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How do Educational Psychologists Construct 'the
Child' in Psychological Assessments?

A Postmodern Discourse Analysis

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the degree of
Doctor of Educational and Child Psychology

Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

Abstract

Language has profound implications for the construction of our realities, constraining what is possible to think, say and do. Words are foundational in how we construct our psychological worlds, with Educational Psychologists (EPs) playing a fundamental role in constructing the psychological worlds of children and young people. This research enquires into how EPs construct children and young people within the written psychological advice conducted as part of the Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment process.

Adopting a postmodern approach to discourse analysis, EPs can be read to draw upon a wide range of discourses in their constructions of the child. Examples include: humanistic, behaviourist, developmental, cognitive, educational and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) discourses; the latter appearing to form a meta-discourse in which the assessments sat within. Seven key constructions arose from my readings which are discussed in detail. These include child as human, mechanistic, object of investigation, SEND, idealised, subordinate and meaning-maker. Explorations look to the less visible and taken for granted assumptions which may lie implicitly within constructions – assumptions which hold the potential for real effects on children’s lives.

Discussions explore the possible implications for the child’s subjective experience and ways of being. Close consideration is given to the ways in which power may operate in the lives of children and young people as a result of these constructions, alongside attending to the potential functions and gains that may arise as a result. Possible implications for EP practice are considered throughout, culminating in some final thoughts and reflections on the themes of power, not knowing and creating space for young people to create their own meanings. Further reflections consider the masking of political, economic and socio-cultural factors, the institutional creation and reinforcement of deficit identities, alongside advocating a role for the EP profession in facilitating deeper, systemic change within the education system at an institutional level. Aiming to shake the ground of what we think we know, this thesis seeks to invoke deeper questioning into the potential implications of the words we choose, closing with the question:

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Key Terms

Some of these definitions may be more easily understood once embedded within the wider contextual discussions within this thesis. The introduction aims to provide the philosophical grounding required to understand this thesis as intended, of which many of these concepts form a part of the discussion.

Knowledge: Within this thesis, knowledge is seen to form a structure for the way a culture has come to organise, see, and thus, understand the world (including themselves). Knowledge is viewed to consist of the mainstream ideas and beliefs that have come to be seen as truth, as well as the less visible conceptual structures and assumptions upon which these are based.

A priori: I use this term to describe knowledge which is assumed to be true, whereby subsequent research appears to contribute to a deepening of this truth by means of its assumption, rather than its questioning (Billington, 2002). This includes concepts, theories and ideas which have become taken for granted or foundational assumptions upon which other research and ideas comes to rely, over time potentially strengthening their unquestionability.

Discourse: Discourse is used in various ways by different authors (Burr, 2015). Within this research, I adopt a somewhat simple definition, with discourse referring to the way in which something is talked about (I use 'discourse' and 'ways of speaking' interchangeably within this thesis). Discourses can be seen as forms of knowledge – or perceived truths - which shape how we come to see and relate to the world (including ourselves and others).

Power: In contrast to traditional power (which I refer to as traditional or explicit power), power within this thesis refers to that which arises through our ways of seeing and speaking about the world (Ball, 2013). Dominant discourses legitimise particular ways of thinking, speaking and acting, whilst marginalising those that sit outside. Power is, then, exercised by drawing on these particular discourses – discourses which can be referred to as knowledges – or ways of speaking.

Resistance: Where there is power, there also arises the potential for resistance to this (Parker, 2013). Whilst drawing upon a dominant discourse may be the exercising of power, there also exists the potential for the exercising of resistance by way of drawing upon an alternative way of speaking (Burr, 2015). In other words, whilst for many, there may be an obvious and apparent truth, there may be alternative ways of seeing – and thus there may be the possibility of this truth being questioned – or resisted.

Ontology: Ontological beliefs relate to how we see the nature of the world (including ourselves). “Your 'ontology' is your answer to the question: 'What is reality?' (i.e. what can be said to really exist, or be?)” (Chauncy, 2012, para. 3).

Epistemology: Epistemology is seen as the study of knowledge, relating to beliefs of how we can come to know the world. “Your 'epistemology' is your answer to the question: 'How can I know reality?' (i.e. even if something really exists, how can I know that?)” (Chauncy, 2012, para. 8).

Structuralism: Structuralism in this research, also referred to as “‘modernism’, ‘positivism’ ... or ‘old fashioned common sense’ ... [relates to a prevailing belief] that it is possible to find essential, ‘objective’ facts that can then be tied together in overarching, generally applicable theories that bring us closer and closer to an accurate understanding of the real universe” (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 20).

Postmodernism: Postmodernism is used to describe a view of the world that questions the idea of there being a single, knowable and discoverable way of understanding or seeing the world. Whilst structuralists believe in underlying structures that can be discovered, postmodernists view these as constructions rooted in conceptual thought and language (Freedman & Combs, 1996). As such, postmodernists question the potential for other possible ways of seeing (Gergen, 1990). This presents a useful perspective for those striving for social justice whereby prevailing knowledges may result in inequities and the marginalisation of particular groups.

To Note Whilst Reading this Thesis

'Child', 'children', 'young person' and 'young people' are used interchangeably to refer to a child, young person, children or young people aged between 0-25.

'Appendix D' which forms the psychological advice for an Educational, Health and Care Needs Assessment is referred to variably as 'psychological advice', 'psychological assessment', 'EHC needs assessment' and 'assessment'. If referring to the broader EHC needs assessment extending beyond the EP's psychological advice, this will be made explicit (i.e. the broader EHC needs assessment).

Within this thesis you will find reflection boxes. These include additional personal thoughts that feel to contribute further to the understanding of this research.

Preface

Once nothing is true, anything can be.

This preface explores what personally drew me to the research presented within this thesis. Wider justifications for the Educational Psychology profession are explored more comprehensively in the next chapter.

As I trained to become a psychologist, I found myself increasingly facing difficulties capturing what I felt to be the *real* experience of the lives I was encountering. I found myself somewhat restricted by the words available to me and noticed that particular words – sentences – ways of speaking – painted very particular pictures. I began noticing very similar pictures being painted of what seemed (at least, to me) to be very different experiences of human life. These were immensely different people, yet on paper they appeared remarkably similar - in some cases near identical. How could this be?

To my frustration, I was drawn to painting this picture ‘accurately’ and had long held beliefs in an absolute and knowable truth. I became increasingly aware that there were many different words I could choose and wrestled as I sought to find the ‘right’ ones. My life had been dominated by pervasive beliefs in a ‘right and wrong’ as I strived for perfection. Now, it became visible that my choices not only impacted my life but perhaps also those of the children and young people I was describing. What words do I choose? What story do I tell? And by default, which do I ‘not tell’?

Encountering the ideas of writers such as Kurt Danziger (1997), Michel Foucault (1977), Michael White (1988), Joan Tollifson (2010) and Alan Watts (1966), my beliefs in an absolute and knowable truth began to fall away. As I became increasingly aware of my own thoughts and feelings through meditative inquiry, I became acutely aware of the power of my beliefs and conceptualisations in shaping my thoughts, feelings and experiences. Whilst once seeing words as simply representing the reality they described, I began to see how they could substantially influence my reality and, in some ways, could come to create it.

As I became more aware of the constructed and relative nature of reality, I saw the power of language within this and my belief system was eventually blown apart. This began with seeing the construction of Western Psychology, including the taken for granted categories of human experience – concepts and structures for seeing that had become deeply held frames of reference shaping how I saw myself and others. As I encountered ideas from narrative therapy more deeply, what I once saw as firmly held values and beliefs - a seemingly solid, fixed reality - became exposed as fluid and relative – and perhaps more importantly, changeable.

Suddenly, there was no certain and stable position to stand and no predetermined direction in which to move. What would guide my life - and my practice – if there was no longer something certain to believe in, hold on to and aim for? Yet simultaneously, there was a liberating realisation. As beliefs about particular ways of being and doing melted away, there was a sense of renewed freedom. The more glued I felt to believing something as truth, the less able I was to see something differently – applying both to my personal, as well as my professional life. Loosening my grasp on objective truths not only freed me up to feel more able to choose those ideas that resonated most, it allowed me to use these more flexibly moment to moment. And perhaps more profoundly, it seemed to create space for the potential to see something entirely new. These experiences have felt to be central in the unfolding of this thesis.

This thesis relates to how we use language to talk and write about children and young people within Educational Psychology and the potential implications of the ways we write. The aim is to unsettle readers' grasps on firmly held beliefs in an attempt to aid increasing flexibility in choosing ways of speaking that feel to resonate most, in the moments they arise. This thesis also aims to promote attention to the wider political nature of the ways we might speak, with an exploration of what this could mean in relation to the Educational Psychologist role.

Some Caveats

Upon first encountering the literature, I found the language confusing and difficult to understand. Recognising that I now use language in such ways, I have attempted to use terminology that might be more accessible to those not already engaging with these ideas. This means amongst the inaccuracies and inconsistencies of the incomplete story I am going to tell, some words might not fully capture the intended meaning of authors and advocates of these ideas (Scheurich, 2014). It is hoped that the benefits of opening up these ideas to a wider, and possibly even 'non-academic' audience, outweigh the discomfort that this might bring for readers more acquainted with these ideas.

It is near impossible to disentangle what feel to be my thoughts from those I have been exposed to over the years, and whilst I cite credit where this is known, I acknowledge that there are far more influences that play an important role in this introduction and the broader unfolding of this research (Tollifson, 2010). This research is a result of innumerable writers, thinkers and the infinite conditions inseparable from its creation (Scheurich, 2014).

Introduction

I encourage us all, whatever our beliefs, to question the basic narratives of our world, to connect past developments with present concerns, and not to be afraid of controversial issues (Harari, 2015, para. 1).

Overview

This research is unconventional and does not fit within the dominant paradigms of Western academia in relation to truth-seeking. Whilst traditionally, knowledge is often seen as something which is discovered, this thesis takes a critical view which sees knowledge as something which is created and produced (Leonardo, 2018). This premise underpins the whole of this research; from the formulation of research questions, to how the analysis takes place, how implications are drawn, as well as how literature is related to. Whilst research might traditionally begin with a literature review, in adopting what some might call a postmodernist perspective, my aim is not to privilege some ideas over others on the basis of what has come to be seen as an evidence base (Gergen, 1994; Traynor, 1997). This could be seen to mark a significant departure from the assumptions held within dominant ways of thinking in research and thus requires the necessary contextual background to explain and justify the paradigm upon which this research rests - a task which this introduction sets out to do.

Educational Psychologists (EPs) play a significant role in shaping how we come to see, understand and relate to children and young people (Billington, 2002). How we come to think, speak and write about children and young people are seen as holding potentially powerful roles in shaping their realities. As such, looking to the ways in which EPs write about children is seen of particular relevance and importance. Despite the profound influence EPs have in creating and producing knowledge of the child, there appears to be little research into this form of knowledge production and the potential implications this might have for the children and young people being constructed. This research focuses upon the knowledge produced within the written assessments

that EPs undertake as part of their statutory role in the Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan process, with reasons for this choice being detailed towards the end of this chapter.

This introduction takes the form of a series of stories, of which I make no claims to truth. These stories are on the themes of knowledge, psychology, language and power, culminating in a discussion as to why these stories are relevant to EPs. This chapter closes with the research aims and questions that have guided this research.

A Story About Knowledge

Educational Psychologists (EPs) are in powerful positions of knowledge production and knowledge creation, knowledge production that has a powerful impact on young people's lives (Billington, 2002). Therefore, it is important that this process is understood. In order to do that, we have to understand what is meant by knowledge and the process of knowledge creation.

Since at least the Enlightenment Project, the Western world appears to have become increasingly hungry for knowledge (Scheurich, 2014). How knowledge has been conceptualised and who has authority over knowledge appears to have shifted substantially over time and is something that is still actively debated between different philosophical schools of thought (St. Pierre, 2012). Despite this variation, it could be said that we are in an age largely characterised by what has been called 'modernism' (Gergen, 1990). Within this are beliefs in a linear progress, that the world can be objectively known - and a belief in knowledge being independent from its time and place; it is seen as the discovery of 'truth' which is presumably leading us to accumulate more and better knowledge over time - the quest for a single truth (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Beliefs in a single, knowable truth that can be discovered through the rigorous application of scientific method are perhaps more visible and explicit when thinking about the physical world. Following the relative success of the scientific method being applied within the physical world, this could be said to have extended to the social world – including modern Western psychology (Gergen, 1990). This could be said to have extended to our use of and views of EHC needs assessments whereby these are perhaps seen by some as a form of discovering the knowable 'truth' of the child.

This objective view of knowledge has been questioned and has led to some significant shifts within the academic world (Sholle, 1988). For some, knowledge and research can be seen as ideological (Billig et al., 1988). Whilst often not visible in resulting knowledge, researchers often must make decisions which sometimes serve a critical role in the resulting 'knowledge'. For example, what model do I construct? Where do I draw conceptual divisions? Which aspects do I focus on as more important and make more visible? In his book on constructing quarks, Pickering (1999) highlights the role of researcher decisions in what can appear to be one of the more seemingly unquestionable realms of knowledge – particle physics. Similarly, the values and beliefs of those researching are important (Lincoln, 1988). In addition to influencing decision-making, these direct what questions come to be asked, why this is important to them – and thus, what they hope will happen as a result, or as part of, their research.

Similarly, the time and place – the conditions of the time – are important in knowledge production (Hutcheon, 1988). For example, what feels important right now as a result of the way things currently are? How have we come to already see and know? What foundations does this serve for what is possible and what directions can be taken? This draws attention to the wider conditions within which the EHC needs assessment sit within. Within this, the broader values of society - or of those in positions of power - could also be seen with importance (Crowther, 2003). What seems important at a public level? What will be seen as acceptable, valuable and worthy? What would be funded and endorsed by those holding this power? This highlights the importance of current societal values. For example, education in its current form has come to be seen with high importance within Western culture, as well as the skills and ways of being that have come to be seen as necessary and valuable within this. These values likely shape or influence how children are conceptualised within EP assessments, playing an influential role in children's educational contexts.

Nietzsche (1887) also questioned this idea of an objectively knowable truth. In what he termed a genealogy of knowledge, Nietzsche argued that in order to see what has come to be taken for granted as truth, we need to go back to see what was happening at the time that made that particular idea meaningful and useful. In this sense, all ideas have a history. Nietzsche argued that *all* knowledge was based upon prior knowledge or ideas which could be questioned, ultimately leading to 'foundations'. These were assumptions that had become to appear so obviously true that to

question them would appear absurd. Nietzsche argued that, rather than evidence of something being true, such beliefs pointed, instead, to them being *old*. Whilst appearing unquestionable, foundations are human thought-created ideas. These may become assumptions upon which other ideas or knowledges rely, over time possibly becoming deeply held assumptions which may serve the basis for considerable amounts of thinking and presumed 'knowing'. To question these could perhaps risk shaking the ground of this knowing. This might present risk, not only at a personal level in terms of uncertainty and discomfort, but may shake the ground upon which certain professions, organisations and perhaps whole industries – even the social order itself - might rely. EHC needs assessments could be seen to exist within a network of presumed knowledge. Some knowledges could perhaps be described as forming the steady ground upon which their existence – and the existence of many services, organisations and even industries - have come to rely. This highlights their being broader political and economic factors not only in the creation of knowledge but also in its preservation – for example, the knowledge of special educational needs. The EHC needs assessment may serve an invisible, yet important function in such knowledge maintenance and preservation.

This also points to what some call *a priori* knowledge. Here, I use this term to refer to knowledge which is assumed to be true, whereby any subsequent research appears to contribute to a deepening of this truth by means of its assumption, rather than its questioning. This could be applied to thinking about much of psychological research whereby research questions begin with a presumption of particular psychological concepts (Billington, 2002). It is of course necessary, in order to get anything done, to have an agreed set of foundational assumptions (Jackson, 1979). For example, in physics it is necessary to assume concepts such as a 'force' and 'gravity' along with current corresponding mathematical equations. Thus, whilst appearing to research an aspect of the world with objectivity, underlying much of research is a set of presumptions, some of which lack a research or empirical foundation in themselves (González Rey, 2017). This can lead to mounting evidence bases – for example, for concepts such as self-esteem and motivation - without research necessarily being required to evidence these concepts in themselves (Pyszczynski et al., 2004; Sekhar et al., 2013). This could be seen to be especially the case when it comes to psychological knowledge – which EPs are often likely to draw upon in their writing of assessments.

Questioning what seems obviously true is not a new idea, nor is it something western society has not experienced at a large scale before. Prior to the scientific revolution, societal beliefs in a geocentric view of the world were relatively firm (the earth being at the centre of the universe) (Bieńkowska, 1973). At this time, the authority of knowledge resided largely with the church and monarchs. Today, it could be argued that the authority of knowledge lies within the realm of experts, with those making claims to scientific knowledge and certainty perhaps being positioned highest (Peters, 2021). Arguably, the addition of mounting evidence bases has, over time, possibly led our modern world of expert knowledge to appear increasingly unquestionable. The role of expert is often required of educational psychologists – particularly within the EHCP process (Billington, 1995). Whilst many in the profession may have been exposed to the problematic nature of truth claims, it could be said that their statutory role in the EHC process places EPs in a dilemmic position. Explicitly distancing themselves from a position of discovering knowledge to one of knowledge creation or production could be said to risk profound implications, should such claims be rejected and seen as problematic by those holding the power to maintain the EPs role within this statutory process. Such implications may extend further, for example potentially influencing service and training funding, as well as the employment of EPs. This highlights the role of economic and political factors not only in the creation and maintaining of particular knowledges, but in the maintenance of particular epistemologies (ways of coming to know). This also illustrates why EHC needs assessments may be more likely to operate according to modernist presumptions, for example in suggesting that the child can be known and discovered by way of professional assessment.

Whilst these ideas have become well known within some academic circles (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008), it could be said that they are yet to reach wider mainstream thinking. This means that many of us might sometimes feel to have relatively firm grasps on what we think of as ‘true’, with this knowledge playing an important role in shaping how we see and understand the world around us (including ourselves and other people). This has particular relevance when it comes to the knowledge EPs construct about children and young people in their assessments, making the question of ‘usefulness’ versus ‘truthfulness’ a poignant question worth deeper consideration (Beaver, 2011).

A Story About Psychology

Psychological knowledge could be seen as particularly relevant when it comes to how we see and understand ourselves and others – including the EP's role in shaping how we come to see children and young people. The EP's assessment could be seen as a crucial document that sanctions particular ways of seeing the child. This section takes a closer look at the constructed nature of modern Western psychology, alongside a brief overview of some of the psychological ideas which may inform EPs' assessments.

Some might assume Western Psychology is 'timeless'; that is, something that has always been – an uncovering of the truth about a universal human nature, progressively being discovered over time. Others, however, suggest a somewhat different story.

In his historical research, Danziger (1997) explains how Western psychology as we know it today existed little before the 1900s. Danziger writes:

Many of the fundamental categories of twentieth-century psychology are, to all intents and purposes, twentieth-century inventions. Such concepts as 'intelligence', 'personality', 'behaviour' and 'learning' were given such radically changed meanings by modern psychology that there are simply no earlier equivalents. (p.36).

Danziger first came upon this idea during his time teaching in Indonesia. Noticing what appeared to be an Indonesian equivalent to the class he was teaching (psychology), he met with his counterpart colleague. Together, they attempted to create some joint classes bringing Eastern and Western psychology together to deepen their students learning. Anticipating differences which would enable relatively straight forward comparing and contrasting, they were surprised to find this was not the case. What were assumed to be fundamental categories of human experience in western psychology, bore little resemblance to those of its Eastern counterpart. Aspects of human experience that had been grouped together to form categories such as motivation or attitudes, were seen to have no meaningful connection, instead appearing to be grouped rather arbitrarily. Or, where connections could be seen, these groupings appeared to hold little in the way of any meaningful relevance i.e. what purpose would this way of grouping phenomena bring to real life?

Important questions arose for Danziger. How was it possible for human experience to be divided up and conceptualised so substantially differently?

If psychology was the study of a universal human nature, was the implication that Indonesian thinkers had 'misunderstood' human life to a grave degree? Or, a far more likely possibility, did this experience present an opening; a glimpse into seeing the constructed nature of how we conceptualise our worlds? A seeing which only became available once the veil of culture was lifted? The culture within which we are often so deeply immersed that its visibility becomes masked by its everyday ordinariness. Whilst Western culture might have a history of adopting the former view, an increasing number of thinkers from a range of disciplines continue to show how much of what we think we know are better described as cultural products of a particular time and place (Rose, 1996).

Going on to conduct historical work, Danziger (1997) has shown how the categories by which we have come to structure psychological experience are historical products – often beginning with a human idea or theory which was for some reason relevant or useful, becoming increasingly widespread and used. The changes taking place in eighteenth century Britain were substantial and made up what some might describe as a new social order, alongside a new moral order (i.e. what came to be seen as good, admirable and wanted in contrast with that coming to be seen as bad, undesirable and unwanted). These changes ultimately coincided with what Danziger describes as a 'reconstruction' of what many have come to see as 'human nature'. This is not to say that such changes are done purposely – or even consciously. Nor is it to say that they take place as a result of one, or even a few individuals. Danziger describes how such a historical process might take place:

Over a relatively long period, countless individuals increasingly encounter situations in which old ways of making sense no longer work. Quite unintentionally, and usually without awareness, subtle changes creep into the way words are used, new terms appear and novel perspectives emerge. (p. 38).

Over time, what may have once been seen as an idea, becomes embedded within everyday language, eventually becoming taken for granted. The categories of human experience studied by Danziger have subsequently become unquestionable assumptions upon which psychological theories are generally based. Similarly, we could say that there are many assumptions surrounding

and underpinning EHC needs assessments which may have become taken for granted. EHC needs assessments could be seen to sit within a culture within which EPs are so immersed, assumptions become masked by their everyday ordinariness, potentially being invisible to the authoring EP.

Modern Western psychology could be said to have had an impressive career as a discipline of ideas. It has undergone several 'crises', in part, perhaps as a result of its eclectic and diverse range of paradigms and theories (Bradley, 2020). This includes variation in the focus of study, methods as well as ways of conceptualising, albeit tending to remain within the foundational categories of human experience upon which much of psychological theory relies (Danziger, 1997). As a result, there may be a wide variety of ideas which EPs may draw upon in their psychological assessments. For example, psychology once held consciousness as central to its study, with methods of introspection being utilised (Boring, 1953). Ideas of a subconscious and unconscious later arose, with psychoanalysis leading to the expertise of another becoming important in accessing aspects of psychological worlds otherwise hidden (Freud, 1925). As psychology sought scientific status, observable behaviour and quantifiable methodologies became favourable – a movement generally referred to as behaviourism (Watson, 1930). As it became clear in the physical sciences that there was a need to presume concepts that could not be directly observed or empirically studied, psychology also recognised a usefulness in presuming unobservable psychological concepts and found ways to define and measure these in quantifiable ways (Leahey, 2000).

In the 1960s, there were increasing references to a 'paradigm shift' as psychology appeared to face another 'crisis' (Parker, 2013). Movement appeared to flow in two directions at the time of this shift. One sought to retain a scientific ideology, with behaviourist methodologies transforming into a cognitive science (Leahey, 2000). Another took a somewhat different turn. The publishing of Berger and Luckmann's (1966) 'The Social Construction of Reality' is described by some as a potential catalyst for this second shift, mobilising what came to be a substantial shift in how the social world was conceived. Whilst those working from within a cognitive paradigm remained within a scientific and experimental method, perhaps continuing their quest for psychological truth, a subset of the academic world began to see reality as socially constructed (Gergen, 1992). A way of seeing the world which brought the role of language to centre stage.

A Story About Language

When we talk about the world, it is not a mirror of the world. It is a way of using words for some purpose, one interpretation among a possible infinity. So there is no truly true account, no truth with the capital “T”, no objectivity that is opposed to a subjective account (Gergen, 2012, in Misra & Prakash, 2012, p. 123).

