s level research had been quantitative and this had shaped my preconceptions about research and my ontological position (although I did not realise it!). Through my engagement with the doctorate, wider reading and reading the theses of previous doctoral students, I was able to understand the value of qualitative research and how listening to people’s stories and experiences are valuable and impactful. This understanding continued to develop as the research process evolved. This was particularly highlighted for me at the interview and analysis phase, where I was inspired by the stories that my participants shared with me and began to see how powerful sharing their narratives could be. Having a limited knowledge of qualitative research methods meant that I had to carefully consider many different approaches to my analysis that I felt would enable me to share the stories from the participants. Through the guidance of my supervisor, I began to explore narrative methods where the participants' voices were prioritised. In reading some narrative theses, I was able to see that through this method participants' voices were heard and that practical implications were drawn from this.

One of my values is concerned with bridging the gap between theory and practice and at times, the need to have accessible findings, has created tensions for me in what methodology to use. At the end of my research, I am able to see how as my understanding around research methods has grown. I have been able to be more open to different ways of thinking that have led to, what I feel are, interesting and valuable findings that I would not have otherwise discovered if I had remained rigid in my thought processes.

As I engaged in peer supervision and informal discussions, I did reflect that mentalising was a lesser known concept by professionals in education, other than Educational Psychologists. From this I realised that I needed to scaffold participants' understanding and I did this through shared examples and discussing these prior to the interview.

I was nervous prior to the interview stage and wondered whether my questions would yield any useful findings. After the pilot study, I was concerned that perhaps I had talked too much and that the interview had been more of a conversation. However, in discussions with my supervisor, I realised that perhaps this was appropriate in this initial exploratory piece of research and that our interviews had become a process of co-construction which supported them with their understanding of mentalising.

The participant interviews were a real highlight of the process, as hearing the complexity of my participants' daily work was fascinating and also enlightening. At this point, I was also able to reflect on systemic issues and consider the life-changing role that key adults do whilst being some of the poorest paid staff in school. The interview process also reinvigorated me and helped me to feel that my research was worthwhile. I was also touched by how open and honest the participants were with me and I was incredibly grateful for this, alongside their time and commitment to the research.

After completing the pilot study, I had not expected my participant to discuss her personal experience and identity in her role as much as she did. This was a surprising finding and helped me to make what had been a very challenging decision, to choose Narrative Orientated Inquiry (Hiles and Cermack, 2008) as my method for analysis. Prior to this, I had wanted to complete a thematic analysis and if I had chosen this method, I would have missed many key aspects of the data analysis, for example, the identity positioning and the close examination of linguistic devices used. However, NOI does have an aspect of the analysis which has some parallels to Thematic Analysis and this helped me to draw out some implications for schools and EP practice.

At first, during the analysis process I was preoccupied with making sure my analysis was ‘right’ and wanted a model to follow. However, I came to realise that I needed to use my own interpretation of an interpretive method. This was in line with Hiles and Cermack’s (2008) recommendations, to use their framework flexibly. Once I realised this, I felt greater freedom to work on my analysis in a way that I thought was appropriate and subsequently I began to enjoy this stage more. I did find identifying the Fabula and Sjuzet challenging and I wondered if this was because I was trying to pick out events (fabula) and reflections (sjuzet) from a piece of transcript that was mainly reflective. The process of research has helped me to grapple with and become more comfortable with, the feeling of ‘not knowing’ or not having ‘right answers’ which has been very difficult for me at points.

I was surprised that experiences around mothering emerged so strongly in the analysis phase. In my wider reading about the role of the TA/key adult and mothers, it did make me question how often the role of key adults was overlooked or seen as a job that was similar to parenting and perhaps an easy job that did not involve the academic learning of children? My research highlighted to me just how complex the role of supporting a CYP with SEMH needs is and how much skill is involved in this role.

My aim was to begin to explore mentalising in this relationship between key adults and CYP with SEMH needs and to draw some implications that might support the relationship and contribute to the field of relational practice. I hope that despite the limitations of this small-scale piece of research, it has achieved the aim. My research has raised more questions around mentalising in schools and I would really like to explore this further. I have already begun to plan an intervention and training in the Local Authority where I will be working to build upon ideas from Hover-Reisnera , Fürstallera and Wininger, (2018).

**Appendix 25**

**Pilot study reflections and implications**

When creating my research proposal I felt it was imperative to conduct a pilot study. The reason for this was to see whether my interview questions were appropriate to explore my research question and whether they would be accessible to my participants. I considered it important to share the questions (see appendix 21) and the examples of mentalising (see appendix 22) prior to the interview and openly discuss them at the end.

I also wanted to practise my interview skills in the pilot study. Harding (2013), shares that pilot studies support the researcher to find possible difficulties and in doing this limit the chances in collecting data that is unreliable. The participant was recruited in the same way as my other participants and she chose the pseudonym of Betty.

During the interview I had my prepared questions and some further prompts. I noticed that I adapted questions and used more prompt questions than I had anticipated. I reflected that this might be due to the nature of the topic we were discussing. I also tried to support Betty’s confidence by summarising and checking what she had said and then probing further into the details. This led me to consider a more conversational approach to the interview, as without this structure, the interview may have felt uncomfortable and inaccessible. I felt that this was something I needed to be really open about in my analysis and results and that this may be a feature of other interviews, based on the concept being explored. The process felt like a co construction of knowledge and I wanted this to be incorporated into my main interviews as well. As earlier discussed, the interview did become more of an exchange of views (Kvale, 1996) which enabled co-construction of knowledge through a more conversational approach.

The pilot study also helped me to consider new questions around whether mentalising happens with a CYP in the moment or after, away from the CYP. I also reflected as I spoke to Betty, that there might be some personal factors that supported mentalising and some systemic factors, this highlighted a line of questioning that I wanted to pick up in other interviews.

When asked about the process, Betty shared that she had enjoyed it and that the examples had helped her to understand what mentalising was. She also explained in her eyes, that it is very similar to empathy and that the difference may need to be clarified for a person.

I asked her about the style of questions and was open about what I

had planned and what I did (in terms of realising I needed to scaffold a bit

more). Betty shared that she thought just one open question would have been too

broad and she may have felt a bit lost with answering it. She shared that the

conversational approach had helped her to feel comfortable.

Based on Betty’s interview and enthusiastic approach to the research, I decided to invite her to be a participant for my research.

Whilst completing my pilot study, it became clear that my participant’s identity was a core aspect of the way she told the story. This helped me to consider that NOI was a method of analysis that would also help to explore how someone may construct their identity through