This is a story about the role of conceptual thought and language in constructing our realities. Whilst many see words as representing or mirroring reality – much like in the dominant views of objective knowledge described - a different account is presented here. This involves a closer look at the process of knowledge production in terms of language, aiming to give this research a more thorough grounding in its philosophical positioning. This story aims to illustrate the possibilities for EPs in constructing differing realities for children and young people by way of the words they choose.

This story begins by looking to the human capacity of conceptual thought and language. It is generally thought that around 70,000 years ago humans underwent a ‘cognitive revolution’ (Harari, 2015; Vyshedskiy, 2019). Whilst specific details remain understandably uncertain, this is characterised as a profound shift in the human capacity for language and thought and is believed to be what sets humans apart from the rest of the animal kingdom so significantly. This capacity forms an important part of this story in looking at how the minds of today have come to understand and be understood. This capacity is something Harari (2015) refers to as ‘fictive language’ – the ability to talk about something never seen, touched, smelled etc. and to create and share imagined stories. I expand the framing of this construct to include our ability to conceptualise.

In relatively simplistic terms, we could see our use of conceptual language as allowing us to divide our experience up, as well as to group aspects of our experience together. In a very literal sense, we could say that our experiencing is one single happening that is always now. Instead of seeing everything as one single whole (this ever-lasting ‘now’ that has lots of colours, shapes and movement), most of us have come to differentiate what we experience into many different parts.

This construct of conceptual thought (and language) could be seen to include the breaking down of experience into things, with the capacity extending to breaking 'things' down into further parts (Tollifson, 2010). For example, 'a person' is one visibly distinct aspect of our experiencing from the whole – and this has been conceptually split into parts such as body parts which, have become conceptually split further, for example by biologists. Whilst this breaking down into parts may be visually distinguishable to the human eye, often, such breaking down involves drawing a conceptual boundary which distinguishes one part from another (Tollifson, 2010) – something which may often involve a human decision as to where this boundary is to be drawn. This extends to aspects of the person which may not be deemed 'physical'. For example, the division of body and mind in which Descartes (1989) played an influential role. This division sought to aid theorising, highlighting how such decisions are likely informed by the conceptual division being seen to hold some usefulness by the decider/theoriser. A number of conceptual divisions have arisen which shape how we conceptualise our psychological worlds, also shaping how EPs conceptualise the psychological worlds of children and young people.

This concept of conceptual thought could also be conceptualised as the ability to group aspects of experience which are seen as belonging together – to see a collection of parts as a unified whole or concept. For example, at a microscopic level, particular particles which go together to form an object. A tree may be seen as grouped together with other trees, forming a woodland or forest - or it may be seen as grouping with other aspects of experience to create concepts such as a park or a zoo. Thus, this capacity could be seen to include the ability of grouping things, enabling us to categorise and classify. It also could be seen to include the ability to meaningfully link aspects of experience together which are not always visibly or concretely together in our first-hand experiencing. Such conceptualising can also involve human decision-making as one considers what to include within the conceptual boundaries being drawn. This is not to say that conceptualisations have no relation to the real world – much of what we have come to think and talk about in language is based on first-hand experiences where it has made sense to conceptually group things or split them up in a particular way. This is also not to say that language *determines* how we see things.

We could say that first conceptualising a concept or theory involves the noticing of particular aspects of experience which are seen as linked together in some meaningful way. As such, conceptual thought and language help us to draw attention to, theorise and communicate

about how aspects of our experiencing might relate to one another. Naming and explaining theories or ideas enables patterns of meaning making that we see within our experience to become visible in particular ways. Whilst examples so far point towards visible aspects of experience, this could include the whole range of possibilities within experiencing – including psychological experiencing. Once these ideas, theories or concepts are put into words, they may become visible to others. Fundamentally, the words we use come to make particular ways of seeing possible. We could say that the words we use provide particular *frames for seeing*; they guide our attention to see in certain ways, to notice specific aspects of experience, to see these and see these as relating to one another in certain ways i.e. to see particular patterns of meaning. If we consider an example relating to potential words that might be used to describe a child who may be incessantly moving, ‘anxious’, ‘ADHD’ and ‘challenging’ could all be said to offer different frames for seeing. The EP being in a powerful position to create or reinforce particular frames for seeing the child within their assessments.

We can imagine how early humans might have begun to name things in their experiencing - plants, animals, cycles and other patterns noticed within daily living and being. Decisions will have been made as to what names to give, how to group things and where to draw conceptual boundaries. Similarly, links and patterns may have been noticed which, over time, may have become theorised and named (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Whilst not proposing such decisions have no real connection to the real world, it could be suggested that different decisions may have been possible. As a basic example, the category ‘vertebrates’ involved the grouping of organisms on the basis of having a spine; had a decision been made according to a different characteristic, such as colour or number of eyes, this category would look quite different. It could also be considered that the drawing of a conceptual boundary around ‘spine’ may have been done differently – something which would have influenced what was possible in terms of the grouping of vertebrates. In this sense, although the ways in which we have come to group, order and classify the world (including ourselves) may seem like very real divisions of nature¹ – we could say that these are human-created divisions, or constructions.

¹ This is especially the case if this is how they were taught. For example, being taught ‘this *is* a vertebrate’ might be conceived quite differently to being taught ‘someone decided to group these according to whether they have a spine and decided to call these vertebrates - though they could have grouped them according to any other characteristic and may have given them an entirely different name’.

Whilst pointing to something in real or direct experience, words are, in many ways, abstract conceptualisations. This is not to say that things are not real or do not 'exist', rather that we use the abstract to think and talk about our experience. Words will always remain words, not the thing they intend to mean (other than perhaps the word 'word'). In naming things, we use an abstract string of symbols and sounds. These come to be associated with something that has been noticed or conceptualised in the real-world experience of the word user. For example, the word 'water' is not water – it is squiggles on a page or sounds made by a mouth. The word becomes a generalised concept which helps us to communicate something in our experience to others (Tollifson, 2010).

It is relatively convoluted to qualify that each word you use is simply a word intending to point to an aspect of your experience. This often leads our language use to implicitly suggest that words equate to the thing they intend to describe. Visibility may become less possible where previous generations already take words or concepts for granted. This is especially the case when it comes to those concepts which may shape the very nature of our experiencing – as in the case of psychological knowledge (Burr, 2015).

Growing up in a world with a relatively established language, it becomes easy to take many of these words for granted. When concepts have become so ingrained as part of our everyday language, it can become less visible that these are names that have been ascribed to aspects of experience that have been conceptualised. Due to our everyday use of language in such a way, it would be unsurprising if we occasionally (or more) 'forgot' that symbols and words are not the same as that they intend to represent in reality. Alan Watts (1966) warns of the danger of what some might call 'mistaking the map for the territory' (Pope, 2018):

[Abstractions] are useful so long as they are taken as [abstractions]. They are then simply ways of "figuring" the world which we agree to follow so that we can act in cooperation, as we agreed about inches and hours, numbers and words, mathematical systems and languages. If we have no agreement about measures of time and space, I would have no way of making a date with you at the corner of Forty-second Street ... on Sunday, April 4.

But the troubles begin when [abstractions] are taken as facts. Thus in 1752 when the British government instituted a calendar reform which required that September 2 of that year be

dated September 14 ... the result [was] that many people imagined that eleven days had been taken off their lives, and rushed to Westminster screaming, "Give us back our eleven days!" (p. 88).

In this sense, we might usefully consider EHC needs assessments as 'maps', not the territory. An important question might be, how much awareness is there that EHC needs assessments are maps? And perhaps more importantly, that these are maps which have the potential to be constructed in vastly differing ways? Maps which are highly contingent on the words chosen.

I have found Scheurich's (2014) archaeological perspective useful in helping to understand how our conceptualisations can form our different ways of seeing the world, or different maps. I have adapted this and have taken my own reading. Scheurich suggests thinking, metaphorically, of a culture, society or civilisation as a "complex three-dimensional array of concepts or names or categories" (p. 162). Different cultures are distinguished by differences in the categories or concepts upon which their understanding of the world relies. Within the metaphor, it might be useful to consider these in layers; with more ingrained, commonly shared, foundational concepts being at the bottom – that is, those things that simply assumed to be true by all, or most. These can often be out of reflective consciousness, something Scheurich describes as being like a "cultural unconscious" (p. 163). These categories and concepts can be seen as linked by meaning and interdependent, with concepts 'higher' up being dependent on those 'below' for their meaning. The deepest foundational layers may be more likely to have commonalities between cultures as they have become so foundational and embedded within ways of speaking, thinking and acting. For example, a deeply held assumption in Western thought is that of the fully autonomous self. As the world has become increasingly connected, some understandings and meanings may be more likely to have become increasingly shared.

Reflections

I have found that the same words can be used where there may be very different underlying conceptual frameworks which significantly alter the intended meaning of these words. This can mean there is a possibility that people *think* they are talking about the same thing when they may have vastly differing experiences and intended meanings. For example, I have been able to see the words 'self', 'sin' and 'reason' from vastly differing perspectives after coming across substantially different networks of concepts and beliefs underlying their meaning. Seeing these words used in different contexts out in everyday life, I have seen how differing underlying conceptual frameworks can significantly alter the hearing and experiencing of these words. This highlights the powerful, yet potentially invisible influence of our culture on how we see the world – with significant differences having the potential to be masked by presumed shared understandings arising from the use of the same words.

Colonialism could be said to have led to the imposition of Western conceptualisations of seeing the world upon differing cultures – something some describe as the imposition of minority world views on the Majority World (Cooke et al., 2021). Globalisation and modernist worldviews could be seen to be continuing this type of imposition of ways of seeing - for example, in the globalisation of mental health (Mills, 2013). Those who believe in knowable and discoverable truths, may see such imposition as being in the name of progress and development. Western psychology can also be seen to similarly impose minority world views on the Majority World, with globalised views of child development based on Western ideals appearing as universal truths of childhood (Burman, 2012). Such ideals have the potential to feature prominently within the work of EPs. Bringing potentially unconscious conceptual frameworks into awareness could be seen as an important act in working towards social justice.

Whilst we may not be able to bring all of our conceptual framework into conscious awareness, in recognising that the ways in which we think are based upon conceptual understandings, we become more able to look to the potential effects of the ways we see the world. For example, EPs can look to the ways in which different ways of conceptualising the child may influence how they see themselves and how others might relate to them – more readily allowing these considerations to guide decisions of ways to conceptualise the child over presumed beliefs in these being 'truths'.

In considering how conceptual frameworks might develop, neuroscientists, such as Lisa Barrett (2017), explain how the human mind appears to have become adept at pattern-matching. Once attention is directed to seeing in a particular way i.e. seeing particular links between aspects of experience, this way of seeing becomes more likely in future experiencing. This could be understood with reference to a tendency which aids survival via remembering past experiencing, enabling the anticipation of similar future experiences and facilitating quick responses. Whilst this capacity perhaps could be seen as developing in relation to survival (though this, too, is an idea), it could be said to have developed as a more general capacity to look for, learn and anticipate patterns within our broader experiencing. Whilst you may not have first noticed or created a particular pattern, having your attention drawn to this by another may enable a particular way of seeing which may come to be anticipated and more readily noticed in different contexts. This can be seen using the metaphor of narratives from within narrative therapy. This enables us to think of the patterns of meanings we see by way of narratives or stories (Morgan, 2000). Dominant stories can make us more likely to notice aspects of our experience which fit with this story – or to interpret our experience in ways that are more in line with this story. Similarly, we can become less likely to notice aspects of our experience that do not fit with the dominant stories we hold – or to explain away interpretations that do not fit with these. Dominant stories told about children and young people may lead to particular ways of seeing and interpreting experiences and may lead to some aspects of these experiences to go unnoticed. EHC needs assessments may play an important role in shaping what is made visible and not visible in children's lives.

The narrative metaphor has been found useful in aiding the conceptualisation of people's psychological worlds. Stories enable bringing various aspects of our experiencing together using words, allowing us to draw attention to aspects of our experience in more complex ways and across time. Perhaps most importantly, this metaphor allows the drawing of attention to the possibility that there are many stories that can be told. This idea has substantial implications as it means that people can change the stories they hold about the world around them, including themselves and others. It brings to life the potential for making new meanings, as well as emphasising the potential implications for the stories we tell and reinforce for other people. It could be argued that EPs might benefit from adopting this metaphor in thinking about how they construct the child in their assessments, perhaps thinking about these in the form of stories being told. What stories do EPs want to tell and what might be the implications of these?

A Story About Power

The work of Michel Foucault brought attention to the power of the stories we tell which I will situate within the previously described discussion of the capacity for conceptual thought and language. Harari (2015) highlights how it is this capacity² that has enabled us to form the increasingly complex civilisations that have developed over the last two to three thousand years. The development of civilisation involved the coordination of large amounts of people. Researchers have suggested that where groups exceed 150 people, a political structure – or social order - of some kind is needed to help maintain their functioning. Harari makes the connection of such social orders being possible by having some shared belief system. Harari claims that “any large-scale human cooperation – whether a modern state, a medieval church, an ancient city, or an archaic tribe – is rooted” in a collective of conceptual thought (p. 30). We could say that there is an incredible amount of variability in how each of us experience the world (including ourselves) – and subsequently in what ways of being and living might be most enjoyable or satisfying for us. As we have come to live in increasingly large societies, particular social orders appear to have arisen. That is, a set of rules everyone must live by in order for lives to be coordinated in a particular way, to maintain the functioning of a society the way it is. Here, the discussion which may have felt confined to conceptual language in terms of ‘concepts’, ‘categories’ and ‘stories’ expands more broadly to ‘ways of seeing and being’.

Whilst traditionally we might think of the rules that help to govern and maintain a social order as being those written in law, Foucault has highlighted that there are other rules which are less visible. With this, Foucault reconstructed how we can think about ‘*power*’. Foucault saw power as intimately bound up with *knowledge* - adopting Foucault’s view of knowledge as “the particular common-sense view of the world prevailing in a culture at any one time” (Burr, 2015, p. 80). Whilst power in the traditional sense can be thought of as a direct exerting of control, authority or influence over others – Foucault would argue that this in fact would indicate a *lack* of power. For Foucault, real power was that which arose through our ways of seeing and speaking about the world – ways which “[bring] with it the potential for social practices, for acting in one way rather than another, and for marginalising alternative ways of acting.” (Burr, 2015, p. 80). The different

² This is my adapted version of what Harari here refers to as ‘shared fictions’ as I attempt to capture the abstract nature of language without the denial of might be considered real.

ways in which we come to conceptualise particular ways of being can have direct implications for how those in society respond. EHC needs assessments and potential resulting EHCPs are primary examples of government sanctioned processes which result in very real implications for how the child is seen, related to and acted upon.

Burr uses the example that behaviour several hundred years back which would have been seen as evidence of a 'possession' would today be viewed as 'mental illness'. The first needing 'exorcism', the second needing 'treatment'. Burr explains that "[t]herefore the power to act in particular ways, to claim resources, to control or be controlled depends upon the knowledges currently prevailing in a society." (p.80). The knowledges that are most dominant legitimise particular ways of thinking, speaking and acting, whilst marginalising those that sit outside. EP assessments could be seen to legitimise particular ways of thinking, speaking and acting in relation to the child. Power is, then, exercised by drawing on these particular knowledges – which I will now refer to as *discourses*. By discourse, I simply mean the way something is talked about (I will use 'discourse' and 'ways of speaking' interchangeably throughout this thesis). Thus, dominant discourses within society lead us to think, speak and act in particular ways by way of shaping what we come to see as truth. Thus, EPs exercising of power is by way of the dominant discourses they draw upon within their assessments.

Importantly, Foucault's concept of power is not one-way. The very existence of a discourse necessitates that an alternative must also be in existence; if there was nothing to contrast one way of speaking about something, this way of speaking could not be visible as a discourse as this would be 'all there was' (i.e. there would not be a 'not that discourse'). This means that whilst drawing upon a dominant discourse may be the exercising of power, there also exists the potential for the exercising of resistance by way of drawing upon an alternative way of speaking. In other words, whilst for many, there may be an obvious and apparent truth, there may be alternative ways of seeing – and thus there may be the possibility of this truth being questioned. Whilst discourse might be seen as constraining what is possible to think, say and do, recognition of the potential for alternatives provides a possibility for choice and change. An important point, especially for those who strive to highlight and address what they perceive to be social injustices or inequities, is as follows: the less visible alternative discourses are – i.e. the more we are glued to something as truth – the less able we are to see, think, speak and act in ways that are outside of this supposed

truth. Subsequently, making the potential for alternative ways of seeing the world more visible could in itself be seen as an act of liberation. The more possibilities there are for seeing and being in the world, the greater the possibility for change.

Whilst discourse so far has been referred to as ways of speaking, Foucault highlighted how discourse extends beyond language, permeating all aspects of our social life. How we come to speak and think about the world influences how we organise society. What we believe as truth informs the how we create and fund services, organisations and institutions. It shapes what is seen as important to do in terms of policy and practice, as well as our everyday social practices. For example, the education system and, within this, the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system have been created and are maintained by beliefs in particular truths and taken for granted assumptions within these. The dominant discourses, or dominant ways of speaking, could be said to rule in particular ways of seeing, being and acting, whilst ruling out potentially different ways of seeing, being and acting.

Over time, how we see various aspects of society as relating to one another (and to our own lives) becomes increasingly embedded. Similarly to conceptual naming, those around at the time of the creation of particular social practices will have had a greater awareness that this was something humans decided to do. With this awareness, also comes the increased awareness that these might have been done in different ways – the possibility for change perhaps being much higher. Over time, as new generations emerge, the awareness of these being human decisions can reduce: ‘this is how we have decided to do things’ can become ‘this is how things are done’ (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Over time, assumptions that might become deeply embedded – and therefore taken for granted - within these practices can appear increasingly unquestionable. In addition, should these assumptions have become foundational for particular practices, systems and organisations to maintain their functioning, it may be in the interests of many for aspects of the social order to be maintained – arguably, even if these may appear to be in need of substantial revision. It could be suggested that this may lead proposed reforms to be somewhat superficial, with change relating to aspects of systems and practices which enable dominant ways of seeing and relating to remain in place.

In addition to informing how we see various aspects of our society and lives as relating to one another, the ways in which we speak come to shape other aspects of our lives, such as how we come to believe we, and others, should live our day to day lives, how we should relate to one another and, perhaps most fundamentally, who – or how – we come to believe we should, and should not be. EP assessments potentially play a crucial role in shaping who or how children and young people believe they should be, this latter point having potentially profound implications for how children see and relate to themselves.

Why are These Stories Relevant to Educational Psychology?

How do we speak of children? How do we speak with children? How do we write about children? How do we listen to children? How do we listen to ourselves (when working with children)? (Billington, 2006, p. 8).

It is hoped that the stories told so far have helped to demonstrate the significance of these questions to the EP role. EPs are both creators and users of discourse (i.e. knowledge). This is in terms of the research they produce during their training, as well as the ways in which they go on to research and contribute to the world of knowledge in their careers. This is also in terms of the discourses they draw upon in their practice – the ways in which they speak and write – as well as the ways in which they *act*.

In their roles, EPs have the potential to legitimise particular dominant discourses, perhaps contributing to the maintenance of aspects of the social order – including dominant ways in which children and young people have come to be constructed (Aitken et al., 1996). Alongside, EPs also have the potential to resist dominant discourses and disrupt what some might refer to as the status quo.

The EHC needs assessments which form a part of EPs' statutory role have been selected for this research and are seen to hold particular importance. Whilst any EP written reports or records of the child could have been adequate as texts, these texts arguably hold more power and weight due to their role within this statutory process. These may be longer lasting written forms of

conceptualising the child, potentially being referred to for longer periods than other forms of records. These may also be more likely for the child to read and for families to hold onto long-term. These texts could be seen to hold more explicit power and weighting in terms of potential real-world implications for the child; in addition to informing how adults go on to conceptualise the child, these texts specify the creation of outcomes for the child - outcomes which could be seen to specify ways in which the child should be different or who/how they should be - and what is to be done practically in order to try to reach these. Should assessments lead to an EHC plan (EHCP), a legal document may result which is likely to be substantially informed by the assessment. This further emphasises the power these assessments have the potential to hold, being sanctioned at both governmental and legal levels. This research looks to the ways in which EPs write about children and young people in their assessments to consider what stories might be told and to explore their potential implications. This research also seeks to illuminate the less visible forms of power which operate in terms of the knowledge being produced by the EP through this statutory process.

Research Aim and Questions

The overall aim of this research is to explore how Educational Psychologists (EPs) construct children and young people in their written psychological advice as part of the Education, health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) process. As part of this, the following questions will be explored:

- What discourses - or ways of speaking - do EPs privilege in their construction of 'the child' within EHCNAs?
- What functions does the locating of constructions within their respective wider discourses appear to serve within the EHCNA?
- What are the implications in terms of the child's subjective experience - that is, "what can be felt, thought and experienced" - and possible ways-of-being for the constructed child? (Willig, 2008, p. 117).

Methodology

Reflections

How I see the world has changed drastically and continues to change quite significantly over time. This movement is what has perhaps made this thesis so difficult to write, as I sought a clear and certain position to stand. But that position appears to not remain stable.

Overview

This research is seen as the production of knowledge – with a process of co-production between the researcher and the data of the research. ‘I’ am not separate from the research; my thoughts, feelings, values and beliefs play an integral role in the knowledge being produced (Corlett & Mavin, 2017). Aiming to bring greater transparency and openness to this process, this chapter begins with an account of the person authoring this thesis – the ‘me’ behind the written words. It continues with a more detailed account of how I see reality, grounding this research in its philosophical foundations. I then outline my approach to the creation of this research – a postmodern approach to discourse analysis. Ethical issues are considered, followed by a discussion relating to the issues of trustworthiness and credibility and how these might be addressed when working from a postmodern philosophical position. This chapter closes with a description of how the research took place, including the analytical process and an account of some of the issues and dilemmas which arose.

The ‘Me’ Behind the Words

At the time of writing, I identify as a white, cisgendered, British female, from a working-class background. Naughton and Tudor (2006) emphasise the importance of challenging culture neutrality, highlighting whiteness as the privileged and dominant norm which can often be invisible. I aim to make my colour and aspects of my culture visible within the research process. Reflecting on my colour and culture is something I foresee as lifelong within my psychology practice.

One aspect of my personal investment in this research has been the struggles I have personally encountered. Seeing many different ways I could conceptualise these difficulties but not knowing which, I found myself lost in confusion which only escalated as I trained to become a psychologist. With psychological training, I could now see different ways to conceptualise what might be going on for a child but wrestled with which was the 'right' or 'best' way. This led me to deeper questions of truth and knowing. Alongside my academic journey was one of a more spiritual nature which has led me to explore knowing more deeply in terms of my experiential reality, venturing into nondualism realisations. This has helped me to see the relative nature of knowledge and the multiplicity of the ways in which we can come to see and think we know. It has deepened my seeing of the interconnectedness of life and has led me to question a long and deeply held view of myself and others as fully autonomous beings.

I have found relaxing my grasp on truth as helpful in enabling me a greater sense of freedom in choosing the ways in which I talk and write about children and young people, something I have been interested in offering to others. Whilst I began with somewhat strongly held values and beliefs of what I believed 'should' happen, this has relaxed as I now see there being ultimately no absolute right or wrong ways - and no absolute better or worse ways. All judgements are relative, being contingent upon which moment in time one looks, and the position and perspective one takes in that moment. Whilst my perspective and my values and beliefs in one moment may lead me to see one way, I now recognise there are many perspectives to take – and that these, along with my values and beliefs, can shift and change. I have also come to see that there are potentially infinite possibilities for how things might turn out as a result.

Throughout my research journey, I have practiced as a trainee Educational Psychologist which has involved being a writer of the type of assessments which form the data for this research. The stories I tell about children and young people feel important. Finding ways to help children and young people have their voice meaningfully heard and finding ways to redress what can appear to be power imbalances has been important to me. My analysis has continued to influence my practice and my practice has continued to influence my analytical thinking.

Epistemological and Ontological Thoughts

I see words such as 'social constructionism', 'critical realism' etc. as labels for varying beliefs and views which have no clear-cut boundaries. I have found that such words can be interpreted with vastly differing conceptual frameworks and feel it might be more appropriate to describe more qualitatively some of my current epistemological thoughts. I do not draw a clear distinction between ontology (what it means to 'be') and epistemology (how we can come to 'know'). As Scheurich (2014) puts it, 'What I see and how I see are intimately woven'. I see my beliefs – which form one sense of what I 'know' - as thoughts. Whilst some reappear and seem more stable, the thoughts that arise appear to be continuously changing. Thus, what I 'know' continues to shift and change.

Currently, I believe that how we each see and experience reality differs and that this is continually changing. Whilst I believe there is a 'real' world, I do not believe there is a single way of knowing, seeing or understanding this (Powell, 2007). A crude and oversimplified example might be to consider that what a bat sees differs vastly from what a human eye sees – this does not make one correct and the other incorrect; we are limited to 'know' in the only way we can and this makes up our reality. Whilst it might feel common sense to assume that all human eyes see the same, I believe what and how we see comes to be shaped by an infinite number of conditions, some of which we might be aware, many of which we are not (Tollifson, 2010).

I see language as important in shaping what many come to see and understand as their reality (Burr, 2015). I view language as being a key (though, not the only) vehicle humans use to describe and communicate experience. I see language as playing a primary role in how many of us think and speak – in drawing the boundaries between what comes to be made visible as 'things', concepts and ideas - in creating and reinforcing particular patterns of meaning in experiencing - shaping how we see, what we do and how our worlds have come to be organised (Ball, 2013). This does not mean I see those who are viewed as not having or using language as not having a reality. Language can be seen to have an important function in shaping reality far beyond the individual level. That is, in how we come to see and understand things and people, thus how we relate to things and one another - including the wider ways in which we come to organise and structure our society, or social order (Hook, 2007).

One way of coming to 'know', then, can come from looking to how we use language – the discourses circulating within society. This is what led to my research adopting a postmodern approach to discourse analysis.

A Postmodern Approach to Discourse Analysis

Initially intending to use a 'Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis', I ultimately opted for a broader naming of my approach as it incorporates other ideas and techniques which may or may not fit with Foucault's intended meanings. The analysis used has been primarily influenced by Foucault (1977), Scheurich (2014) and Hollway (1989). Needless to say, the analysis has also been influenced by a broad range of reading that I have carried out over the years.

Scheurich (2014) urges caution towards any approach which claims to be postmodern yet seeks to provide overarching guidance as to how research should be done. For a large part of the research journey, I was unwittingly being guided by structuralist underlying assumptions. I sought the safety and certainty of a pre-written, prescribed method. This was not only to help provide guidance and a sense of knowing what to do, but also felt important in ensuring I was carrying out research that was methodologically sanctioned by the academic world.

Now taking place from what might be referred to as a postmodern epistemology, a necessary aspect of the research methodology is that it does not follow or propose any prescribed rules. In doing so, it would risk reproducing already prescribed structures for how things are to be done, something which I believe limits new possibilities and risks slipping back into a structuralist ideology for how to view and understand our world. Central to adopting a post-modernist approach for me has been the breaking down of prescribed ways of being and doing, attempting to see through these and any ideas of an absolute 'right' and 'wrong' which I had long held on to. Key questions that arose for me in this decision-making included: Might the desire to follow already written and academically 'approved' methods lead psychologists to the affirming and strengthening of particular ways of doing research? Simultaneously, might this risk marginalising other ways, as well as dampening individual researchers' unique expressions of creativity?

My reference to a postmodern approach to discourse analysis points to a style of research that looks to the ways in which we can construct our realities through discourse. The thinking of Foucault has been particularly influential. Foucault's work might be usefully understood via a lens of 'macro social constructionism' (Burr, 2015). This type of analysis was chosen as it supports the ability to 'make visible' what might otherwise go unnoticed; to question the unquestionable, or rather, those aspects of reality that have become so 'normal' that they could be considered taken for granted and therefore unseen (Given, 2008). This type of analysis can allow us to question "how something has come to be the way it is, how it is that they remain that way, and how else they might have been or could be" (p. 2). Conducting historical analyses, Foucault became deeply interested in where the boundaries lay between societal judgements of normal and abnormal; judgements creating boundaries between that which was considered acceptable and that which was not. Foucault particularly focused on institutions and how their structures served to reinforce particular ways of being that were deemed normal, appropriate or acceptable – and subsequently, what was deemed not.

Within his analyses, Foucault focused upon the power of language – of discourse – as being intimately bound up with how individuals, groups and institutions relate to one another, and themselves. How we speak about something shapes how we think about it, see it and interact with it; the discourses we use directly influence how we think, speak and act – or perhaps more accurately – they *are* how we think, see and act. They influence and shape subjectivity – or our subjective experience (Hollway, 1989). Discourses are seen to help create and maintain the particular structures we live by and within; the structures shaping how we see ourselves and others; the structuring of beliefs about how life should/should not be lived, the structuring of society by way of services, organisations and institutions. Thus, an approach drawing upon Foucault's thinking, looks to the available discursive resources within a culture; what discourses are available? What assumptions do they convey about what it means to be a person? What does it make possible to think, say or do? This orientation of analysis looks to consider the available discourses within a culture – which in this case is the field and practice of Educational Psychology – to consider the ways in which reality can be constructed – which in this case, is the reality of what it means to be a child or young person.

It could be argued that a somewhat 'mixed' approach was taken in relation to this approach to discourse analysis, whereby there is some 'zooming out' to more macro discourses alongside some 'zooming in' attending to closer details in how language is used within assessments. This could be seen as drawing upon elements which might traditionally be seen as belonging within other categories of analysis, some of which are described below.

Whilst taking a somewhat fluid and mixed approach, in selecting to carry out a postmodern discourse analysis, it could be said that there were explicitly named alternatives not chosen. It is hoped that the philosophical underpinnings described so far offers the justification for an approach which sees language – and more specifically discourse - as important in shaping reality, whilst also looking to consider the potential power relations within this. There are various approaches to conducting research which emphasise the value of language and discourse. Whilst I am reluctant to categorise what might more usefully be seen as creative, open and flexible, for the purposes of communicating differing styles, some alternatives considered might broadly be conceptualised under the following headings:

Conversation Analysis: an approach which might be considered more 'micro' in nature. This focuses on "naturally occurring interactions in order to reveal the rhetorical devices that people use to achieve their interaction goals." (Burr, 2015, p. 25).

Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis: could be seen as an approach akin to that within this research but with more explicit attention to gender and identity within power relations. (Thompson et al., 2018).

Critical Discourse Analysis: is viewed as attending systematically to the way in which text is structured and organised – looking specifically to textual features distinguishes this from the approach I have taken. (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000).

Narrative Analysis: adopts a postmodern orientation whilst drawing upon the narrative metaphor whereby events are weaved together to tell particular narratives or stories. Whilst my looking to and developing constructions might be seen as alike to narrative form, the omission of a time element means my analysis sits outside of this form of categorisation. (Bamberg, 2012).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): involves detailed attention to lived experience. (Smith et al., 1999). This research does not take an explicit IPA approach, as participants' phenomenological experiences are not attended to. However, I could be said to draw upon aspects from this approach in terms of how I actively utilised my own phenomenological experiences in my readings of the assessments. My personal meaning-making has been central to the analysis, with my own subjective experience informing decision-making as to what to attend to and how this is done.

It feels important here to clarify my position that I myself am not 'outside of discourse' – nor is the concept of discourse - nor the use of a postmodern approach. Whilst I talk about discourses, this in itself could be described as my drawing upon a 'discourse of discourse', and I adopt the view that researchers are also producers of discourse. This is not the only way of speaking or thinking about the ways in which we can conceptualise the child – it is simply *one* way – and this way is not free from the infinite conditions (including time and place in history) upon which its creation and use is contingent. That is, discourse is not seen as an absolute 'truth' but another set of ideas constructed from the weaving together of aspects of experiencing and seeing meaning in particular ways.

The process of analysis will be explained in the 'Analysis Process' within the next chapter, 'What I Did'.

Ethical Considerations

To critique is risky work, not just because it might alienate those who are deeply attached to, or personally implicated in, the discourses to be placed under scrutiny but also because to draw attention to the very terms through which existence is made possible, to begin to dismantle those very terms while still depending on them for shared meaning-making – even for survival – requires a kind of daring, a willingness to envisage the not yet known and to make visible the faults, the effects of the already known. (Davies, 2005).

Deep consideration was given to how this research could be carried out in a way that felt emotionally safe, not only for participants but for all potential readers of this thesis. Discourse is not being viewed as unique to individuals but to be culturally shared and it is possible that many

who read this thesis may find themselves identifying in one way or another to the analytical and subsequent discussions. This thesis seeks to go to the very core of what many might consider ‘really real’ - foundational assumptions within their personal realities. To question these might be somewhat unsettling, perhaps even disturbing. This ethical consideration is addressed by attending to what this type of questioning and exploration can offer i.e. considering whether the potential ethical ‘gains’ can be seen to outweigh the potential ethical ‘risks’. It is anticipated that readers may experience a greater sense of choice in the ways they write and speak, allowing them to act in ways that feel more closely aligned with the beliefs and values they hold at that time. A participant of research from a similar post-structuralist perspective writes:

“Critical (thinking) is not just reflecting on practice, but through that, uncovering what it reveals about what we think and believe and an opportunity to find out exactly who we are doing things for and why, and to change and adapt if you need. I know as an educator one of the main things I’ve got out of it is changing, and being able to change and knowing that you can. Whereas before, I went along thinking I had to do things because that’s the way they were done ... now I know that I can question, and I can change if I need to – it’s quite a liberating experience.” (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 13)

Initially, my attention to ethical considerations related to a particular reading of the ‘critical’ aspect of the research – for example asking, ‘How might people feel if something they say, think or write is felt to be in some way critiqued?’ However, I came to realise that this ethical question is dependent upon the everyday use of the word ‘critical’ which is understood in terms of thinking negatively about something and fault-finding. Such ethical concerns are quickly dissolved by two key points which are important to understand when working from a post-structuralist perspective. These are:

1. ‘Critical’ in the social sciences has another meaning – rather than looking upon something negatively, this orientation involves invoking questions relating to knowledge and power. It relates to questioning “how particular ideas come to dominate our understandings of and actions in the social world and contribute to inequities in it” (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 8) - aiming to bring to light underlying, taken for granted assumptions.

2. No discourse or construction can be judged without its context and meaning – and even then, any judgement would be from one perspective, in one set of conditions, at one moment. An illustrative example might be to consider how easy it is to differentially judge a discourse of extermination. Within contexts of killing masses of human beings, this is generally seen as wholly bad – a great deal of suffering and harm that should never happen. In a different context, however - such as gardening – this might be seen (at least by some) in a very different way. Where mass killing is seen to be in relation to what is constructed as a ‘pest’, not only might this not be seen as bad or harmful - it might be seen as morally advocated – for example, potentially being seen by some as for the greater good, for example for a particular ecosystem or the wellbeing of the gardener. These judgements of good and bad are highly contingent on the context and the position of the person being asked (or living organism being asked, in the case of the hypothetical aphid). Adding the element of passing time further adds to the realisation of how provisional such relative judgements can be (for example, inorganic toxins may cause soil erosion resulting in a very different judgement arising for the gardener at a later point in time).

Whilst this analysis will look to the apparent functions of different ways of constructing and the drawing upon of discourses, this will necessarily be partial and limited. Instead of encouraging people to see how ‘good’ or ‘bad’ particular ways of thinking and speaking are, it seeks to encourage critical reflection on how these might be used and consideration to potential implications that might otherwise be less visible. In other words, there are no absolute ‘good’ or ‘bad’ ways of constructing, nor discourses – these are seen to be relative judgments. These judgements can only be made in relation to specific contexts, from a particular perspective at a particular moment in time, with reference to a particular set of values and beliefs.

Nevertheless, I was keen to ensure the emotional safety of all potential participants in the early stages of this research which led me to seek to ensure high levels of anonymity. To do this, I sought the help of a trusted third party to help facilitate recruitment whilst maintaining the anonymity of the participants, as well as the assessments. To help create an additional layer of felt distance from the discussions, analyses are emphasised as attending to constructions *across* assessments as opposed to looking to individual authors or assessments. Additionally, a smaller number of assessments are used in the analysis than the number of EPs who provided consent. This sought

to serve an additional layer of emotional security when reading the thesis (i.e. 'this may relate to something I wrote, though it may not.'). Within the thesis, a higher number of various pseudonyms are used and pronouns are changed to minimise links between extracts and to further increase anonymity. This means extracts are not referenced by way of numbering or naming of specific reports.

This research process, including recruitment and consenting methods, was ethically approved by my university's ethics board (see appendix G).

Research Rigour & Reflexivity

This study does not measure itself against criteria such as 'accuracy', 'validity' and 'reliability' as one might if working from a modernist epistemology. Traditionally within research, validity has been considered centrally important – with its many forms pointing towards the trustworthiness or legitimacy of research (Scheurich, 2014). Establishing measures and criteria for trustworthiness necessarily leans on a need for prescribing particular ways of doing and seeing. It draws a boundary to rule in/out what is acceptable/unacceptable. This raises an essential question; who determines these measures, criteria and subsequently drawn boundaries? Upon which values and assumptions do they lie? Could imposing such structures within how to do research risk reproducing particular ways of seeing, doing and understanding, whilst marginalising, ignoring or condemning different ways of seeing, doing and understanding?

As my epistemological positioning is that there is no single way of coming to know or explain reality, this shifts the appropriateness of such measures. This is not to imply that things cannot be false, or that we cannot come closer to an understanding that was intended, nor that things cannot be misinterpreted entirely – all of which I believe are possible. I believe that we can come closer to a particular intended understanding – though I also believe that one person's understanding cannot be truly known by another and that understandings may not be as stable and unchanging as they might seem.

Gergen (2014) has grappled with this question of what he terms 'criteria of excellence' where traditional criteria in research are rendered inapplicable. In discourse analysis, he highlights a

primary aim being “liberation from convention” and therefore a centrally important criterion being “the rhetorical power of the critique” (p. 54). This involves “activating the readers sense of social justice” and making “a case for his or her interpretation” (p. 55). Justifying my constructions, ensuring plausibility within the applicable context, whilst also considering issues of inequity and power will form criteria against which this research can be judged.

The assessments which form the data for this analysis are not assumed to represent some accurate representation of the reality of psychological assessments, nor even an accurate representation of the reality of these particular psychological assessments. How I read them will differ to how they were written, and how I read them will likely differ over time and conditions. Nor is there an assumption that my analysis will gauge an accurate representation of the ways the child is constructed or the ways in which discourses are drawn upon. Ultimately, I do not claim that this research shows how children and young people are *really* constructed by EPs. Constructions are not claimed to have been discovered in the text but to have instead been *created* as part of my readings. Thus, I am not claiming to offer a contribution to the reality of what is ‘known’, in the conventional sense, about children and young people – nor what is known about how EPs see children and young people. Alternatively, I seek to present an account and exploration of the variety of ways EPs might talk about, and thus, construct children and young people in the way they write. I actively invite readers to critically reflect on the constructed nature of the enquiry within this research (Gergen, 2014).

I believe any knowledge – including that which is produced or legitimised by research – can tell us more about the time, place and values of a researcher - or society - at the particular time and place it came into being than it does of what is *really* happening. As such, another aspect of rigour within this research involves paying attention to my own values, thoughts and feelings, in part taking the form of an ongoing research journal, alongside attempts to bring honesty and transparency within this written account.

What I Did

Recruitment and Consent

EPs interest was first gauged using anonymised google forms, followed by recruitment and consent also being sought using anonymised google forms. These were collated with the help of a trusted third party (TTP) who then assisted with randomly selecting assessments. Using scripts, the TTP then facilitated an enquiry into potential interest and sought subsequent consents. This began with consent of the school the child attended at the time of the assessment, followed by that of the carers/parents. A decision was made not to seek the child's consent. This was based on ethical considerations that the child may have a negative experience of reading an assessment which conceptualises them in terms of special educational needs. This risk was felt to outweigh the risks of harm that may come from the child not consenting to their assessment being used, particularly with reference to the level of anonymisation and type of analysis being used.

Processing the Texts

The TTP used a random sampling of assessments written between December 2019 and July 2021 by EPs who had provided consent. These dates were selected somewhat arbitrarily, the intention being that the assessments had been written within relatively recent history as to be somewhat relevant in considering how we think, write and speak about children today, whilst also intending these to have not been written too recently as to be more 'fresh' in the minds of EPs to minimise self-recognition. Random sampling was not necessary given the philosophical positioning of this research (Hollway, 1989), however it helped to aid a system of selection and remove a need for additional decision-making. A minimum of three assessments were sought in total, from a minimum of three differing author EPs. Assessments with all of the relevant written consent were then anonymised by the TTP. This included the removal of all names and any information that was deemed to be identifiable, with pseudonyms being used. These were then sent securely in preparation for the analysis which is detailed later in this chapter.

The Analytical Process

To me, my analysis is a complex culmination of conscious and unconscious activity, not solely by 'me' the researcher, but more likened to a tapestry or web that includes all my interactions - the many writers I have read, the many young people, colleagues, carers/parents I have worked with – a *totality* that cannot be captured by words, or even encapsulated as a finite 'totality'. I bring my life's history, and the histories of many, with generations upon generations of experiences and conditioning being foundational in the unfolding of this analysis. This 'not knowing' and acknowledgement of the infinite influences upon this analysis is not an attempt to side-step accountability. Conversely, it has highlighted further the need for transparency and attempts to detail my thoughts and actions within the analytical process as they unfold – even where these might not 'fit' with ideals within mainstream Western academia. This involved my use of a research journal whereby thoughts, feelings and reflections were captured along the research journey. (See appendix F for some excerpts from my research journal).

What is captured in relation to the research journey is necessarily selective and as captive to the unknowable limitations described above in relation to my view of knowledge. Nevertheless, I tell 'my analysis story' by conceptualising this into a more succinct model to help with contextualising and providing a framework of meaning for possible readings of this analysis and associated reflections. This starts with the basis I initially drew upon, followed by a more detailed description of how the analysis unfolded.

Willig's (2008) six stage process to discourse analysis was used as a basis for this analysis. This basis was condensed into four stages as the object and subject – two separate stages for Willig – are both 'the child' within this research. This basis can be seen as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Willig's Six Stages Condensed into Four Stages
Step 1: Discursive Constructions Identifying the ways in which 'the child' is constructed within the text by highlighting all implicit and explicit references to constructions.

Step 2: Discourses, Positionings and Subjectivity

Locating identified constructions within their wider discourses. This entails looking at how is 'the child' positioned within the discourses i.e. what does it mean to 'be' a child within these discourses? This stage aims to explore the consequences of taking up these positionings in terms of 'the child's subjective experience. Willig describes this as "what can be felt, thought and experienced from within various subject positions" (p. 117).

Step 3: Action Orientation

Attending to the functions of constructions i.e. "what is gained from constructing the object in this [way and at this] particular point within the text?" (p. 116).

Step 4: Practice

Looking to the ways in which the identified positionings lead to, or rule out, the potential for what might be done or said in practice.

Additional Stage: Historical and Social Conditions

This stage was added in which I planned to trace the historical and social conditions which may have given rise to discourses arising from the previous stages i.e. under what conditions were these knowledge claims originally made? This was an attempt to take a 'genealogical approach' based upon the work of Nietzsche and Foucault, involving wider reading in relation to the history of discourses.

Below is a description of how the analytical process unfolded. Whilst this appears to be in a clear, linear fashion, this presentation is to aid readers' understanding of the analytical process - simplifying and clarifying what was a messy, confusing and often overwhelming experience into a clearer and more coherent description of steps. To aid illumination of analytical process within the reading of the analysis, I have made initial reference to Willig's stages within the first construction. It is anticipated that these initial pointers will aid their visibility throughout the subsequent constructions of the analysis.

- 1) Assessments were anonymised by a trusted third party and received securely.

- 2) Attempting to step into the role of a 'general reader', I carried out initial readings of each assessment, aiming to let go of any analytical or psychological thinking. Afterwards, I jotted down my initial thoughts and feelings in my research journal. (See appendix B for an excerpt from my initial reading notes).
- 3) I attempted to highlight all implicit and explicit references to constructions of 'the child'. This proved more challenging than initially presumed given the nature of the text. As highlighting applied to most of the text, I opted to use computer software (NVivo) and began to create 'codes'. This involved attending closely to the many different ways in which the child was constructed, leading to the development of a large number of codes which might be considered as 'micro constructions'. (See appendix C for the initial list of codes).
- 4) I adopted a technique which I call 'making the familiar strange'. This was based on my university experience of engaging with ideas from Michel Foucault; we were encouraged to step outside of everyday assumptions by closely considering something in new ways. Instead of a 'child', I imagined something entirely different, such as the neighbour's cat or my pet goldfish. This enabled a more thorough exploration of what assumptions might implicitly be being made by the use of particular words i.e. enabling questions such as 'why could I say this about a child but not a fish? If I did say it about a fish, what does that tell me about what is being assumed?'
- 5) Reflective writing helped with exploring initial ideas in relation to constructions and the potential discourses being drawn upon. I used 'free association' type techniques to aid this (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008), for example asking others 'if I was to say this about a person, what contexts might I be using this in?' or 'in what areas of life do we talk about things using descriptions such as this?'. I also used Google, putting in particular words or phrases, as well as searching definitions to see how this might stimulate further thinking and reflection. (See appendix E for some examples of this type of analytical thinking).
- 6) I began attempting to put together what I described as 'codes' in NVivo to form broader ways of constructing the child. This involved putting codes (or 'micro constructions') which fit together into groups. This was complicated, messy and often overwhelming. Drawing

boundaries between constructions was unclear and ambiguous. Often being pulled into a structuralist mindset, doubt and uncertainty could be said to have characterised much of this stage of the research. I sought to capture a comprehensive overview of the various ways I read the child being constructed in the texts. Yet, I found myself struggling to define boundaries between what might classify as names of constructions, as well as what might better be described as descriptions of the subjective experience of a construction. There felt to be a high level of human decision-making in drawing such boundaries and the locating of emphases. I felt a strong sense of responsibility in getting this 'right', particularly given the context of this being a piece of research. (See appendices C and D for the initial codes list and a visual representation of this constructed 'overview' – something which was ultimately 'let go' of as the research journey continued).

- 7) Following reconnection with a postmodernist positioning through continued reading, reflection and supervision, a new approach was adopted whereby I stepped back and let go of everything so far. Re-reading the assessments freshly, I sought to connect with what resonated most, what stood out as meaningful and relevant for myself as the researcher, and for the EP profession more broadly. This led to more focused constructions arising which no longer sought to comprehensively capture the assessments. I moved towards a more focused writing of the analysis. I used reflective writing alongside where additional clarification of my thoughts were needed (for example, in distinguishing initial constructions of 'child as living being' from 'child as meaning maker').
- 8) Initially, I was searching for specific and distinguishable 'discourses'. Over time, I found that I had become somewhat fixated on the language of 'discourse analysis' which I realised may have been constraining my thinking i.e. reading the texts with the mindset of 'what discourse is being drawn upon?' As the analytical process progressed naturally in the steps described above, I began to turn more broadly to ways in which the child was being constructed. I could then consider literature and ideas more broadly, without feeling this having to relate to a specific 'named' discourse. This enabled me to reconnect with the purpose and meaning of the research, and of the analysis, which was to provide a thought-provoking exploratory account of the ways in which children and young people might be constructed. This enabled me to meaningfully connect with ideas that felt useful to explore

in relation to the analysis - including reference to equity and social justice - rather than becoming caught up in discussions that may have felt less relevant or useful.

Reflections

A central 'technique' (although this word is not entirely accurate in its intended meaning as what I describe is more of a 'non-doing' than a 'doing') which I have consciously sought to return to throughout my research has been to connect with presence. It is often easy for my being to become lost in thought, identified with an image of myself as a researcher/student. I noticed that these identifications could lead me to move in directions that were in some way driven to what I thought I *should* be doing – comparisons to particular ideals and standards which could be seen as becoming internalised. Alternatively, I have sought to let go of ideals – dissolving fixed self-images – listening inwardly to connect with my own unique expression, even when this might not fit the way things are usually done. This has felt in many ways to be a risk but also an act of faith as I seek to embody the underlying philosophical questioning that characterises this thesis – letting go of socially conditioned 'shoulds' to allow space for something new.

- 9) I regularly referred to my research questions, asking how I might attend to these areas if these had not yet arisen. This included asking:
- Have I described and justified this construction using references from within the texts?
 - Have I considered what assumptions might be being made about the child in terms of what is possible to think, feel or do?
 - Have I considered the functions of constructing the child in this way?
 - Have I considered other possible implications, such as what might be ruled in or out as possible to be said or done in practice?
 - Have I considered what this might relate to which could be useful for further discussion or exploration?

- 10) Finally, I re-read the texts and analysis, ensuring the analytical discussions felt meaningful and relevant in relation to readings of the texts within their broader assessment context. I restructured and edited the analysis write up to aid greater coherence and presentation for readers.

Issues & Dilemmas

The high level of anonymisation sought for the assessments presented some challenges. This required the recruitment of a trusted third party who was appropriate in terms of their role and relationship to potential participants, as well as requiring their willingness and capacity in terms of time. Finding a trusted third party meeting these criteria involved time delays. Any issues arising were subject to a more time-consuming process than might have been without these anonymisation protection measures.

Deciding how to present extracts whilst maintaining anonymity for potential readers who may have familiarity with the specific assessments used (i.e. participants) posed another dilemma. Changing words could pose too much risk to the integrity of the research (the words chosen being seen to have a high level of importance). This led to a decision to cut extracts to be short which raises another dilemma. As Olesen and Pedersen (2013) write “the context will help to determine how any text can be read ... wrenching a text out of its context could represent a fruitful disturbance that might have the potential to produce insights about dominant discourses in the context of the reading. The writing subject is an active framer of any research account.” (p. 128). The extracts in this research will lack the wider context of the broader assessments they sit within. This may be more uncomfortable for those reading from a structuralist or modernist positioning. There can be a sense of resolution in the remembering of extracts not being seen as contributory evidence for the discovery of particular constructions, but instead as examples of the ways in which EPs use language which could hold the potential for being read to construct in particular ways.

A central dilemma recurrently arising has been the necessary use of words to tell this research story. There has been an increasing awareness of words not equating to what they intend to represent and how meanings can vary moment to moment, person to person, sentence to sentence. There has also been a lot of ‘forgetting’ whereby I have become caught up in structuralist

thinking, lost and entangled as a result of what I might describe as a 'gluing' of words to what felt to be a reality I was attempting to capture. This led to regular experiences of doubt and distress and highlighted the importance of remembering the *conventional* nature of language – that it is an abstract conceptualisation which has a functional purpose.

Similarly, 'naming' constructions and discourses has been difficult and confusing, as well as organising my ideas and the analysis. I have become increasingly aware of the arbitrary nature of how we draw boundaries around our conceptualisations and have had to become increasingly familiar with the discomfort such uncertainty can bring. There has been an ongoing tension between seeking out pre-existing ideas and creating something potentially new, with the accompanying fear and doubt that this will be judged 'wrong' by someone with more authority. Learning to trust that there is validity in my own ways of seeing – and remembering that these are highly provisional - and therefore no more than playful explorations to provoke thinking - have been of particular importance.

Working from a poststructuralist positioning has been immensely difficult. Not having a clear process or structure to follow has brought further doubt and uncertainty, alongside the need for high levels of reflection and consideration to which direction to move in. Trying to let go of preconceived ideas and finding ways to connect with my own intuition has been indispensable.

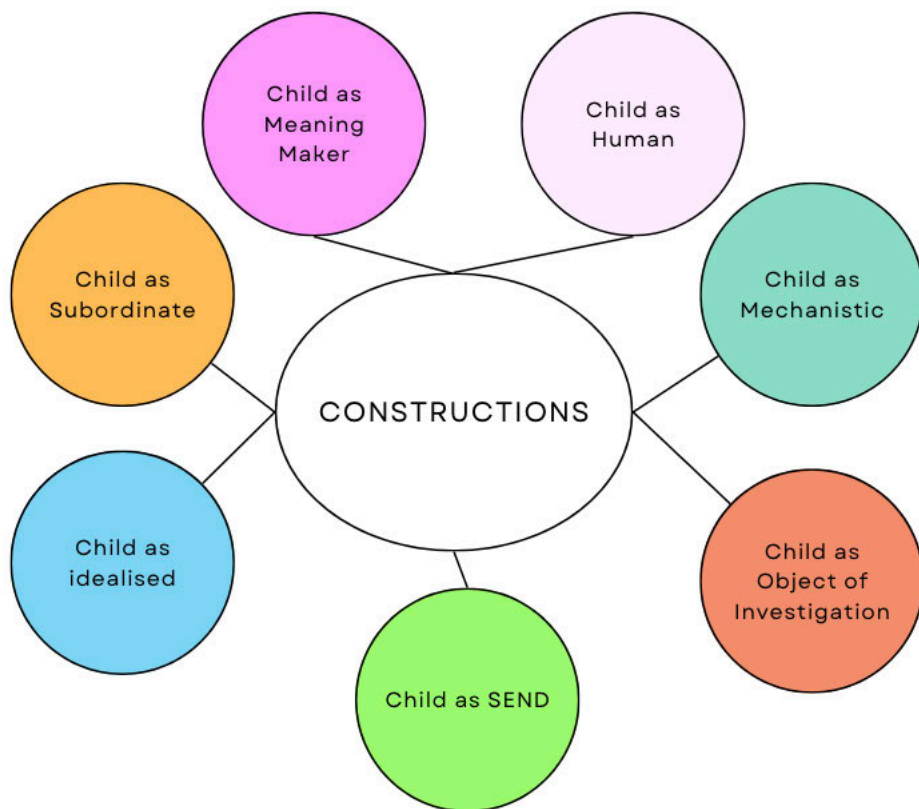
Analysis and Discussion

Overview

This chapter details seven constructions which arose through my analyses of the assessments. These can be seen in Figure A. These constructions are considered in terms of their potential functions and implications, including close attention to some of the possible implications for the child's subjective experience, as well as some potential considerations for EP practice. Following a summary, this thesis closes with some final thoughts and reflections.

Figure A

A visual showing seven constructions which arose from my readings of the assessments.



Child as Human

Within this construction I interpreted an 'inner world' of the child appearing to be brought life.

This included the child having interests, enjoyment, likes and dislikes.

... enjoys art ... music ... dancing.

... enjoys playing in the sand and water...

... likes playing with her toy kitchen; making sausage, eggs...

Reflections

Particularly enjoyable aspects of my readings arose when descriptions brought to life an image of the child playing or simply enjoying their everyday experiencing. This stood in contrast to the professionalised language that can be characteristic of professional assessments. For me, this brought a real sense of 'humanness' – as well as a quality of warmth and joy to the reading.

This could relate to an aspect of ancient humanism in terms of “the familiar world of people and things” whereby “usable truth lies in Appearances, not a speculative reality”. (Leahey, 2000, p. 65). We could say those aspects of the construction described above relate to the 'visibly real' aspects of the child's life - offering moments of stepping out of what can typically involve abstract conceptualisations.

In being constructed as having interests and preferences, the EP may be attempting to help readers to feel more connected to the child at the level of being human. This may aid furthering more meaningful relationships, for example, by helping the child to become more visible and relatable to beyond the traditionally ascribed role of 'SEND pupil'. This construction may also arise from EPs

seeking to build child-centred understandings which encourage looking from the child's perspective. This may also be an attempt to aid developing approaches to working with the child that are tailored more meaningfully in light of their experiences.

Reflections

The aspects of the analysis above could be seen to reflect Willig's (2008) analytical stage 3 'Action Orientation' whereby the question is asked, "What is gained from constructing the child in this [way and at this] particular point in the text?" (p. 116).

This construction could be an attempt to build a broader picture of child to extend beyond what could otherwise be a dominantly professionalised view of the child – a view which could be skewed towards what may feel somewhat negative (for example, focusing predominantly on perceived needs or ways in which the child encounters struggle). Emphasising the child's interests and hobbies may help the EP formulate approaches which are more tailored to the child's specific interests. This may lead to approaches which feel more meaningful and enjoyable to the child and increase possibilities for adults to find ways to incorporate the child's interests and preferences in their life beyond the assessment. This may help the child to feel liked and personally connected with by adults around them.

Reflections

In addition to stage 3, here the analysis begins to move into Willig's (2008) analytical stage 4 'Practice' whereby consideration is made as to how the positioning of the child rules in or out what might be said or done in practice.

This construction could be said to contrast with descriptions which might be read as somewhat pathologising. For example, within this construction, EPs might use descriptions or explanations in terms of preferences in contrast to alternatives which might be suggestive of a need or disorder. The extract below could be read to juxtapose these different ways of constructing.

... he had some sensory needs and disliked being in loud, busy environments.

The latter part of this extract relates to the child not liking a place that is loud and busy which could be read as relating to their human capacity for preferences. In contrast, the conceptualisation of

sensory needs could be read as more suggestive of a pathology. Pathologising used in this sense refers to ways of conceptualising that are seen as outside of what might be expected for a typical (non-disordered) human being. This involves a presumption that the child has a distinct difference to that which is seen as typical or ordinary (here, with regards to aspects of their sensory experiencing).

This highlights another possible function whereby EPs may seek to contribute normalising understandings of the child to adults around the child, as well as the child themselves. This is not intended in the sense of dismissing the child's experiences but instead relates to seeing the child in a way that can be seen to 'make sense'. That is, offering an understanding or explanation that views the child in terms that could be seen as typical or 'normal' of a human being, given their conditions and circumstances. This could be an attempt to move away from, or resist, medical model perspectives which can sometimes lead to deficit-based views. With the latter having the potential to convey a sense of 'fixedness', EPs may be looking to create space for the child to be seen as normal (as opposed to abnormal) and for perceived problems to be seen as provisional and open to change.

This could relate to one of Beaver's (2011) principle assumptions which takes the starting position of assuming:

A person will behave in a way that is in their best interest, given what they know at the time, their understanding of their situation, their model of the world and their view of themselves within that.

Whilst pathologising views could be said to fit within this, this would entail a view that a disorder forms a part of the person's understanding of their situation, model of the world or view of themselves. This principle could be what 'bridges the gap' between normalising views and pathologising views. Beaver writes this principle as separating the professional from the lay person due to there being an acceptance of the person as "not damaged, or broken, or behaving irrationally." Conversely, some might argue that it is the very fact of a person's actions or experiences being deemed to not fit with this principle which has resulted in the construction of the psychiatric disorders that have arisen (i.e. the person is seen to be 'dis' ordered).

This may facilitate the child seeing themselves as 'normal' whereby their experiences are seen to make sense given their particular circumstances. This may help them to feel their experiences are

validated and understood at a human level as others may appear able to relate or connect to these experiences meaningfully from within their own experience or perspective.

Reflections

The above discussions arose from thinking that was prompted by my adoption of a 'making the familiar strange' technique. Enquiring into why a disorder or condition might arise for a living being currently not seen to have psychiatric disorders, it became apparent that this relates to acting in ways that sit outside of what is expected. By definition, we could say that these arose as a form of naming ways of being that were to be seen as abnormal.

Also included within this construction are moments where attention appeared to be directed to emotions and other aspects of an inner world. This conveys a sense of 'inner life' that may aid readers in gaining a sense of what life might be like in terms of the child's world of feeling.

Summer shared that the sun makes her happy.

... showed some signs of frustration...

... can become cross if things do not go her way...

In constructing the child as an emotional being, EPs may be attempting to foster a sense of empathy for the child and deeper understandings from the child's personal perspective.

The child is constructed as capable of experiencing emotions which, in some descriptions, appear to be fluid with a propensity to change. The child's experience of emotions sometimes appears to be relative to their social context i.e. being described as caused by something in the child's experience. EPs may be drawing attention to the potential role of the child's conditions in their emotional experiencing, perhaps to aid adults in creating preferable conditions.

There are other times where emotional experiences appear somewhat less fluid. This is perhaps when the child is believed to be experiencing an emotion recurrently. EPs may here be seeking to emphasise that this feeling is enduring. Again this is perhaps to help foster a sense of empathy – for example, for the child who is generally overwhelmed with school.

Jake appears overwhelmed with the complex social and learning environment of school.

Sometimes emotion appears to be described as something the child has – appearing as something they possess as opposed to something they experience more fluidly. In my readings, this can lead the emotion to appear less relative to the child's social context - something which could be seen to be carried around with them across time and contexts. Similarly, it is likely that EPs are seeking to foster a sense of empathy towards the child, perhaps seeking to emphasise the level or enduring nature of the perceived emotion.

Anxiety and ... are impacting significantly on his wellbeing...

... this is compounded by his social anxiety.

Jake's anxiety...

Internalising descriptions such as these could be seen to have the potential to create and thicken a deficit-focused narrative for the child. The child may come to see themselves as somewhat stuck with this feeling which may create a related self-image which, over time, may be experienced as a more enduring sense of identity. They may come to expect this feeling and may interpret a range of physical sensations as this feeling, potentially further reinforcing its 'stuckness'.

This may lead to interventions such as therapeutic work– or in some cases it may lead to diagnoses or medication. These may each be helpful for the child in various possible ways, for example helping them to see and relate to these feelings in ways that feel helpful, normalising and functional – or perhaps helping to draw attention to aspects of their life requiring attention and possible resolution. Alternatively, some approaches may have the potential to lead the child to see themselves as faulty in some way – with ideas such as therapy, diagnosis or medication possibly being perceived to convey a message that the child has, or is, a problem.

The child may come to learn that they should not have the feelings being experienced or that they should be able to control them. Should these feelings not go, or return following intervention, the child may experience a reinforcing a sense of feeling faulty, along with inner conflict. This may influence their lives in school and beyond school in a number of ways.

Within the assessments, it could be read that some emotions were implicitly preferred or wanted. For example, there appeared to be a want for the child to be calm. When the child was talked about in terms of upset this was sometimes talked about in terms of being calmed or reduced.

Causal links also appear to be made in terms of what conditions enabled calming to happen, appearing to perhaps be seen as having importance within the context of the assessment.

Azlam is calmer in school when...

Being taught by the same teacher in the same setting has resulted in him being calmer.

... was easily soothed by the teaching assistant...

This could be read to point to what has perhaps become a taken for granted assumption that some emotions are good (and thus wanted), whilst others are bad (and are thus not welcomed or are to be avoided). Whilst these assumptions might not be explicitly stated, these messages can be given implicitly by the ways in which we talk about and respond to different emotional experiences. A possible implication of these messages could be that the child learns that they should avoid some emotions and perhaps strive for others. When perceived 'bad' feelings show up, the child may try to suppress or avoid these.

Sometimes, upset was described in relation to current or past school experience. In contrast to descriptions of what are traditionally seen as more positive emotions, it was often unclear as to what the upset in school related. Whilst this may have been explored in conversation, specific details are not captured within the written assessments.

In school, when he is upset Azlam needs support from an adult to calm down.

Azlam struggles with the academic and social demands within school and these difficulties can result in him becoming upset and expressing a negative view of school.

She is now more comfortable and settled at primary school and does not get upset as much.

This could be read as omitting the idea of causation - i.e. they simply get upset. Or, it may be an omission of detailing specific possible causes within the written assessments. If the former, the child may be constructed as being able to experience upset without specific or knowable reason. If the latter, it could be read that specific reasons for upset whilst in school are not noteworthy enough for capture within the context of these assessments. Alternatively, it is possible that EPs are looking to minimise feelings of blame or guilt that might come from enquiring into or detailing in writing specific aspects of school life that may cause, or have caused, upset. Whilst considering the feelings of those we work with is important, this might raise a useful question for EP practice relating to the enquiry of difficult feelings for children in school. It raises questions such as, what levels of distress are acceptable? And, how far do we enquire? The distress of children is explored in a later construction.

Reflections

The above discussions could be seen as an example of Willig's (2008) analytical stage 2 'Discourses, Positionings and Subjectivity' whereby the questions 'what does it mean to 'be' a child within these discourses?' and 'what are the consequences of taking up these positionings in terms of "what can be felt, thought and experienced" by the child?' are asked (p. 117). This stage could be said to permeate throughout much of the analysis, with considerations to the child's subjective experience forming a central thread.

Child as Mechanistic

Another construction arising from my readings is 'child as *mechanistic*'. This involves an apparent omission of inner life – or subjectivity - whereby the child could be read in mechanistic terms.

This includes descriptions where the focus appears to be on the child's behaviour, with an apparent absence or omission of what might be conceived as mind.

...did not particularly interact with others...

... will speak to very few people in school.

... displayed a high level of movement during the assessment...

This focus may relate to EPs being drawn to a behaviourist paradigm in aspects of their thinking. As early behaviourists sought to remove 'mind' from psychology, human behaviour was viewed as largely the result of conditioned reflexes. In Watson's view, "the organism was a machine in which a given stimulus elicited a predefined reflexive response". (Leahey, 2000, p. 412).

Some descriptions could be read to fit within this stimulus-response way of theorising. This could include seeing the child as a responder to external stimuli.

Jake will ... respond to the personalised support strategies in place for him.

Monitoring her response to individualised literacy intervention will now be important, to clarify the nature of her difficulties in this area.

Azlam responds well to being taught in quieter settings...

Definitions

Mechanistic relates to theories in which phenomena are explained in deterministic, physical, biological or automatic terms – akin to the workings of machinery.

Within early behaviourism, external stimuli were seen as the causal basis for human behaviour (Leahey, 2000). This may highlight EPs seeking to look to the child's conditions, considering the ways in which the adults might be able to influence change by way of doing something differently.

I have also included specific language which could be interpreted to convey a mechanistic view of the child. For example, the language of 'engaging' could be read as having a somewhat mechanistic tone.

... struggles to engage in any group work.

Where descriptions point to a lack of engaging, this might be read as an alternative to other ways of speaking, such as 'not learning' or 'not joining in'. Though not always, anecdotally, these alternative ways of speaking may be more likely to invite curiosity and draw in a closer look – i.e. what is preventing them from learning? What is preventing them from joining in? It could be wondered as to whether descriptions using mechanistic language, such as 'engaging', might have the potential to limit the likelihood of further enquiry. Perhaps what could be conceived as mechanistic language may convey a sense of there being little beyond the mechanistic description to enquire about. This may go on to limit possible deeper understandings of the child's experiences.

Other similarly mechanistic language felt to arise within my readings.

He increases his rigidity when he encounters sensory triggers, change and transitions...

... the trigger for him displaying disruptive behaviour.

This language conjured up a somewhat robotic image of the child – rigid in movement and operating within a world of 'sensory triggers'. 'Triggers' appears to point to an automatic responding to something, much like a mechanical trigger which causes something to happen with immediacy. Again, EPs may be seeking to draw attention to the external conditions of the child, emphasising their influence on the child. This may also be to minimise potential blame on the child; it is not them, but their conditions.

Within early behaviourist theorising, awareness was seen of little importance in understanding a person's actions. The awareness one might have of understanding their actions was seen to come from observing the causes of the behaviour change, rather than having a causal influence in themselves (Leahey, 2000). Similar theorising could be interpreted within this construction whereby the child appears to be passively responding to their conditions with automaticity.

If seeing the child's thoughts or perceptions as having little meaning or relevance, these may not be sought, or may be sought at a more superficial or tokenistic level. This may limit possibilities for the child to be actively involved in formulating understandings as well as in any planning or decision-making. This may lead to understandings which omit the child's meaning-making, influencing how the child comes to be seen and what approaches are taken. Subsequent approaches, actions or interventions may be more likely to be done 'to' and not 'with'. The child may feel less invested in what the adults decide – and in some cases may find the adults' choices unhelpful or unwanted.

If the child is not asked what they might be experiencing - as a result of these assumptions - this may reduce the likelihood of the child seeing that there might be other ways of making sense of their experiences – and that they might have the expertise to do this. Thoughts and ideas that might arise for the child, may come to be seen as less valid, worthy or important than the adults'. There may be implications in terms of the child's sense of 'knowing' in relation to their own experiences. There may be a strengthening of accounts whereby aspects of the child's being are in accordance with mechanistic-like principles – something which may leave little room for a sense of agency – and little room for possibilities outside of these automatic responses. The child may come to see themselves as passive responders and may come to feel somewhat reliant and dependent on adults and professionals for both understanding themselves and being helped, where this is believed to be possible.

Also within this construction are descriptions where parallels might be read between the child's inner world and that of a computer. This moves beyond what could be read as an omission of mind, to one constructed in terms of computing - an information processor.

... can need more time to process information given verbally.

...verbal memory and processing speed.

This relates to cognitive psychology. Believing that there were processes intervening between stimulus and response, an intermediary was proposed to the behaviourists' theorising (i.e. stimulus → mediating response → response). Eventually deemed too inadequate of a model, the language of the computer was adopted in the theorising of mental processes with the model shifting to become input → processing → output (Leahey, 2000). Adopting the computer metaphor, cognitive psychology has been defined as "how people take information in, how they recode and remember it, how they make decisions, how they transform their internal knowledge states and how they translate these states into behavioural outputs." (Lachman et al., 1979, p. 99).

Cognitive psychology resulted in the construction of various models for what came to be seen as the processing of the human mind, including various cognitive capacities (Massaro & Cowan, 1993). Within the assessments, some descriptions construct the child in terms of such capacities; aspects of mental processing which are seen as measurable. Cognitive capacities might be likened to the inner workings of a machine or computer, with cognitive assessments being presumed to offer a window into a child's inner functioning. Functioning which is seen at a generalised level.

... suggests that Autumn's verbal and non-verbal abilities lie within the ranges described as 'very low' and 'low' respectively.

... spatial abilities score which fell in the average range.

...Jasmin's verbal and non-verbal reasoning abilities are in the very low range ...

This would indicate that Li experiences significant difficulties accessing the curriculum...

EPs may draw upon cognitive discourses in seeking to understand the child, specifically if considering what might be seen as internal processing. This likely relates to beliefs in cognitive psychology offering a way of helping to formulate about a child's experiences in school. Where there are felt to be difficulties in terms of cognitive processes, EPs may seek to foster a sense of empathy, as well as adjustments from adults in terms of expectations and approach.

Within the assessments, the child's measured cognitive capacities appear to be generalised as being applicable to their school context, as well as appearing somewhat fixed. Where this is suggestive of a deficit, there may be implications for what the child and adults believe is possible; adults may find low expectations are created or legitimised and the child may develop limiting beliefs relating to their capabilities. Cognitive assessments could be said to offer the sense of certainty and 'knowing' that can often be sought in problematic situations, this may aid EPs in feeling as though they have utilised their expertise and aid other adults in feeling a sense of relief in this knowing.

Within cognitive discourses, difficulties with learning tasks are generally located as internal to the child. Relief may also arise in the sense of responsibility adults may have felt without this being lifted. There may no longer be a risk that difficulties might have arisen from the design or content of tasks, or design or content of the curriculum. This may serve in helping to protect the feelings of adults in schools, minimising feelings of blame or guilt (albeit not necessarily intentionally or consciously). By emphasising fault as within the child, not the wider systems they are a part of, cognitive discourses – and in particular, low scores which may result from cognitive assessments - could be seen to aid the school and education system more broadly in being relieved of responsibility or need to change. This may have profound implications for any children and young people constructed in this way for whom the design of these systems is not working well for. Adults in school may similarly gain in situations where such information relieves inner or external pressures in relation to the child's academic performance reflecting on their performance.

Another less visible, yet substantial, gain also arises from the use of cognitive assessments. In 2022, GL Assessment – who produce a vast number of standardised assessments, including the British Abilities Scales (BAS) used by some EPs - turned over £48,932,000, with £22,873,000 profit (GL Assessment Limited, 2022). This illustrates that there are wider political and economic gains that may result from the child being constructed in these ways.

Child as Object of Investigation

Another construction arising from my readings is 'child as object of investigation'. This resulted from noticing similar relations between the EP and the child to that which might be typical of a researcher and their object of investigation. The EP could be read to take on the role of researcher/investigator, with the other adults (those consulted as part of the assessment) taking on co-researcher, or participant, roles. The child could sometimes be read as participant, but primarily as the object of investigation.

This construction sits within a historical context which began in the late 1800s within Western culture (James & Prout, 1997). During this time were the beginnings of a movement in which children came to be seen as the objects of study. In addition to fears about 'racial degeneration', a key factor was thought to be mass schooling. Compulsory mass education resulted in a wide range of children being suddenly placed within a new set of conditions, with a corresponding set of particular expectations for the child. This increased anxieties about the 'quality of children' (James & Prout, 1997) and is said, by some, to have "revealed the extent of mental and physical handicap among the pupils". This attracted the attention of a wide range of professionals, including politicians and middle-class parents, as well as social and natural scientists (Hendrick, 1997, in James & Prout, 1997, p. 47).

As a result, organisations emerged advocating for the study of child development, with theories of child development being central to many Western educational policies and practices today. Since, the number of professionals, services and organisations dedicated to the task of studying, investigating, treating and supporting children have been on the rise – the EP being one of them.

Descriptions of the child in the assessments often begin before birth, continuing into the child's early years. Close attention is paid to the history of the child's development as their life appears to be an object of close inspection.

...delivery was difficult and Jake had a few days in the Special Care Baby Unit...

There were no difficulties with regard to birth.

... described as reaching her developmental milestones within usual limits.

When considering the child from this perspective, the level of attention directed to the child over the course of her life becomes apparent. A child undergoing an EHC needs assessment appears to have much of their life placed under a microscope. This likely relates to the EP seeking to understand and develop a comprehensive *formulation*.

Within this are likely beliefs in early experiences being important, as well as a view that there are many experiences and conditions of a child's life which may play an important and influential role in psychological meaning-making.

Definitions

Formulation involves the drawing upon of psychological theory in an attempt to "create a working hypothesis or 'best guess' about the reasons for a [person's] difficulties" (Johnstone & Dallos, 2013, para. 1).

The child is constructed within a framework which covers all areas of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice (2015). This includes:

- Communication and Interaction
- Cognition and Learning
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health
- Sensory and/or Physical Needs

This broad capturing of information may relate to beliefs in the importance of a comprehensive assessment which looks to all aspects of a child's life which are seen as relevant, ensuring important information is not overlooked. This means many aspects of the child's being are captured as part of the assessment, including those which may be outside of the initially intended purpose of the assessment being sought. This could mean descriptions are included that might otherwise have remained unexamined and unsaid – some of which might include descriptions which could be applicable to children not having, or being seen to need, this type of assessment. By being written into a psychological assessment, an inference could be made that what is written is in some way noteworthy from a psychological perspective. Thus, there may be potential for what some might consider ordinary aspects of a child's being to be viewed as in some way problematic, psychologised or pathologised. Anecdotally, some example extracts which could be read in this way are below.

Azlam struggles in loud, busy environments and it has been noted that he is calmer when the school is quieter...

likes soft fleecy materials and doesn't like wearing shoes or tags in clothes.

...when she was younger she could have outbursts...

In having the assessment, the child may come to see themselves as different in some way to those not having an assessment. Allan (1996) describes how children categorised as SEN are often put under a higher level of surveillance. She writes:

All children are the objects of scrutiny within schools, but for pupils with special educational needs, the gaze reaches further. They are observed, not only at work in the classroom, but also during break times. The way in which they interact with mainstream peers or integrate socially is often viewed as equally important, if not more so, than their attainment of mainstream curricular goals. All aspects of the child's interpersonal relationships can, therefore, be brought under the vigilance of staff. The emotional well-being of a child with special educational needs is also cited as an important aspect of special education. This legitimises the search within the child for signs, for example, that he or she is happy or gaining confidence, to a degree that teachers would not scrutinise mainstream pupils. Surveillance of pupils with special educational needs enables professionals to show concern for their welfare and acquire knowledge about their condition and the progress they are making (p. 222).

An EHC needs assessment could be seen as one manifestation of this higher level of surveillance. Within this appears to be a taken for granted assumption that adults have the right to closely inspect many, if not all, aspects of a child's life. This could relate to what Gore (1995) described as 'micropractices of power' – one of which being surveillance. These are techniques of power which Gore - drawing upon Foucault's work - describes as being inherent within education. Surveillance as "being – or expecting to be – closely observed and supervised in and through reference to particular truths" (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 30).

In looking beyond her usual developmental meanings in observation, an early childhood educator and researcher, Kylie Smith, writes:

Using Foucault's challenging idea that 'observation is a disciplinary apparatus' I began to question my right to know the child. There are thoughts, questions, dreams and imaginings that I keep within myself that I have never shared with even the closest people in my life. Yet, I turn my gaze on the child expecting to know all of her (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 48).

This could be seen to have implications for the child's right to privacy. If privacy was sought by the child, this may risk being interpreted in ways which might add another layer to a professionalised formulation. For example, descriptions such as 'not engaging', 'will not speak', 'too anxious', 'withdrawn', 'refusing/defiant' may arise, potentially adding to or creating a pathologising view of the child. This highlights a dilemma within EP practice which is not easily resolved. The child's right to privacy - in situations where this is sought by the child - could be seen as in contradiction with adults' efforts to help and do what they believe is in the child's best interests.

Recent guidance published advises seeking the informed consent of all children above 16, as well as those below who are deemed *Gillick competent* – with the child's consent being sought *before* the adults' (AEP, 2022). Where the child is not considered Gillick competent, consent by *assent* is advised. This guidance appears to strongly advocate for children and young people being more actively and openly involved in consenting processes – including prior to observational work. Crucially, for EHC needs assessments, the legal basis for processing data is public task, not consent. This suggests that the child choosing to decline informed consent may not stop an

Definitions

Gillick competence relates to "...the legal competence to consent to medical examination and treatment if they [have] sufficient maturity and intelligence to understand the nature and implications of that treatment."
(AEP, 2022, p. 5)

"Assent is the active agreement or engagement of a person who is not able to consent. For example, a pre-school aged child engaging in an activity as part of the psychological involvement" (AEP, 2022, p. 4).

assessment from taking place, including perhaps in situations where the child explicitly wants an assessment to not take place. Whilst not new discussions (Bourke & Loveridge, 2014), these are important topics for EPs and services to closely consider. Attention to the less visible forms of power operating in and on children's lives may aid taking these conversations in new directions. Are children given the opportunity to say 'no' to an assessment? If they did (and said 'no'), how might this be navigated?

Within this construction, I perceived a sense of distance between the child and adults. The child could be read as being passively observed from a distance, with adults raising concerns and meeting together to speculate and hypothesise about what they have observed. Appearing to use a consultation model (Wagner, 2016), this likely relates to seeing the adults as important for facilitating change in the child's life.

Initial consultations with staff and parents explored concerns about Haru's social anxieties...

They took him to clubs but he did not respond to these.

They found it helpful to use strategies to forewarn her of changes so that she could better adapt.

Adults could also be read as being positioned as investigators in the sense of referrals, including seeking further potential assessments or diagnoses for the child - initiatives seeming to remain in the hands of the adults. Here, the child could be read as an object of study in need of further investigation by other professionals. Practices and processes around psychiatric diagnoses could convey a message that there might be something not visible, nor knowable, without professional investigation. This could relate to firm beliefs in medical diagnoses being discoverable truths. Discovering these truths may be seen as the adults' duty - perhaps with deeper assumptions that such discovering would always be in the child's best interests.

... I made a referral to CAMHS ... diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC)...

When constructing in this way, it could be read that there was a sense of adults 'doing to' as opposed to 'doing with'. There was a sense of adults as knowers and the child as known – adults as investigators and the child as investigated. Within the assessments, adults sometimes appear to be positioned somewhat explicitly as knowers, appearing to be able to ascertain whether a child has interpreted their experiences correctly.

Jake displays a realistic assessment of his difficulties...

This could also be read in the apparent differential level of contribution from the adults and the child - adult perspectives reading as more dominant within the assessments. Similarly, discussions with adults, and EP's professionalised descriptions appear to directly feed into what can be read as the assessments' 'main sections' (i.e. 'background' and 'needs and strengths' sections). Direct contributions from the child tended to sit separately in a distinct section (for example, 'child's views') and could perhaps be read as being secondary to the main parts of the assessment.

This separation may help emphasise the child's perspective, with EPs perhaps wanting to ensure this is visible. Wanting to minimise repetition, some EP assessments may have the appearance of the child's perspective being secondary or excluded from the main parts of the assessment whilst the child's perspective perhaps influenced and shaped what is written in less direct ways. This could, however, mean professionalised or adult understandings arise which may transform these away from the child's originally intended meanings.

Borrowing from Kapp (2019), these readings could be described as a "professional-knows-best" – or an 'adults-know-best' position (p. 6). If adults were to take this position, the child's perceptions may be seen as secondary to and as having less credibility than the adults', particularly where this contrasts with the adults'. This likely relates to adults and professionals believing that they know what is in the child's best interests, perhaps not seeing children as having the expertise to understand their own experiences at the level adults feel they require in order to help them. This may result in less active participation for the child in sense-making and planning. Whilst the child's perceptions are sought, the child's personal meanings in relation to concerns expressed by adults might not be sought or less weight may be given to the child's perceptions where these differ from

the adults'. Adults may be primary in formulating understandings and planning outcomes and interventions, whilst the child is somewhat secondary.

This could result in professional or adult understandings being imposed upon the child. Where meanings feel to fit their experiences, this could bring the child a sense of understanding and comfort in situations where they may have felt confused or unsure of how to make sense of their experiences. Where adult meanings differ to the child's personal experiences or understandings, this could lead the child to interpret subsequent experiences through a professionalised, or adult lens. This could lead to confusion, inner resistance or conflicts where there are discrepancies that are difficult for the child to reconcile - or perhaps where these new meanings do not serve the child in the way their own personal, or alternative, understandings, might. The self-images we help to create through our constructions - and potentially impose on children - is a particularly important issue for EPs to consider.

Imposition of adult meanings - particularly where these differ to the child's personal meanings - may lead the child to learn not to fully trust their own thoughts, feelings and beliefs. The child may come to see adults and professionals as those who know best - as those with the expertise, knowledge and life experience who are able to tell them who they are, what they feel and why they do what they do, possibly creating a sense of dependency that may extend into later life.

Narrative therapists propose that professionalised language and cultural understandings can often be imposed upon people. A narrative therapy perspective emphasises the importance of using a person's own language, encouraging reference to specific life experiences to aid enquiry about personal meanings (White, 1988). This perspective recognises the implicit power that operates through language, seeking to find ways to redress the power imbalances that can result from dominant discourses. A narrative approach creates space for a stepping back from dominant discourses offering possibilities for a person's choosing of their own words and a seeing that there might be other ways to think and see. It promotes reflection on the meanings that influence people's lives, seeking to facilitating the seeing of those which no longer resonate or serve their life and allowing a strengthening of preferred meanings.

This point could call to attention what some might see as a pivotal difference between the practice of a narrative therapist and an EP. Namely, in terms of the time they have available and the

expectations that might be placed upon them from others (such as an employer or commissioner), particularly in relation to their role within education, health and care needs (EHC) assessments. Narrative therapists may have numerous sessions which can be dedicated to the exploration of meanings as described. Conversely, EPs often have a limited amount of time with the child. The adults around the child also play an important role in shaping meanings, particularly with consideration to the overall function and intended purpose of an EHC needs assessment.

The EHC needs assessment serves a number of potential functions for various audiences. The primary function is for those commissioning the assessment to take place – decision-makers within the Local Authority. It is a process which helps members of the LA decide how to allocate a finite amount of resource and funding. Primarily, it helps to determine whether “it may be necessary for a child to have special educational provision to be made for the child or young person in accordance with an EHC plan” (Children and Families Act, 2014, sec. 36.6). An EHC plan is described as “for children and young people aged up to 25 who need more support than is available through special educational needs support” (UK Government, n.d., para. 1). ‘Special educational needs support’ is the funding schools have for SEND. This ‘SEN budget’ is notional (i.e. this is not ring-fenced) and is included within general school budgets. Whilst notional, this generally equates to schools being expected to cover the first £6000. Whilst not stated specifically in law, it could be said that this threshold is one of the primary markers for whether a child is deemed to need ‘special educational provision in accordance with an EHC plan’. Funding above this amount may need to be provided by the LA, should an EHC needs assessment result in this being deemed necessary. Whilst an EP’s assessment may offer the function of aiding the writing of an EHCP (where one is issued), the first and foremost function is to aid these economic decisions - whether an EHCP is to be issued and, if so, how much funding, if any, is to be attached. Decision-making as to the type of setting that would be most appropriate for the child may also be a function of the needs assessment.

Subsequently, EPs are tasked with writing the assessment in a way that helps LA members make these decisions. This task could be said to be done indirectly as assessments tend not to contain explicit detail as to whether an EHCP should be issued, costs of provision or what type of setting the child should attend. Within the written assessments, the primary function of allocating finite resource could be said to be hidden. This could be suggested to be a masking of the economic

and political function of these assessments. What could be seen as a governmental issue, could be seen to be presented, on the surface, as an issue within individual children.

A primary function for those adults applying for or endorsing the application for an EHC needs assessment are typically seeking an EHCP for the child. This likely relates to beliefs that additional funding will better enable school staff to educate in a way that works for the child. For schools, this may relate to receiving a higher amount of funding. Anecdotally, this can involve beliefs that an EHCP will enable the employment of an additional adult. For carer/parents, this can also relate to seeking a formalised, legal document specifying what the setting must provide. In some cases this can also relate to wanting the child to attend a particular setting, for example specialist provisions which require an EHCP for a place.

Notably, it is typically these adults who subsequently contribute to ways the child comes to be constructed through the written assessment. Adults may unwittingly tailor their responses in relation to the perceived function of the assessment. Whilst unlikely intentional or conscious, exceptions or aspects that feel irrelevant to the intended function of the assessment may be less likely to arise in descriptions. Understandably, this may result in child descriptions which adults believe may increase the likelihood of issuing of an EHCP. For example, descriptions may be more problem-saturated than descriptions which might arise when not relating to this particular function. This context and function may lead to a stronger emphasis on 'the child' over experiences and context - i.e. being individualising and decontextualising - with 'within-child' views of the child needing resource perhaps being privileged over views where a need of resource is seen to be a result of the child's experiences or context. This may have implications in terms of how the child is constructed overall in the written assessment which may influence how readers see and relate to the child (i.e. via a lens of having significant needs).

In addition to object of assessment and investigation, the child can also be read as an object of intervention. The assessments culminate in sections focusing on 'what to do next'. Outcomes describe what aspects of the child will be targeted for intervention, accompanied by what should be done to facilitate these changes.

Jeff will be able to express his needs, thoughts and feelings to others...

Summer will be more able to have a turn taking conversation with a peer...

Li will be more able to manage the verbal processing demands in and out of the classroom...

Outcomes are individualising in nature, focusing directly upon how the child should be changed. Whilst an in-depth discussion of the function specific outcomes may serve goes beyond the scope of this thesis, setting outcomes (and designing linked interventions) could be seen as broadly in an effort to help the child to live with a level of ease and success in society as it is currently organised, with a more immediate function applying to their life in the education system they are currently within. From a societal perspective, this may be described as facilitating the child to better suit the current social order. For the EP, this may involve guiding adults to focus upon what they feel is most important from a psychological perspective – or perhaps from the child’s perspective to aid their being listened to.

Outcomes could be said to, again, refocus attention away from any economic and political functions – emphasising explicitly that the child is where change is to be targeted. This could lead to the overlooking of change in the wider systems which some might say have not been designed for the diversity of our children and young people. Considering the increasing cuts which have resulted in reducing resource for schools in general, it could be said that this design is becoming increasingly narrowed. With the child as object, the results of any narrowing may simply lead to an increasing number of children deemed to have SEND – the possible implications of such will be discussed as part of the next construction.

Child as SEND

The assessments themselves could be described as situated within an overall special educational needs (SEND) meta-discourse. An introductory sentence within the framework articulates that the assessments are a “professional opinion regarding the special educational needs of [the child].” The conceptual framework of SEND appears to be non-negotiable in the constructing of the child. Whilst the EP has professional autonomy to carry out the assessment according to their own professional judgement, this could be said to be within the confines of a broader SEND construction. There is no possibility for the child to be constructed as *not* having SEND.

Being constructed as SEND serves many, if not all, of the functions described in the previous construction.

Inherent within the language of special educational needs is the heavily debated dilemma of their conceptualisation, particularly with reference to the location of the ‘problem’: within the child, setting, or an interaction between the two. The language of SEND arose, at least in part, as an attempt to shift from the former towards the latter interactional view.

The report of the Warnock Committee (1978) - the first comprehensive review of SEND - and subsequent legislation, mark important moments in the history of SEND. Prior to this, language of “handicapped by disabilities of body or mind” firmly located the difficulties people experienced within the people themselves. Within the Education Act (1944) categorisation was according to medical disabilities. Some children were considered ‘uneducable’, whilst others were categorised as ‘maladjusted’ or ‘educationally sub-normal’. These latter two groups received ‘special educational treatment’ in separate schools. During the 1950s and 1960s, developments in research and thinking contributed to proposals that handicap should be reconceptualised (Lindsay et al., 2020). Instead of sitting firmly within people, what was seen as handicap was increasingly seen as the product of an interaction between people (including any impairments) and factors outside of them (such as their immediate social context, upbringing and experiences). This led to what some call a ‘paradigm shift’ whereby the language of special educational need (SEN) arose to “describe the outcome of this interaction” (Lindsay et al., 2020,

p. 2). The Warnock Report (1978) actively promoted this shift in language which can be seen to be reflected in relevant legislation, service and policy development since.

Within the Warnock Report (1978), at points, there are some notable differences in language use which could point towards a more interactional conceptualisation of SEN. For example:

The planning of services for children and young people should be based on the assumption that about one in six children at any time and up to one in five children *at some time* during their school career *will require some form of special educational provision*. (para. 3.17, emphases added).

This language use could be read as moving away from a fixed sense of SEN which is something also housed within people.

However, whilst recommendations suggest a shift in language away from 'handicapped', they also advocate a move towards language use of "children with learning difficulties" (Warnock, 1978, para. 3.26) as well as "those with significant difficulties in learning, or with emotional or behavioural disorders, as well as those with disabilities of mind or body" (para. 3.42). Whilst the word 'need' in itself may imply an interactional conceptualisation (i.e. something cannot be needed without this being absent in a person's immediate context), it could be argued that this language shift has been more akin to providing a new label. That is, 'SEN' could be read to point towards experiences arising from within the child in a similar way as before as opposed to a more fundamental shift in conceptualisation whereby factors outside of the child are inherently incorporated.

Reflections

I have long experienced confusion in the conceptualisation of SEND and thought I had resolved this when happening upon a view of this being a category used for any child who requires educational provision different to or above that which is ordinarily provided. Anecdotally, in my practice and everyday conversations, I felt that this label had come to take on its own meaning which transcended such context-contingent definitions. However, close inspection of the legislation reveals that institutional definitions do appear to gravitate towards SEND being conceptualised as something housed within the child.

The Children and Families Act (2014) defines SEN as follows:

- (1) A child or young person has special educational needs *if he or she has a learning difficulty or disability* which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.

- (2) A child of compulsory school age or a young person has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she—
 - (a) has a *significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others* of the same age, or
 - (b) has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions.

(emphases added, sec. 20).

Whilst this definition initially appears to point clearly to SEN being housed within the child (i.e. if he or she *has* a learning difficulty or disability), the further defining of learning difficulty or disability could be read to introduce an ambiguity which allows scope for an interactional conceptualisation. For example, a child may have a 'significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others the same age' for a wide number of reasons, including reasons conceived as external to the child.

A social model locates problems as being within the environment; the environment is lacking something the child needs. The social model of disability argues that people are not disabled in themselves, rather, society disables them through its design (Collett, 2017). Whilst some may be seen to have impairments (i.e. aspects of their being seen as functionally different to what might be considered typical) these are seen to only lead to the inability (or dis-ability) to do something if society is designed in a way that does not cater to this difference. From a social disability view, if the environment catered to all difference and nothing was lacking or prohibitive, there would be no need for additional provision or adjustments. Within the context of school, the latter model advocates consideration to barriers to learning. Barriers then become the focus for intervention; the environment is the target of change as opposed to the child.

Within the assessments in this analysis, needs could sometimes be read as something belonging to the child. For example:

Leo's needs are complex, persistent and severe.

Similarly, difficulties were sometimes described as something the child possessed:

... this is compounded by *her* social anxiety.

... related to *his* inflexibility, *his* social interaction skills ... resulting in a need for constant adult support and reassurance.

(emphases added).

Social anxiety, inflexibility and social interaction skills are constructed as belonging to the child. These could be conceived as being carried around with or as being a part of the child. Without reference to specific contexts, these appear to be conceptualised as independent of social context. This may lead the child, and adults, to believe that the problem is within the child – enduring across contexts, situations and time. For the child, this may impact upon or create a deficit-based self-image which may become somewhat enduring and form a sense of identity. This may influence how they come to interpret future experiences, possibly shaping interpretations of subsequent

experiences to fit with this deficit self-image. For the adults, this could lead them to view the child as needing to change or be fixed. This may limit possibilities for any wider change outside of the child and could be seen as a form of regulating the child (Aitken et al., 1996). Being something the child appears to have may convey a sense of 'fixedness' which may lead to beliefs that possible change is somewhat limited, if possible at all.

At points, the language 'barriers to learning' was used which could be seen as an attempt to adopt a more social or interactional view.

Li's anxiety and communication difficulties act as barriers to her learning.

Sarah's approach ... had a significant impact on her ability to complete them. It is likely that in the classroom, these difficulties are a significant barrier to her learning.

However, these examples highlight how, whilst at surface level this language shift can appear to have shifted towards a social model, there appears to be a continuation of a conceptualisation whereby the barriers are seen to exist within the child.

The language of SEND is prevalent within education, yet there seems to be little research into how this language may impact upon children described in this way. 'Special needs' language is actively discouraged by some disability advocates in the United States who claim the language is stigmatising and marginalising (King, 2023; Willison, 2023). Research by Gernsbacher et al. (2016) suggested that people are viewed more negatively when 'special needs' language is used over 'disability'. Arguably, these views relate primarily to the United States where the language of special educational needs may be less prominent within the education system as it is in the UK. However, anecdotally, it could be suggested that the language of SEN can be used in derogatory ways, much in the way previously used terms can be used as insults. Corbett (2013) advises we should pay close attention when terms which were once used as professional categorisations have become "blatant and crude terms of abuse" – something he situates, in part, within the hierarchical thinking prominent within Western culture. Writing about the marginalised and inferior status some children are given in schools, Corbett suggests the use of the word 'needs' could "[imply] dependency, inadequacy and unworthiness" (p. 3).

Some are said to have found the language of SEN offensive, expressing a view that their needs are not 'special' but are the same as everyone else's human needs, sharing views that they "should be able to fully participate in society just as much as the next person" (Oliver, n.d., para. 4). This view is in line with a social model of disability whereby problem lies in the design of the context which could be seen as *creating* what some see as a special educational need. Whilst changing the language of SEN may seem a simple way to overcome any negative influences on children described in this way, deeper change in the construction of SEN may be required should this be at the root of such experiences. Whilst labels change and pockets of movements arise, if conceptualisations beneath these remain largely unchanged in the mainstream, it is likely that the same derogatory usage will continue to resurface. Should the child come to see themselves as categorised in this way and share such conceptualisations, this may lead them to see themselves as 'less than' or inferior to those not categorised in this way. This shares the possible implications outlined for deficit-focused views.

Whilst social or interactional models might appear helpful in some ways, Shakespeare and Watson (2001) highlight the importance of not denying difference in the adoption of social models. In drawing attention to difficulties at the level of the child, EPs may be seeking to ensure attention is paid to the potential implications in terms of the child's day-to-day experiences. Those in which they may encounter personal discomfort or distress. Adults being able to empathise with potential struggles at this individual level may be a way of helping the child to have personal difficulties recognised, validated and responded to. Some children may feel cared for and taken care of by way of potential differing treatment from adults. This may involve a more positive sense of the word 'special' being conceived by the child where there has not been exposure to this language or treatment being seen in negative or derogatory ways.

It feels important to mention the importance of avoiding being drawn in by the stark dichotomy that can often be drawn when considering social models in contrast to individual models. This can lead to an overemphasis of one over the 'other', when the child and their social environment are inextricably connected and, in reality, are inseparable. Yet, whilst those working with children categorised as having SEND may be able to see the interactional nature giving rise to these needs, it could be said that this is easily overshadowed by the conventional

use of language in relation to SEND. 'Having' SEND, 'identifying' needs and finding ways to 'support' children are dominantly and repeatedly reinforced ways of speaking, all which could be said to continue to neglect interactional constructions, potentially reinforcing deeper within-child, deficit constructions of SEND.

Some argue for a social theory looking to the various dimensions of experience including psychological, bodily, social, cultural and political – as opposed to advocating for a purely medical or social model (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001). Whilst changes in theorising and campaigning may influence some change in perceptions, it could be said that more substantial change is required in the form of practice and systems should such change be sought in relation to how SEN is conceptualised in the mainstream.

From my experiences of EHC needs assessment frameworks in various LAs, these appear to be highly individualising, primarily focusing upon the psychological, with some attention to social where EPs are able to bring this into their descriptions. Decontextualisation is likely within these frameworks as attention is directed to the child, with little attention to the systems they are a part of. Perhaps considering ways EPs might be able to incorporate these wider dimensions more formally and explicitly within the frameworks of psychological assessments could be useful to explore further. However, the continued use of such frameworks could be said to ignore the political and cultural dimensions which play a necessary role in the creation of SEN. Looking to the political and cultural dimensions may enable greater attention to the 'background' within which SEND arise and may enable changes (for example, curriculum or education system changes) which result in a lower number of children requiring special educational provision, and therefore a lower number being categorised as SEN.

Child as Idealised

That all children are different is unsurprising and that we should be interested in these differences, too, seems unremarkable. That we should be interested in certain differences rather than others seems more worthy of attention and analysis. That we should then develop whole industries, technologies and practices in order to measure and manage some specific differences, however, does indeed seem remarkable. For on what basis are certain differences selected for scrutiny? Indeed, whether we celebrate, tolerate or remediate differences are issues which present themselves as a stream of dilemmas throughout our working lives with children. (Billington, 2000, p. 1).

I came to realise that, whilst unsaid in the assessments, a number of implicit assumptions appear to have developed in relation to what is expected or wanted of children. Making the familiar strange became important in my analytical thinking as I sought to step out of the automatic, less visible assumptions I had developed in relation to human difference. It could be said that there seems to be an unwritten 'idealised child' constructed from expectations about what, or who, a child 'should' be – an unsaid set of reference points to which we compare in our psychological meaning-making. As Billington references, these expectations appear to be some of those differences for which, as a society, we have come to develop industries, technologies and practices in order to measure and manage. The EP's role within EHC process perhaps being one manifestation of this.

Whilst I tried, during my initial readings I could not help but apply my own psychological lens. I realised the anonymisation by a third party had included removal of the child's age. This quickly came to my attention as I found my mind scrambling for a reference point to ascribe meaning - i.e. 'Are these skills (or lack of skills) appropriate or not?' Without an age, there appeared to be no reference point.

Reflections

This was the beginning of my recognition of how central (and, remarkably, somewhat invisible) developmental discourses had become in my own thinking and perhaps within psychological assessments more generally. I also came to realise that, in my readings and practice, the psychological judgements we made in our assessments could be said to contain within them value judgments. What was wanted? What was unwanted? What was a 'strength' (good)? What was a 'need' (bad)?

Developmental discourses arise from developmental psychology and have heavily influenced thinking about children, including that within education. Developmental psychology considers the ways in which human life develops over time. With a focus on chronological age, maturation and learning are seen as central in understanding a person's development (Bartholomaeus, 2016). Developmental psychology has given rise to knowledge of how children 'should' develop over time - knowledge which is rooted within Western culture and ideals. Whilst once perhaps theoretical, many developmental ideas have come to be equated with truth as their use has permeated research and continues to influence practice across various institutions including health, education, social care and law. For example, developmental milestones offer norms to which children can be compared, allowing judgements to be made as to the child's presumed current stage of development. Mac Naughton (2005) writes:

Developmental truths express authoritative discourses (systematised ways of speaking, seeing, thinking, feeling and acting) about children and childhood. Within these discourses, the child is but an immature and irrational adult whose progress (development) towards adulthood and towards mature, rational adult behaviour follows predictable, pre-given pathways. By identifying and monitoring these pathways it is possible to identify which children are developing normally and which are developing abnormally. (p. 25).

We could say that the education system itself is based on this way of thinking about human life. Particular forms of knowledges and skills have come to be seen as important for the child to know and learn. Seeing life as growing in some standardised way, a curriculum has been developed whereby certain knowledge and skills are taught at particular ages. Expectations in relation to the

curriculum and ways of being in school could be seen as the reference points used within education to try to standardise certain aspects of children, or human life. The EHC needs assessment could be seen as one manifestation of these attempts. Outcomes could be read as ways to move the child closer to these reference points, whilst interventions or provision detail how to do this.

The SEND framework within which the assessments in this analysis sit invite descriptions which are conceptualised within a dichotomy of needs-strengths. Needs and strengths could be read to describe variance from the reference points described above. The context of a psychological assessment could be seen to have the power to transform what might be intended as neutral, qualitative descriptions into value judgements by way of descriptions falling into either side of this needs-strengths dichotomy. The adoption of a needs discourse could be said to legitimise cultural value judgements about what is desirable and 'good' for young people. Instead of articulating this as a judgement, Woodhead (1997) argues that the identification of needs allows such judgements to appear as facts.

Reflections

For me, these points emphasise the power of the EP in reifying what can come to be seen as 'normal' and 'abnormal' by decisions as to what they include in their written assessments and under which heading descriptions are placed.

This way of organising descriptions could relate to the function of needs assessments in terms of allocating finite resource. With finite resource, it becomes necessary to compare children in order to determine the allocation of this. This comparison needs to be visible to decision-makers from within the Local Authority (LA), with the needs-strengths dichotomy being potentially helpful within this.

It feels important to not be drawn into an oversimplified view that there is, or should be, a particular perspective in relation to difference or particular differences. The intention of this analysis is to invoke thinking with regards to difference, particularly those differences and idealised aspirations which may have become unquestionable and taken for granted.

Table 2

Table Showing Implicit Expectations or Wants for Children

From my readings of the assessments, there appeared to be implicit expectations, or a want, of children to:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Act or behave in particular ways.• Establish and maintain friendships.• Develop something at a particular age (for example, speech).• Express emotions in particular ways.• Speak clearly, use and understand spoken language.• Eat or drink in particular ways.• Not resist sleep.• 'Toilet' in particular ways.• Dress themselves.• Have psychological constructs or skills of a particular standard or level:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Concentration.○ Awareness of danger.○ Confidence.○ Flexibility.○ Independence.○ Self-esteem.○ Sense of belonging or inclusion.○ Skills to manage situations they find stressful.○ Adaptation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tolerate or experience sensations in a particular way:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Clothing.○ Different food textures.○ Sudden or loud noises.• Communicate their views, wants and needs.• Tolerate things being different to their wants.• Interact in particular ways.• Move in particular ways.• Show distress in a predictable, logical or gradual way.• Stay on task, do or complete tasks.• Have academic or cognitive skills of a particular standard or level:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Use phonics and sight read.○ Balance and coordination.○ Emotional regulation.○ Maths or number.○ Organisational.○ Processing.○ Self-evaluation.○ Thinking.

Note: This table arose from descriptions within the assessments which could be read to implicitly convey something being expected or wanted in children. Example extracts are later in the text.

Canella (2000) writes that “A discourse of education has emerged that legitimizes the belief that science has revealed what younger human beings are like, what we can expect from them at various ages, and how we should differentiate our treatment of them in educational settings.” (p. 37). These beliefs and expectations could be seen to provide the reference points which give aspects of psychological assessments their meaning. Mac Naughton (2005) highlights how “Each field of knowledge, such as early childhood studies ... expands by developing officially sanctioned truths that govern normal ways and desirable ways to think, act and feel.” She describes child development scales to “sanction truths about normal ways to comfort people, to relate to peers, to concentrate on tasks and to deal with disappointment, sadness, hurt and anger according to your age.” (p. 28). EHC needs assessments could be seen to sanction these types of truths in a similar way.

We could say that it is when the child does not meet expectations, or beliefs about what they should be able to do, that the idea of ‘difficulties’ or ‘struggling’ can arise. If the child were not expected to be able to do something, it would be difficult to say that they were struggling or having difficulties. For example, one might be confused upon reading that an infant is struggling with reading novels or with swimming as these may not be implicit expectations normalised within our culture. Some example extracts from which Table 2 is based are below.

He struggles to express his emotions and communicate his views...

... struggles to express his emotions to key adults.

Akib finds it difficult to communicate his views...

...struggles to sustain her attention for an extended period of time.

...has often struggled to form friendships.

... difficulties falling asleep at night.

Alongside conveying an implicit assumption of what the child should be able to do, such descriptions could also be read to convey a message that the child is lacking in comparison to the idealised child. Whilst generally 'unsaid' within society, comparisons to an 'idealised child' may be implicitly conveyed in various ways – for example through the design and practices within the education system and through discussions and descriptions resulting in the assessments being analysed. This may lead to internalised views of who the child should be and of what they should be capable. Whilst diversity and difference may be seen as normal and expected within human life, some aspects of being may perhaps be seen as more valuable and important, such as those central and emphasised within the education system. This may lead to experiences of inner comparison in relation an idealised image and relates to Foucault's ideas of self-governance: in continually comparing ourselves to idealised images, we govern ourselves to act in accordance with what and who we think we should be (Wain, 1996). This may result in self-consciousness and, where lack is perceived, self-doubt and anxiety.

Where experiences do not fit this idealised image, the child may feel a sense of lack and develop beliefs of inferiority. This may have longer-term implications in terms of beliefs relating to their capabilities, as well as how the child relates to themselves beyond school, for example perhaps resulting in self-consciousness, self-doubt and anxiety. Anxiety in this sense could be seen in terms of an emotional manifestation of a perceived 'gap' between a person's experience in the moment and what they perceive this 'should' be, with a particular focus on self-image.

It is likely that EPs use of such implicit assumptions relates to beliefs of what is felt to be in the best interests of the child – with these assumptions perhaps not being consciously visible by most of those immersed within the culture and everyday practices from which they arose. These might simply seem obvious in terms of being the best thing to strive for in children or may appear as facts, rooted in nature and backed up by an evidence base. They may also perhaps appear to be in a child's best interest when considered in relation to the social context – perhaps seeming somewhat obvious in order for children to be healthy, happy and successful in today's world.

Whilst not contesting that these assumptions which guide what we aspire for in children may be in the best interests of many children, it may be useful to step back and consider if this is always the case. If we look to history, we can see that what has been conceived as human nature and what

is to be aspired for arose within relatively recent history, within a very particular set of conditions – the ‘modern’ society. Whilst on the surface these wants might appear as obviously in the best interests of the child, it may be important to reflect on the role of societal values and beliefs – particularly of those in powerful positions of circulating and maintaining dominant discourses and associated practices.

Child as Subordinate

This is an intentionally provocative use of words which aims to highlight moments of reading where there was a sense of the child lacking power or control in relation to others. This construction could be said to subsume the earlier construction 'child as object of investigation' where the child could be read to lack power with regards to the investigator-object relationship. The current construction pays closer attention to other aspects of potential differential power dynamics.

The child could be read to lack of power in terms of the limited choice they appear to have in the significant decisions affecting their life. This analysis extends to the wider socio-political context, considering current legislation and social practice, as well as my own experiences of working in various local authorities. Alongside broader aspects of decision-making in which children generally have limited involvement, relevant areas for the purposes of this analysis include the child's lack of, or potentially limited, choice as to whether:

- they go to school and which school they go to.
- the EHC needs assessment can take place.
- they are to be categorised special educational needs.
- they receive support and what this looks like.

Whilst there may be variability, this discussion seeks to invoke thinking for those children who may have little to no involvement in these decisions. Within the assessments, there was sometimes explicit reference to carer/parent involvement in decision-making, or seeking their views in relation to significant decisions, alongside an apparent omission of reference to the child's involvement. It is possible that this simply was not captured within the written assessment, but drawing upon wider context and practice, this idea feels relevant and worthy of further consideration.

Kyla's mother would like Kyla to stay at her current school and to have additional support.

With the agreement of Joss' parents, school staff submitted a request for an EHC needs assessment.

Changes in policy and legislation has led to increasing rights for parents and increased involvement in decision-making for their children (Children and Families Act, 2014). Similar changes have taken place to increase these for children, though how far these have meaningfully translated into practice could be a useful question to consider, particularly within the context of education (Palikara et al., 2018).

A primary function of the child's limited involvement in such decision-making likely relates to adults wanting what is best for the child. There may be beliefs that adults have greater capacity for making the best decisions for children, alongside possible fear that children may make poor decisions, perhaps as a result of perceived immaturity. In some cases, this line of reasoning might appear to have some visibly obvious validity which may have been a factor into such assumptions being applied more widely. Some professional knowledges could be said to legitimise such beliefs, for example developmental models which claim a particular trajectory of maturity and cognitive capacities (Grootens-Wiegers et al., 2017). Practically, seeking a child's involvement may feel time-consuming or effortful whilst another possible factor may involve adults fearing risks that the child may want something different to the adult. Over time, these practices and corresponding adult-child power relations may have become normalised whereby these power differentials in decision-making may often not be consciously chosen or considered.

Limited involvement in such decision-making may lead children to see there are no choices when it comes to important decisions in their life, such as whether they have an EHCP or whether they are categorised as SEND (or more accurately in some cases, they may come to *not* see that these happenings were the result of adult choices). They may also see that they have no choice in decisions such as whether they are discussed, observed and assessed by professionals which may involve receiving diagnoses. Children may come to see professionals as an unquestionable form of authority. They may see aspects of their lives which have been professionalised, such as being categorised as SEND or disordered as equating to unquestionable truths. Similarly, the question of whether the child is treated visibly differently in school may be a decision in which the child is unable to have a say. This might mean it is not possible for a child to decline, choose differently or propose alternative understandings or suggestions should they want to. Some potential

implications in terms of the child's subjective experience have been explored within previous constructions.

A similar power differential between children and adults could be seen to be reflected in the taken for granted assumptions and expectations of everyday school life. The child is expected to attend school daily, complete tasks, whilst obeying and following adult rules and instructions. Within the assessments, there were many references to the child in relation to work, tasks and interventions leading to an image of 'child as worker' arising in my readings.

...does not ask for help if she is struggling...

... often requires direct prompts...

... finds homework anxiety-provoking...

...checking she understands tasks...

This felt relevant to this construction with consideration to the limited choice the child has in taking on this role and the level of effort this can involve. It could highlight the level of control which tends to be implicitly imposed upon the child in their everyday experiences of going to and being in school.

"In school the young person becomes a student. The word student controls the child by setting a clear boundary of its expected conduct – 'listen to the teacher', 'be quiet', 'do as I explained to you'. The student should pay attention to the teacher, should learn, should place herself under the governance of the classroom rules. The 'unruliness' of childhood is over, the 'learning child' steps in (Holland, 1992, p. 63). The 'learning child' must be placed in a 'learning environment' and she must execute 'well-structured learning tasks'. The idea of 'student' creates expectations towards power relationships and conduct in the classroom. Thus, the idea of 'student' also provides a base for instant evaluation of the young human being as 'good or bad'." (Millei, 2005, p. 134).

The school could be described as a somewhat unique and relatively controlled environment in which the child is expected to act and perform in particular ways. It could be said that, in order for the child to feel a reasonable level of comfort and confidence in school, a particular set of skills or ways of being are required. Given the wide-ranging diversity expected as a part of human life, it is anticipated that not all children will be well-suited to the conditions of UK school life. With the curriculum appearing to prioritise an increasingly narrowing set of skills (Hargreaves et al., 2023) with a culture which emphasises high expectations, academic progress and attainment, school life may be becoming increasingly difficult for some children. Whilst many children may find these conditions and expectations reasonably comfortable, enjoyable and beneficial, others may find school life a difficult and repeated daily struggle. The child typically featuring within EHC needs assessments is perhaps more likely to be in this latter category, making the education system and its conditions a worthy area of attention for EPs. Example extracts below could be read to potentially point to such school experiences in the assessments analysed.

...appears overwhelmed with the complex social and learning environment of school.

The effort required to manage the school day appears to exhaust Joel.

Reflections

Within the assessments, the level of repeated distress for some children was somewhat stark. Distress which could be seen to have become somewhat normalised by the expectations and dominant discourses within the UK education system. This reflects my experiences in my practice more broadly, with the children and young I construct in my own EHC needs assessments often appearing to experience repeated struggle in their daily experiences of school. Whilst EHC needs assessments (and possible resulting EHCPs) may appear on the surface to be serving to help in these situations, I now wonder whether these could sometimes aid further legitimising the circumstances the child has to face. Whilst some aspects of school life might change, could this sometimes remain somewhat superficial? Is it possible that more substantial change might be needed terms of the broader conditions and expectations of school life?

Descriptions within the assessments are often relative to the implicit assumptions and expectations of everyday school life, many of which could be said to have become somewhat unquestionable and taken for granted. The use of the phrase 'academic and social demands' could be EPs attempting to draw attention to the child being in an environment which demands from them, perhaps encouraging empathy for the child. This could be read as an attempt of some resistance to these taken for granted assumptions (i.e. these conditions are what all children have to experience, being unquestionable). Drawing attention to the ways in which implicit assumptions and expectations are perhaps contributing to, or creating, perceived problems for the child, may enable EPs to use their assessments as a means for exercising resistance to dominant discourses and practices which may be seen as oppressive or inequitable. Conversely, the EP also has the potential to legitimise such assumptions through their assessments. A key question for EPs might be to ask which assumptions and expectations they want to legitimise and sanction for the child in their assessment and which they might want to resist.

A primary function of many of the taken for granted assumptions and expectations related to school life likely relates to the dominant view that (Western) education is substantially important for all, often seen as the prerequisite for a successful and happy life. Moral discourses are often drawn upon when discussing the value of education, imbuing education with an inherent sense of 'goodness', seeing there to be a moral duty to ensure education for our future generations. This is reflected in national discussions whereby education is seen a marker of a well-developed country (Idris et al., 2012). This strong moral discourse could be contributory in the current UK education system appearing to have become unquestionable and taken for granted - often presumed to be the best interests for all children.

This context can make it difficult for the EP to resist or challenge aspects of the systems of which they are a part, where these may not feel to be in the best interests of the child. This is particularly when considering that the EP is often employed (either directly or via private contract) to carry out the assessment for the LA. This highlights risks for EPs extending beyond the individual level, including the wider level of their employment and profession. Central government hold high levels of traditional power with regards to how organisations, services and processes are funded and legislated. Central government can also exercise high levels of implicit power in their propagation of particular discourses which can constrain what is possible to think and do. For example, in the

publishing of statements, reviews and policies which draw upon SEND and mental health discourses, problems may appear to be located within people. This has substantial gains for government as the education system in its current form is able to remain intact, as well as broader aspects of social policy and practice.

Children could be seen to have no 'opt out'. Whilst adults may have the option for a career change - or to seek advice from a Human Resources department or professional union - when their day to day has become somewhat unbearable, a child's options could be seen as more limited. Adults hold the power to have and report concerns whilst the options for a child experiencing issue may be far more limited – including situations where they may face daily, repeated experiences of struggle, exhaustion or relational difficulties with others - experiences which could be seen as normalised through the dominant discourses and expectations of everyday school life. Whilst changing schools might be possible, this may be a lengthy and difficult process which the child themselves (and possibly carers/parents) may struggle to initiate. Perhaps more importantly, such a move may not side-step issues where a child is resisting school as a result of expectations or other pressures that currently exist within UK school systems.

Another example of power differentials could be read in references to behaviour management. Within this are messages that the child's behaviour is to be managed, or controlled, by adults.

Azlam's behaviour at home can be difficult to manage...

...feels more able to manage his behaviour currently.

Wright (2009) proposes beliefs that children's behaviour should be managed (as well as beliefs that emotional awareness and understanding should be taught) keep professionals such as teachers "believing that they have both the power to, and the responsibility for, changing children's behaviour and that they must do both of these, by distancing themselves from the sometimes complex and painful emotional lives of children." (p. 280). The normalised practices and expectations arising as a result may lead the child to see themselves as naturally under the control or management of adults - that they must do as adults want, say or expect because this is the way things are.

Reference to behavioural difficulties more generally – or disruptive or challenging behaviour - could similarly be seen to locate a sense of fault being with the child, whilst also conveying an assumption that children should act in a particular way.

...can display disruptive behaviour...

Millei (2005) shows how disruption in the classroom can be understood through a discourse of control. Exploring conceptualisation, Millei found disruption to be attributed to the child's conduct, or in the lack of the adult's skills in addressing their conduct.

A more implicit power differential may operate through these discourses whereby the child may be seen as being responsible for relational difficulties arising between the child and adult. Focusing on the child's behaviour could be said to overlook the interpersonal and intersubjective, as well as situational and cultural contributions to what is being experienced. Once constructed in these terms, subsequent relational issues with adults may be more likely to be seen as the child's fault. The child may see themselves as a problem (for example, as naughty or bad at following rules), perhaps in need of changing in some way. Conversely, where the child feels confident in not being at fault, or seeing the role of the adult in the relational issues, this may lead to frustration, feeling not listened to or perhaps rejected. This may have implications for how the child constructs relationships with adults, or authority.

These ways of conceptualising can have further implications in terms of what is possible in terms of change outside of the child. For example, it may inhibit change in the ways adults relate to the child, in the expectations placed on the child or in or conditions which may contribute to what is being experienced. It can lead the focus of intervention to be directed towards the child, for example to develop their emotional regulation skills, express their emotions or improve their self-esteem.

Potential power differentials could also be read in the relational experiences of the child with other children. Whilst unlikely to be a consciously held view, it was noticed that language use when

describing social relationships and social experiences, could be read as the child being positioned as responsible for these:

...has developed positive relationships with other children in his class and the adults in school.

... needs a high level of structure and adult support to enable him to interact successfully with peers.

Limited reference to the intersubjective nature of relationships and interaction could be read in these extracts. This includes limited reference to the role the 'other' might play in the formation of relationships or in what is seen as successful interaction.

It could be argued that when a child is having such an assessment - or comes to be seen as SEN - a differential view of responsibility may arise in terms of such relationships (albeit this is likely unintentional). This relates to earlier discussions of increased surveillance for children categorised as SEN. The focus may become more intently directed towards the child, leading to a potential overlooking of the ways in which other children and adults (as well as other situational and cultural factors) may influence or contribute to what is described or observed.

...had a preference for playing alone and would rarely approach adults.

...did not particularly interact with others and struggled to establish friendships.

A wide range of reasons – some which may interact at various levels – could be said to have the potential to limit or influence interactions between the child and other children, or the child and adults. Whilst the EP may formulate about potential complex interacting factors, focusing solely on the child within the written assessment could lead readers to overlook the wider conditions and other potential influences. In some cases, this could lead to a deficit view of the child whereby they are seen as the cause of any social difficulties.

... has few social communication skills to initiate and maintain conversation.

The child may come to see themselves as responsible for social interactions which feel in any way problematic, something which could influence how they see themselves in relationship and may have a profound influence on their future social relationships.

This could bring up the question of 'what constitutes as problematic within an interaction and how responsible is each party within this?' It brings us to consider a social model at a wider cultural level to consider what has come to be seen as acceptable/unacceptable within our social worlds. The organisation of our social worlds has involved the development of socially agreed norms and implicit assumptions, assumptions which EPs may find useful to consider more deeply, particularly with reference to differential responsibilities in relating. Where does responsibility lie when apparent difficulties within a communication or interactional (or behavioural) experience arise? And who – or what – might hold the responsibility to change? These are not questions which are intended to be directly answered, but instead invite an open-ended provocation of enquiry and exploration.

Child as Meaning Maker

The child sometimes appeared to be constructed in ways that paid attention to an apparent deeper inner life whereby the child could be seen to be interpreting and making meaning from their experiences. This could be read to be in line with the 'intentional state categories' of a narrative therapy perspective. Within narrative therapy, people are seen as having purposes, conscious intentions, wishes, values, hopes and dreams, principles and commitments (Walther & Carey, 2009).

... very sociable ... and can ... share her thoughts, ask questions...

... and that she never gives up.

... is able to "stand up for herself."

... does not want to miss out on anything.

One function of constructing the child in this way may be to facilitate a deeper understanding of the child, looking to aid the EP's formulation, as well as encouraging an understanding of the child by others in terms of the meaning the child might be making in their experiencing. This might be an attempt to help adults in looking to what the child might be thinking and feeling in their experiencing to try to aid sense-making from a child-centred perspective. This could also act as an attempt to present normalising accounts whereby the child's experiences can be seen as making sense in relation to their personal meanings, perhaps seeking to move away from what might be seen as traditionally more pathologising or deficit-based accounts. Another function for the EP might be to help inform the writing of outcomes that appear to be more meaningful and important to the child in relation to their personal meaning making.

I have also included references where the child appears to be constructed as having values. This appears to go beyond descriptions in terms of likes or interests, perhaps moving deeper in the sense of constructing the child in terms of having things that are important to them.

It is important to Summer that she is involved and included in what the other children are doing in school...

...she strives to keep up with her peers.

It appeared important to her that she was successful with her handwriting...

Again, this could be seen to relate to aspects of narrative psychology. In considering the meanings people make in their lives, those working from a narrative perspective see worth in looking to people's values. The EP may be seeking to facilitate a deeper understanding of the child's purposes and intentions that may be applicable more widely, to other areas of their life and in other potential situations. The EP may be seeking to help adults, and perhaps the child, to come to see the child in terms of what is important to them, helping to create an adult perspective whereby the child is seen and related to in terms of their values, perhaps extending beyond the assessment. This increased focus upon the child's values may help to facilitate moving life in preferred directions and at a more meaningful level.

This construction may have some resonances with the work of psychologists such as Freud and Jung who held a view of there being something beyond what is apparent in our psychological worlds (Freud, 1925; Jung, 2020). This led to the idea of something less visible perhaps being able to drive some of our actions. As concepts such as the unconscious and subconscious arose, it became possible to question whether meaning making at a deeper level might be possible to infer from a person's actions. This raises interesting questions as to how conscious or aware an EP might construct a child to be in relation to any potential meaning-making.

When children are seen as consciously meaning making, they may be constructed as active in their making sense of and participating in their experiencing. In line with a humanistic perspective, descriptions may allude to a sense of purpose and intention, as well as perhaps an implicit sense of the child having choice – or agency (Hayes, 2012).

I feel happy when I know what I am doing.

I feel worried when I am struggling and there is no one there to help.

...worries about other children making fun of him and can get upset about this at home.

Seeing the child as being able to offer insights into their own meaning-making, the child's perspectives may be more likely to be sought with a similar level of openness and privileging to that they might with adults'. Subsequently, the child may see that their perspective is listened to and valued as important, something which may aid them in developing a sense of trust in their own experience and sense-making. This may influence how other adults perceive and relate to the child – for example, beyond the assessment, adults may be more likely to actively involve the child as they come to see them as capable of understanding and making sense of their own experiences.

Alternatively, the child may be constructed to potentially lack conscious awareness of some of the potential meanings being hypothesised within their experiencing. This may occur where the adults feel the child lacks the capacity for understanding or expressing potential meanings – or this may relate to a drawing upon of psychoanalytic ideas. Here, the EP might feel that there are patterns or responses which may be serving a protective function for the child.

...not feeling successful can cause Summer some distress.

... indirect approach appears to allow Jake to think more freely and moves towards skill-building without his feeling shame or embarrassment about his own difficulties.

Azlam doesn't always engage with highly differentiated tasks as a result of his low self-esteem...

Within the assessments, the child could read to be constructed as having a stable or fixed sense of self which, here, could be seen to have the potential for being threatened. This cartesian sense of self could be seen as characteristic of Western psychology, as well as being a deeply held assumption within Western culture more broadly (Sermijn et al., 2007). Within this, we could say that past experiences are more likely to be seen as important and to be held on to with a sense of being personal (to this sense of self). It could be suggested that this may lead to the protection of

this sense of self, with particular self-images perhaps being sought or avoided. The extracts above appear to convey the child as having the capacity to experience feelings such as distress, shame or embarrassment which appear to arise in relation to a particular self-image being threatened, either from the perspective of a self or how others are perceived to see this self (though perhaps not always at a conscious level).

Where the child might be constructed as lacking a level of conscious awareness, there may be a privileging of adult perceptions with those who have been able to observe the child's apparent patterns. Hypothesising may be more likely to take place with adults, alongside those who are seen to have the relevant psychological knowledge or expertise. In some cases, these assumptions could lead the child's perspective to be sought and interpreted based on the adults' hypothesising – possibly leading to the child's perspective being sought less openly than with the adults. Sometimes this could be in an effort to maintain a sense of psychological protection for the child. This may include the EP designing their questioning and approaches to working with the child according to pre-existing adult hypotheses – something which may limit what is possible for the child to communicate. Preconceived ideas may also arise which go on to shape the EP's interpretations of the child's contributions.

This could have the potential to lead the child's perceptions to be sought at a more superficial level – that is, with a function of seeking their views in terms of their likes and dislikes or feelings about school. This is in contrast to perhaps working with the child to explore possible meanings, enabling the child to have a more direct and involved role in the EP's formulating.

Where the child has opportunity to provide meanings and these do not fit with the adults' perspective, this may lead the child's view to be dismissed or taken less seriously. Conversely, the EP may feel they need to reformulate where there might be an openness to different ways of seeing – or they may look to hold multiple ways of seeing. These points could highlight interesting questions around who an EP approaches first in their assessments and how this may shape their frames for seeing, as well as the subsequent approaches taken to the child's involvement. It may also raise the question of whose perspective is privileged in times where there are discrepancies or how this might be negotiated. This last point, however, could be said to be

based upon an assumption that there is – or should be – a unified psychological formulation, which may not necessarily be the case for some EPs or services.

Response to Research Questions

EPs drew upon a wide range of discourses within their constructions of the child. Some examples include humanist, behaviourist, developmental and cognitive discourses. Psychiatric or medical discourses were also drawn upon, as well as educational discourses. The assessments themselves appeared to sit within what might be described as a meta-discourse of SEND, with the assumptions of educational or schooling and developmental discourses often featuring implicitly throughout. As can be seen from the previous discussions, there are various potential functions and gains for differing constructions and numerous possible implications which may arise for the child in terms of their subjective experience. Potential functions are summarised in Table 3 whilst implications for subjectivity can be seen within Figure B.

Table 3

Table to Show Potential Functions or Gains for Constructions

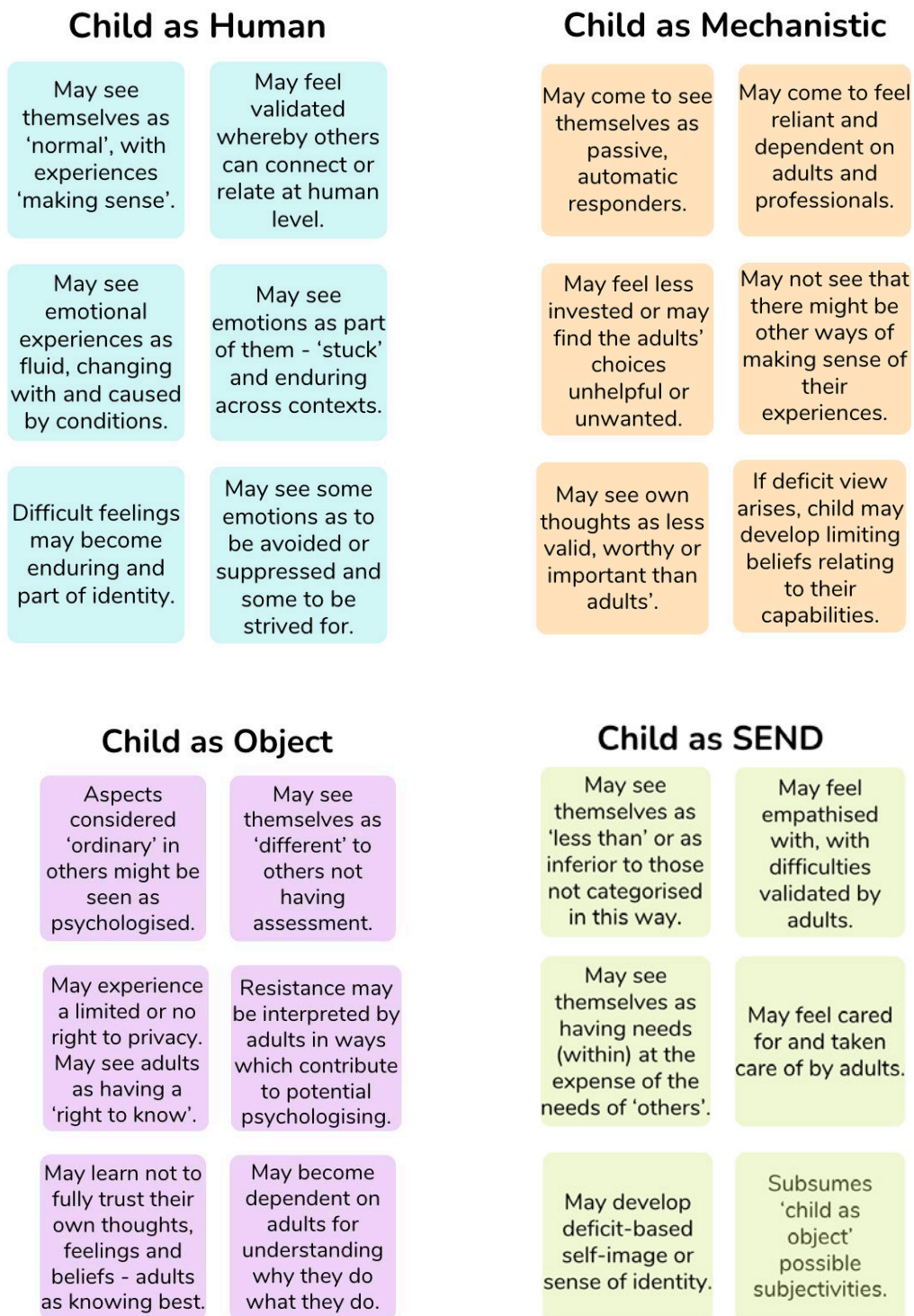
Construction	Functions: what is gained from constructing the object in this way?
Child as Human	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aiding connection at the human level – offering visibility and relatability beyond ‘SEND pupil’. • To aid child-centred understandings where adults are encouraged to look from the child’s perspective and the development of more meaningful approaches in relation to child’s experiences. • Building broader, balanced view of the child beyond professionalised views. • Formulating approaches more tailored to interests. • Seeking to bring normalising understandings whereby the child is seen to ‘make sense’. To allow child to be seen as ‘normal’, with perceived problems as provisional and open to change. • Aiding feelings of empathy for the child.
Child as Mechanistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking to look to child’s conditions to influence change. • Emphasising the influence of conditions on child. • Minimising potential blame on child. • Seeking to understand the child in terms of inner processing. • Aiding feelings of empathy. • Seeking adjustments in expectations and approach. • Providing a sense of certainty and ‘knowing’. • Protecting feelings of adults. • Relieving responsibility of school and education systems to change. • Relieving academic performance pressures. • Economic gains for cognitive assessment companies.

<p>Child as Object of Investigation</p> <p>Child as SEND</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking to understand and develop a comprehensive formulation. • Seeing broad aspects of child’s life as relevant and ensuring important information is not overlooked. • Trying to help and do what is felt to be in the child’s best interests. • Seeing adults as important for facilitating change in child’s life. • Seeing the discovering of truths of the child the professional’s duty. • Aiding LA with resource allocation decision-making. • Where granted, aiding the writing of an EHCP. • Seeking additional funding, with beliefs this will help child be educated in a way that works for them. • Seeking a legal document which specifies what a school must provide. • Possibly seeking a particular provision for the child through EHCP process. • Helping the child to help to live with a level of ease and success in school and wider society, as they are currently organised.
<p>Child as SEND</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking to have personal difficulties recognised, validated and responded to.
<p>Child as Idealised</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aiding the allocation of finite resource of LA decision-makers by making comparisons between the child and other children clear. • Seeking what is believed to be in the child’s best interests – may appear obviously important or valuable for the child or as facts.
<p>Child as Subordinate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults wanting what is best for the child. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Beliefs in greater capacity for adults making better decisions. ○ Fear the child may make poor decisions. ○ Practical benefits of avoiding time-consuming efforts to involve child in decision-making. ○ May become normalised and less conscious/visible. • Assumptions and expectations of everyday school life may be less visible, hidden in the taken for granted by adults immersed within the culture. • Dominant beliefs in Western education being highly important may reinforce assumptions and expectations which can subordinate. • Adult needs or wants to be in control.

Please see next page for Figure B.

Figure B

Visual to Show Summary of Possible Subjectivities or Ways of Being for Constructions



Child as Idealised

May internalise a view of who they should be and of what they should be capable.

The child may see some aspects of being as more valuable than others.

May lead to continual comparison to idealised images and self-consciousness.

May perceive a sense of lack and beliefs that they are not good enough.

Where lack is perceived, may lead to self-doubt and anxiety.

Child as Subordinate

Subsumes 'child as object' possible subjectivities.

May see there are no choices when it comes to important decisions in their life.

May see professionals as an unquestionable form of authority.

May see themselves as under control of adults - must do as they say/want.

May find school life a difficult and repeated daily struggle.

If violate adult rules, may see self as bad, wrong or perhaps naughty or out of control.

May feel responsible for social relationships or interactions that are problematic.

If feel not at fault, may feel frustration, not listened to, subjugated or rejected.

Child as Meaning Maker

May see themselves as having purposes, intentions and values.

May develop a deeper understanding of what is important to them.

May help to facilitate moving life in preferred directions.

May feel a sense of choice and agency.

May develop a sense of trust in their own experience and sense-making.

Conclusions:

Final Thoughts and Reflections

This research aims to highlight the power of words and the power of the EP role in terms of the real-world implications for how a child is subsequently related to and acted upon by those around them. This includes how the child may go on to see and relate to themselves in their lives beyond the EP's involvement. Some of these implications for practice can be seen to be reflected in the summarising tables in the previous chapter. The various functions EPs could look to invoke through their adoption of particular constructions, as well as the various subjectivities constructions might convey and subsequently create, each offer a window into the potential differing implications of the different ways we might use language to construct the child. This includes potential differing implications for how adults might relate to and act in relation to the child, including the EP, as a result of differing ways of coming to see and understand them.

The way an EP conceptualises within their psychological advice process could be said to legitimise and professionally sanction a particular way of seeing, extending beyond a professional level, sanctioning at governmental and legal levels as a result of the statutory nature of this process. EPs contribute to knowledge production of the child and could be seen to contribute knowledge at broader societal levels; as perceived experts in psychology and education, EPs sanction and reinforce societal beliefs of what it means to 'be' a child, or who a child 'should' be. This chapter describes some final thoughts and reflections that arose within this research journey, along with further thoughts in relation to how this research could be used to inform EP practice.

Power

This research highlights the limited power children have in their lives. This includes explicit power whereby aspects of their lives are highly controlled and regulated, as well as less visible forms of implicit power whereby dominant discourses and associated practices can lead the child to be

subjugated in relation to others. This research hopes to bring the subject of power to the forefront of attention within the EP profession. It seeks to increase the visibility of assumptions and taken for granted expectations that might otherwise remain hidden, yet powerfully influential. This research highlights how there may be numerous assumptions and expectations implicitly placed upon the child, assumptions which EPs may inadvertently reinforce and legitimise. Do EPs see their role in reinforcing particular expectations for who and how children should, and should not be? A key question for EPs being, which assumptions and expectations do they want to legitimise and sanction for the child in their assessment and which might they want to resist?

A Role for EPs: Power

Questions EPs may find useful to consider in their practice are listed below. These might form part of doctoral training course sessions and could be used in EP team development activities to encourage critical reflection on implicit power within the EP role. They could also form a part of ongoing reflective practice, for example acting as a framework EPs could use individually or within supervision to critically reflect upon the power implicit within their written assessments.

- What type of child do you want to normalise and idealise?
- What lies implicitly as 'wanted' and 'unwanted' in your constructions of the child?
- In what ways do you communicate a need or want for the child to be different?
- What 'truths', values and ideals govern these decisions? Are these 'truths', values and ideals that you want to legitimise and reinforce, or resist?
- Who is positioned as responsible in interactions, relationships and other social experiences? Do you draw upon discourses that emphasise or overlook the intersubjective nature of social experiences? How much acknowledgement and responsibility is given to the role of the 'other' within these experiences?
- Who is positioned as responsible for the difficulties being experienced? Where do you locate 'the problem' and what does this rule in/out as possible in terms of change?
- Are we casting a microscope over the lives of the children and young people within our assessments? Has the child consented to their lives being discussed in detail? Do they have a right to privacy? Is the child able to resist without the risk of pathologisation?

- Could there be a risk of the pathologising or conceptualising of ‘needs’ for aspects of the child’s life that might otherwise go unnoticed or be viewed as an ordinary variation of childhood - for example, as might occur for a child not undergoing such an assessment? What role do we play in normalising particular childhood experiences and how might this be reflected in our conversations and written assessments?
- In what ways do the way you speak and write reinforce and legitimise limited choice and control for children and young people in their lives? For example, do you legitimise that their behaviour is to be managed by others?
- Are the child’s thoughts or what appears to be important to the child actively incorporated into the main body of the assessment? Or are these confined to a particular section? How involved is the child in the sense-making aspects of the assessment? Do they have a means to express agreement with, or to contest, the conceptualisations and interpretations within the resulting assessment?
- In completing or reflecting upon your assessment, would you describe this - or the resulting outcomes and provision - as something that is meaningfully ‘done with’ the child or is this more reflective of something that is ‘done to’ the child?

These questions are not intended to have any clear or knowable answers, but aim to invoke an opening of the heart and mind to the complex ethical dilemmas that arise in relation to power and the statutory role of the EP.

Not Knowing

Once nothing is true, anything can be.

This research journey has taught me of the powerful nature of words. Constructing frames for seeing, creating and reinforcing expectations and shaping possible interpretations; the ways in which we have come to describe the world – including the children and young people we encounter – could be said to constrain what is possible to see. As we have seen, differing ways of speaking hold the potential to constrain what is possible for children and young people in much further reaching ways.

Do we see that our already held frames for seeing may limit what is possible for us to see and not see? When we look at a child or a situation, when we hear the words of another, what are we looking for? What are we listening for? What are we open to? What are we closed to?

What might happen if we let go of what we think we know? What might happen if we could step back from the prescribed ways of seeing that have developed over our lifetimes?¹ What if we could let go of the 'knowing' which shapes our seeing? How comfortable are EPs with not knowing? Could this be the key to creating space for something new? Once we see that nothing is 'true' in the sense we might once have thought, is it possible that a door to new possibilities might be opened?

Creating New Meanings

The construction of childhood and the social structures around them appear to present a marked divide and power differential between adults and children. Within this culture, adult meanings could be seen to be generally privileged over children's, with the proliferation of expert and professional knowledges perhaps leaving little room for children and young people to create their own meanings.

Could a letting go of knowing serve a useful starting point for creating the space for children and young people to actively create their own meanings?

A Role for EPs: Epistemology (Not Knowing and Creating New Meanings)

Is there a role for EP doctoral courses and supervisory models within EP services in exploring the ideas and questions detailed above and below within this section, including looking to build comfort with, and see value in, 'not knowing' as well as developing an openness to, and skills in, facilitating the creation of new meanings?

¹ It is questionable whether it is possible to truly step outside of our frames for seeing, though this question refers to increasing our awareness of these frames for seeing, shedding those layers that are possible to shed, to create an openness to something that might be entirely new and unexpected.

Are EPs able to see that their *descriptions* of the child, could be seen to be *constructions* of the child? Constructions which are made up of particular patterns of meaning which are selected out from experiencing – patterns (or stories) which are told and re-told, strengthening and thickening particular ways of seeing the child?

The framework and general structure of EHC needs assessments could be said to infer a view of there being a single, knowable and discoverable truth of the child. Arguably, this modernist perspective is one which continues to dominate in mainstream society, including the education system. Could the way EPs engage with EHC needs assessments infer an adherence to - or conversely - a resistance to - a modernist worldview?

Is there a role for EPs in helping others to see the constructed nature of knowledge? What could this look like in conversations and written assessments?

Do we speak, and write, as though we are speaking 'truth'?

Or do we speak in terms of ideas and ways of seeing that could have alternatives?

What 'truths' do we reinforce?

What 'truths' do we distance ourselves from?

With mainstream Western thinking largely governed by modernist assumptions, it could be suggested that many prospective EPs enter training with a relatively firm grasp on what they think of as 'true'. Could prospective EPs benefit from their doctoral course dedicating time explicitly to the loosening of their grasp on such truths? This includes those of Western psychology, for example by introducing trainees to the work of Danziger (1997) to illuminate the constructed nature of Western psychology, including many of the conceptualisations which have come to be fundamental in how we see and understand human experiencing. Is there a role for doctoral courses in illuminating the role of culture and language in shaping our seeing and in finding ways to help 'lift the veil' of our cultural conditioning in order to make visible the possibility for alternatives?

Whilst prospective EPs might explore applying differing paradigms and lenses within psychological theory, with differing courses potentially having differing emphases, is there scope for extending the focus of doctoral training beyond current western psychological theories, where this is not already done? Should EP doctoral training look to shape EP 'seeing' by tasking prospective EPs with mapping their experiencing onto Western psychological theory? Or in unsettling such truths, is there a role for doctoral training in helping to build prospective EPs trust in their own, potentially new and unique ideas? And perhaps more importantly, in working with young people, families and practitioners to explore their own making sense of their experiencing?

Is there a role for the EP profession in helping children and young people to see that there might be other ways of making sense of their experiences? Is there a role for helping them to develop trust in their own, personal experiences? And where it is wanted, might there be a role for EPs in helping children and young people to resist the imposition of adult or professionalised meanings?

Adopting a postmodern philosophy, narrative therapy could be seen to offer practical skills and techniques for facilitating a practice whereby EPs might actively seek to allow those they work with to create their own meanings, including meanings which might extend beyond existing ways of seeing.

Specific questions that might be useful to consider within doctoral training sessions and as part of an ongoing reflective practice within EP sense-making processes are:

- What hypotheses are guiding my thinking right now? How might these be influencing or potentially blocking what I see/hear?
- Can I hold these hypotheses to one side in order to create space and an openness to seeing/hearing something different?
- Can my mind let these hypotheses go completely and become open to seeing/hearing and, potentially creating, something entirely new?
- How might what I see/hear be being shaped and interpreted through my lenses of seeing? Can I seek to put these to one side, or bring these into awareness, in an attempt to hear more authentically what is being communicated from this person's experience? For

example, can I look to let go of, or hold to one side, expert interpretations, as well as Western ideals and assumptions?

- Is my mind seeking a 'grand unified narrative'? Might there be multiple and potentially contradicting ways of seeing that might be held at once and could each be seen to offer some possible usefulness?

Reflections

Remembering that Western psychology is a set of cultural ideas, not truths, has been utterly profound in developing my ability to more authentically 'get alongside' others, particularly those where beliefs and actions might be seen as unhelpful or questionable when looking from the perspective of Western psychology. Postmodernism has enabled me to be increasingly able to hold lightly the 'truths' and 'shoulds' of the culture in which I am immersed. Alongside practicing mindful awareness, this has opened up a greater possibility for dropping into a position of 'not knowing' and a letting go - or a holding to one side - of my own beliefs. This has helped me to become increasingly able to connect and listen more fully, openly and without judgement, enabling a level of compassion and empathy that continues to deepen within my practice.

Is there a role for increasing presence and mindful awareness within EP practice? And could these skills be seen as highly supportive for those within the profession looking to strive for social justice? In conjunction with deconstructing Western psychology and other 'truths' that may have become somewhat stable parts of our belief systems, could it be useful for prospective and current EPs to have explicit practice of increasing awareness of thoughts, feelings and other forms of sensations and experiencing that might arise during our practice? Can we practice seeing thoughts and beliefs as ideas that might have alternatives? Can we notice what comes up and practice letting these go? Can we practice creating space for something new? To help EPs to develop and maintain these skills, explicit attention to developing mindful awareness within EP doctoral courses could be useful. This type of practice could also usefully form a part of EPs' ongoing professional development, for example through formal training courses, spiritual reading (in relation to mindful awareness, not knowing and cultivating skills in nonjudgment and compassion) and personal formal and informal practice.

Masking Political and Economic Factors

Statutory assessments offer a particular purpose, although not made explicit to the reader in all of its facets. The use of the label 'special educational needs' and statutory assessments ultimately arise from a governmental need to manage finite resources and pursuing one often serves the function of gaining access to additional resource – “the issue here becomes how the tactic is used and whether the person labelled knows it is a tactic or comes to believe it is a life sentence.” (Williams et al., 2016, p. 132). Looking closely at statutory assessments within this research, I believe these economic and political functions can remain largely invisible, whilst the child appears to be placed in central view. This process could be seen as one which directs attention inwards towards and within the young person, masking the broader political and economic purposes ultimately being served – a process not without consequence, having the potential for very real implications for the young person at the centre.

Creating and Reinforcing Deficit Identities

For those applying for an EHCP, a primary aim often relates to seeking help for what is being perceived in some way a problem – with a need for funding above and beyond what can be provided at SEND support level funding in itself arguably being constructed as a problem. Within this lies what could be considered an inherently problematic need to construct a child by the way of problems. The EHCP process involves individualising and decontextualising the child, creating and providing a level of permanence to particular constructions of the child, enabling the child to be compared to others in adults' attempts to gain resource. The child needs to be judged as falling short within this comparison in order for additional resource to be granted. Some might call this an institutional failing which targets and systematically furthers deficit-focused identities of children and young people. Is this an aspect of SEND discourse and associated practices which tends to go unnoticed?

Masking Socio-Cultural Factors

The power imbalances experienced by children and young people are perhaps amplified when considering those categorised as SEND. The SEND discourse itself could be seen to prescribe a particular frame for seeing which may limit how a young person is seen and related to. Perhaps more importantly, it can aid obscuring the broader picture - the relative nature of SEND which necessarily involves a child's experiences which are created by and within a given context. The SEND discourse can direct attention inwards towards and within the child and legitimise initiatives that call for supporting a child to fit within their particular context. This often leaves responsibility with schools and the child – both who are perhaps feeling largely constrained (knowingly or unknowingly) by the broader context of the education system and the normalised culture they have to work within. Similarly, the mental health discourse directs the gaze inwards to individuals, which in SEND language might be translated to social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. This discourse tends to construct difficulties being experienced as being housed within individuals and can subsequently entail calls for support through medication or therapeutic intervention – often leaving the systems and culture around them untouched.

In addition to creating and reinforcing deficit identities, the current practices in education could be seen to include a failing of institutions to acknowledge their own role in the creation and maintenance of the difficult experiences endured by some children and young people, and ultimately in the creation and maintenance of what is described as SEND. The discourse of SEND (and mental health) could perhaps be seen as a means of masking and maintaining these failings, potentially protecting wider systems and practices from a sense of responsibility to change. For example, frustrations and complaints may be more likely to be directed towards a need for greater support - such as being directed at the EHCP process or the SEND (or mental health) system. This can involve calls for more 'support' and campaigns for greater training and finance in these areas (Jayanetti, 2023). Notably, these discourses appear to leave the education system more broadly – such as the design and delivery of the curriculum and the implicit practices of prioritising and privileging particular skills or qualities, alongside comparison and judgement - to remain largely unquestioned.

A Role for EPs: Institutional Systemic Change

With recent years seeing record numbers of children and young people struggling to go into school (The Centre for Social Justice, 2023), as well as those being categorised as SEND – in addition to increasing numbers of young people being issued with EHCPs (Department for Education, 2023) - is now the time to look past the taken for granted and what may have long seemed unquestionable? Could EPs play an important role in bringing this broader picture to light? Whilst EPs may look to work systemically – does this role extend to central government to consider more substantial changes in terms of the broader curriculum, the culture within education and the normalised expectations and practices within these? Whilst some might see this as the role of particular bodies or organisations, I believe this is a role that should be taken on by individual EP services and individual EPs who see institutional systemic change as having the potential to play an important role in building a more inclusive and socially equitable society for the children and young people of today and the future.

Could each EP Service allocate time to systemic change that extends beyond the school level? That is, dedicating a proportion of EP time to systemic change at the level of government and the education system, such as contemplating (and taking pragmatic steps in relation to):

- The construction of SEND. Is there a role for the EP profession in publicly and explicitly questioning dominant ‘within child’ conceptualisations of SEND? Is there a role for the EP profession in proposing shifts in language and driving forward proposals for a move towards an increasingly interactional conceptualisation of SEND?
- The design and delivery of the curriculum. Can attention be drawn to the necessary role of these structures in the creation and maintenance of SEND? What is seen as important to be prioritising at an institutional level for today’s children and young people? What skills, ‘knowledge’ and expectations for children and young people are prioritised? Why are these important? Who is this serving? Who is this not serving? Might there be ways for the education system to increasingly embrace and behold our rich diversity of children and young people? This may include looking to the way current practices may marginalise or disadvantage, helping to bring greater awareness to factors such as race, gender and class which can be less visible yet highly influential within our institutionalised practices.

- The various changing conditions which are likely having a contributory effect to the increasing numbers of children being categorised as SEN, for example economic changes in funding and resource within education and socio-cultural factors such as changes in technology-use and play. Is there a role for EPs in bringing these contextual factors to light and considering their role in the apparently changing nature of SEND?
- The epistemologies of the EHC needs assessment and the modernist presumptions which appear to implicitly and explicitly underly EPs' psychological advice. Do EPs view themselves as discovering the 'truth' of the child? Do assessments suggest that the child can be known and discovered? Is there scope for other epistemologies which emphasise the real-world implications the knowledges we produce can have? Is there scope for emphasising the creation of knowledge and the potential for alternatives? Could there a role for the EP profession in publicly driving forwards Beaver's (2011) poignant idea of seeking what is 'useful' over 'truthful'?
- The individualising and decontextualising nature of EHC needs assessments. Might wider contextual factors be considered more explicitly within the overall frameworks of assessments?
- The tendency for the child to be constructed by way of problems and the inherent need for the child to be judged as falling short in comparison to others in order to gain resource through an EHC needs assessment. Might there be a role for EPs to help bring this dimension to light – with particular attention to the potential implications for the child's subjective experience and self-image or identity? Might there be ways to meet the administrative needs of resource allocation in ways that could pose less risk with regards to the creation and reinforcement of deficit identities? Could this be a worthy area of future research?
- Other organisational structures, systems and processes within education, such as the size and structures of schools and academies and the role of comparison, judgment and performance-driven measures and incentives in education. Can attention be drawn to the role of such contextual factors in the experiences of children and young people? Questions might be asked such as: What is the purpose? Who is this serving? What are the potential implications? And might there be alternatives? I propose that attending to the education system more broadly may be a fruitful area for future research and educational development within which EPs could play a highly valuable and contributory role.

- The 'industry' of SEND, including the role of privatisation within SEND provisions and the potential for high-cost places, significant financial gains and substantial inequities. Are these political and economic factors which are often unseen, yet worthy of attention?
- The experience of distress within education. What role do normalised practices within education play in the increasing levels of distress experienced by children and young people and the development of deficit-based self-images?

Nonviolent communication (Rosenberg, 2015) offers a framework for compassionate relating whereby one is encouraged to reflect upon and take responsibility for their own needs in a given situation. Is there a place for explicitly making visible the needs of the adults in relation to the EHC needs assessment process and the education system more broadly? (for example, government members, other members of the education system and local authorities, educational settings and staff). Whilst this includes attention to the governmental and LA need to manage finite resource, could this also involve a looking beyond and making visible the needs that underly many aspects of the maintenance of the education system in its current state? For example, perceived needs to look a particular way when compared to other countries or other settings, such as in international and national league tables and Ofsted ratings? Perceived needs to control and manage a large number of children with minimal resource in terms of adults? Needs for certain proportions of children to attain particular outcomes in order to attain performance-related pay? Could this be a useful framework for EPs to adopt in research and reflection in considering some of the deeper and less visible factors which may serve to maintain particular practices? Could this potentially aid sensitive and compassionate listening and help in tailoring approaches and emphases - for example, in potential lobbying, campaigning or training where these needs might usefully feed into some of the suggested topic areas above in expanding how we come to construct and relate to SEND?

It feels important at this point to return attention to the political and economic factors detailed in the introductory chapter of this thesis. The potential threat that may be experienced in the questioning of current systems and structures may serve to maintain these in their current state with limited visibility. Threat may be experienced by those in positions of power, as well as the many services and structures who rely upon particular ways of seeing, being and doing for their continued existence. Should the EP profession be seen to be instigating threat, this may pose a

direct risk to the profession itself – at least in its current form. This feels to be an important point to emphasise in awareness within the profession when considering the above ideas. Whilst these factors may often play out unconsciously and with automacity - perhaps playing a prohibitory role - it is hoped that this research helps to create space for the conscious contemplation of what could be seen to be important ethical considerations. Considerations that could be said to direct our gaze and energies beyond much of the systemic work traditionally undertaken by EPs in an effort to question and potentially disrupt dominant and normalised ways of seeing, being and doing – disruption that could be seen to be fundamental in the profession’s striving for social justice.

What Stories Will You Tell?

Western psychology has played quite the role in reinforcing problematic stories and increasing their stickiness and heaviness to people, albeit often with good intentions. EHC needs assessments can be seen as a potential manifestation of this; EPs play a highly influential role in what is selected out and attended to from descriptions of a person’s life – both of their present and their history – ultimately imbuing these descriptions with a sense of importance and noteworthiness.

William James once wrote: “the essence of life is its continuously changing character; but our concepts are all discontinuous and fixed...” (James, 1912, p. 253). Whilst life itself is fluid and moving, the words we write fix the constructed child into place. Some have described our use of language as casting a metaphorical net upon the world; seeking to name, order, classify and categorise to establish fixed understandings (Watts, 1966). An EHC needs assessment could be seen as an institutionally sanctioned ‘metaphorical net’. A net which is cast upon the child in an attempt to categorise and establish a fixed understanding. Thus, the words chosen can play a crucial role in shaping what goes on to be seen, what understandings and interpretations are to be held onto and, ultimately, what may come to form an integral part of one’s self-image or self-identity. Something which, in reality, may be constantly moving and changing, and something which may have the possibility for many alternatives.

Distancing from beliefs in a single, knowable truth, this thesis hopes to present an account that allows a deeper questioning into the stories we tell – both at a societal and an individual level.

What might be the implications of these words over those words? Who gains from this kind of story? How might the child see and relate to themselves? And how might others relate to and act upon them? What becomes possible as a result of these words? And what might be ruled out? Could we benefit from seeing the words we use not simply as descriptions, but as holding the powerful potential for creation?

What worlds are we wanting to create?

Speaking and Writing about Children and Young People

In addition to those already listed within this chapter, some additional questions EPs might find useful to ask themselves when writing about children and young people are considered below. These might form a part of EP doctoral training sessions in relation to statutory assessments or writing and speaking about children and young people more broadly. They might also be utilised as a framework for ongoing reflective EP practice, being used individually (or within supervision) in relation to their writing of, or critical reflection upon, their psychological assessments (or other written records).

- What self-images are you creating or reinforcing? Have you considered the possible implications for how the child might see themselves and how others might see and relate to them?
- Would you write any differently if you imagined the child reading this assessment over your shoulder? Or reading this back as an adult?
- Are you creating or reinforcing deficit self-images or is this something you might look to resist?
- Is the child constructed as having thoughts, feelings, values and intentions that help to make sense of their experiences?
- Is the child constructed as having emotions which appear somewhat fixed and enduring? i.e. do they appear to carry these around with them across time and contexts? Or does language reflect these as fluid experiences which can come and go, offering the potential for an increased sense of distance and agency in relation to their emotional experiences?

- Is distress or upset referenced within your assessment and, if so, are details as to what might be underlying these feelings made explicit, including where these might relate to everyday (and potentially unquestioned) practices within education? i.e. in what ways might your assessment contribute to - or resist - the normalisation of distress in children categorised as SEND in relation to normalised practices within education?
- Is the child constructed as having (or lacking) skills, capacities or abilities that are conveyed as fixed and relatively unchanging? Is language used to position these as something the child does, or as something they are? How might such constructions create or reinforce beliefs in relation to what is possible, both for the child themselves and adults around them?
- How does your language use position 'needs'? Are these between the child and their setting or are these solely located within the child? Could consideration to what the child needs outside of themselves aid greater emphasis towards an interactional conceptualisation of need? As examples, might we write 'the needs between the child and their setting' or 'the child and their setting appear to be experiencing a need for special educational provision in the areas of...'. In 'needs' sections, might we write about what the context, adults or social environment needs to provide, as opposed to a sole focus upon what the child is apparently lacking?
- Have you referenced the broader context and primary purpose of the assessment in terms of the setting's needs, including the economic and political functions this appears to be serving? For example, what does the school lack or need in terms of resource which is driving the application for an assessment? Is this something you think would be useful to make explicit, for example with a 'context of assessment' section or similar?

Whilst this chapter details many ideas for reflective thinking and exploration, in an effort to create something more pragmatic for use in everyday EP practice, I have compiled some simpler questions that EPs might find useful to hold in mind when writing and speaking of children in their everyday practice:

- Is this how I want the child to see themselves?

- What stories² do I want to reinforce and maintain? Which do I want to resist?
- Am I privileging 'useful' over 'truthful'?

(Beaver, 2003)

Whilst I list my own questions, readers may find it useful to create their own questions to hold in mind, considering what resonates most for them and what would feel to have a pragmatic value within their everyday practice.

What stories will you tell?

² The reference to 'stories' in these questions extends beyond stories about the child, to include the implicit stories about what it means to 'be' a child, who the child 'should' be and the ways in which we 'should' live, 'be', and 'do' more broadly. For example, the way things are done within the education system or within Western culture more generally – all of which can often be implicit in the stories we tell within our psychological assessments.

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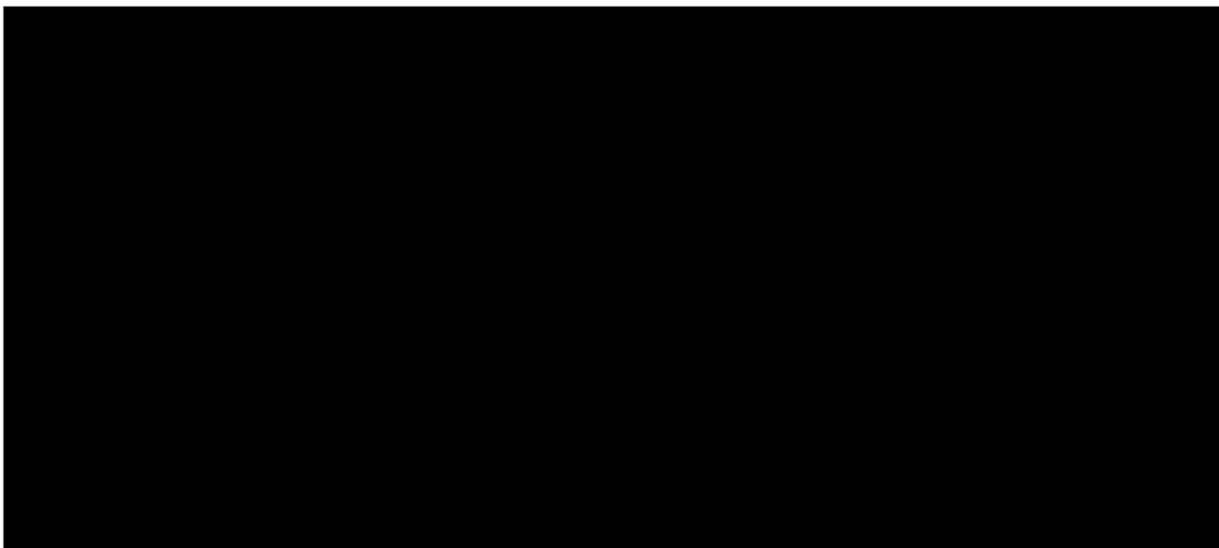
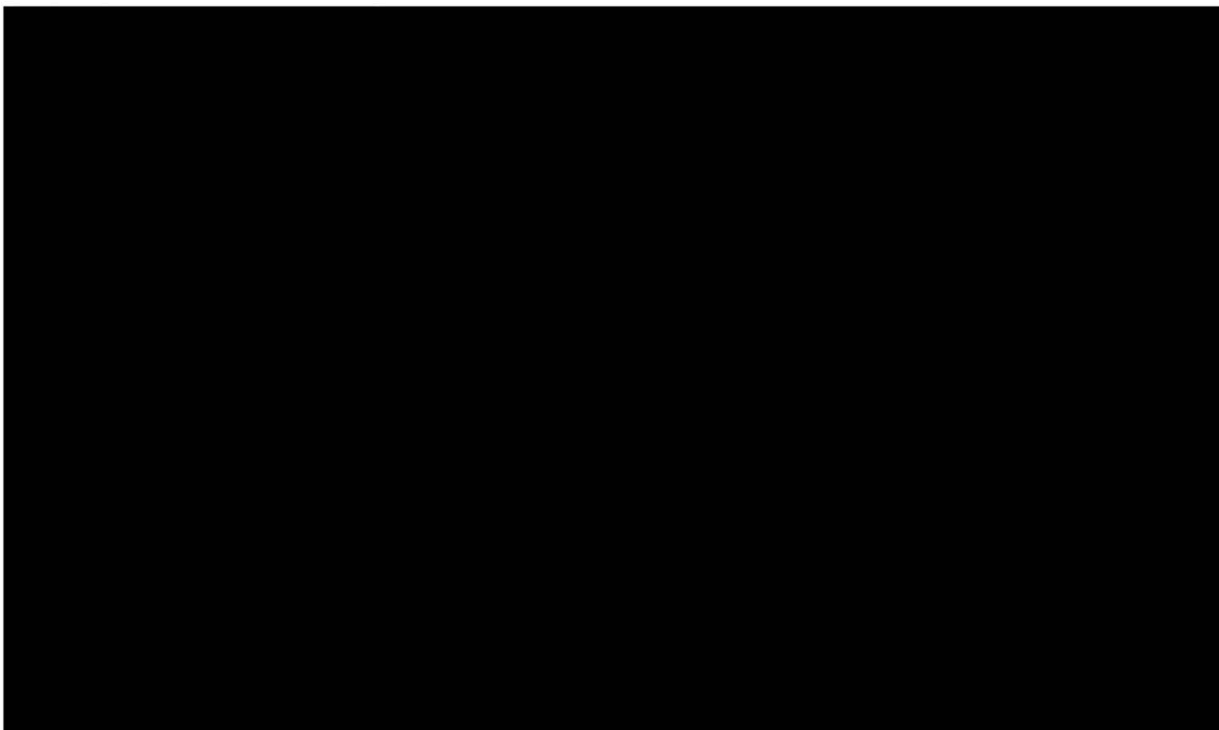
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Appendices

Appendix A

Excerpts from Anonymised Reports

*This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for anonymisation reasons.



Appendix B

Excerpt from Initial Reading Notes of a Report

Reflection in notes - non-analysis

First Reading - Primary (report-02)

Aim - to read as 'whole' - what is the text telling me as a reader?

o Try to 'let go' of analysis Q/OP

o Try to read as ? → Can't get away from who I am.

→ Not looking to 'formulate' as yet

→ Am I considering reader as parent/carer?

SEN officer?

I don't know - shall I try from diff child/yr?

persp. to see what happens?! Someone else?

Notes / Thoughts as read:

- formal - legislation - scary? has 'clout'

- 'evidence' professional opinion - 'serious'

- feelings of sadness reading health experience of child in 'background' - 'shunt' feels like a permanent thing as needs so much

ongoing surgery - feels sad for someone so young

- Parent view bring hope - believes w/ right

support' can be happy + keep up/perform at similar lvl to peer group.

- Parent views - Is EP giving a 'nod' to

potential impact of parent 'being' without explicitly saying? Would this only be a

nod received by someone w/ psych. knowledge? Is this just 'me' formulating

...from my own vps + perceptions on what has been said?

- Pascal views feels 'respectful'

- views, interests + Asp of vp - feels to 'humanise' what has been said so far -

- Brings me some happiness as I picture little girl as someone who enjoys doing what you can imagine a little girl doing - ^{pleasant} Makes her feel 'human', real? _{'a child'}

[Rep] - Did she feel 'less human' before for this word to come up for me now?

- feels to bring her a sense of agency

'doesn't like help with them' ^{as I read!} _{'brighter'}

- feels 'happy' Note: Sun came out - not sure if helped feel 'brighter' ^{'happy'}

- a sense of wanting to be normal + feel included - is the child exercising resistance?

(Q/DP) Dates - would be useful to see their relatedness i.e. - were views from 'now' + 'for this' or from rky them a diff time earlier + not in relation to advice specifically?

[Rep] Wondering but not fully thinking through the aspect of 'not knowing' the dialogue - the Qs asked - what was said specifically, what comes from who, what is a changed word / possible interpretation - relation of what was said?
→ so different from interview!! ^{constructed} but words are permanent.

Appendix C

List of Initial Codes or 'Micro Constructions' in Early Stages of Analysis

able to do something	coper (or implicitly not coping)	emotion	thinking
accepts help	curriculum or extra-curricular user	emotional regulation	toileting
accessor	demands on or of them	english, read, write and spell or literacy	understanding
achiever or accomplisher	deserving of equality or equity	expressing emotion	disruptive
acts or behaves in particular ways	developmental level or milestones	general academic or learning difficulties	dresser
adapter	diagnosable or capable of disorder (fixed difficulties of particular configuration)	group work	eater
aspirer	different or with difference	hearing	effort
assessable	difficulties or struggles	independence	emotional being
attender	adapting to change or flexibility	language - speaking and understanding	angry or cross
barriers	approach to tasks	listening	annoyed
benefiting from something	asking for help	memory	anxiety
can be successful or unsuccessful	aspects of the environment	organisational	calmness or calmable
can experience comfort or relief	awareness of danger	phonological skills	distress
can persist or give up	balance and coordination	processing skills or ability	emotional regulator
can tire	behaviour	reasoning	excited
cared for or cared about	communicate or express self	self-esteem	frustration
chooser	concentration or sustained attention	self-evaluation	happiness
chronological age	confidence	sensory	having self-esteem
collaborator	dressing	sleep	having worries
communicator	eating	social communication skills or friendships	lack of comfort or relaxation (discomfort or unease)
community member		spatial ability	mood
comparable to peers or to keep up with peers		starting, accessing or completing tasks	overwhelmed
competent (or not) also see sense of			shame or embarrassment
consent			social anxiety
contributor			stress
cooker			upset
			wellbeing
			encourageable (needs encouraging to do

*Please note, these codes were constructed within the early stages of the analysis. Often being drawn into structuralist thinking, I initially thought it was important to capture 'thoroughly' how the child was constructed across reports, looking to create an overview of where references lay and the quantities of these.

This part of the analysis could be said to reflect Willig's (2008) initial stage 'Discursive Constructions'. The highlighting of all implicit and explicit references to constructions of 'the child' was found to apply to most of the text. This led me to create 'codes' as I sought to make sense of the data and create some sense of 'order'.

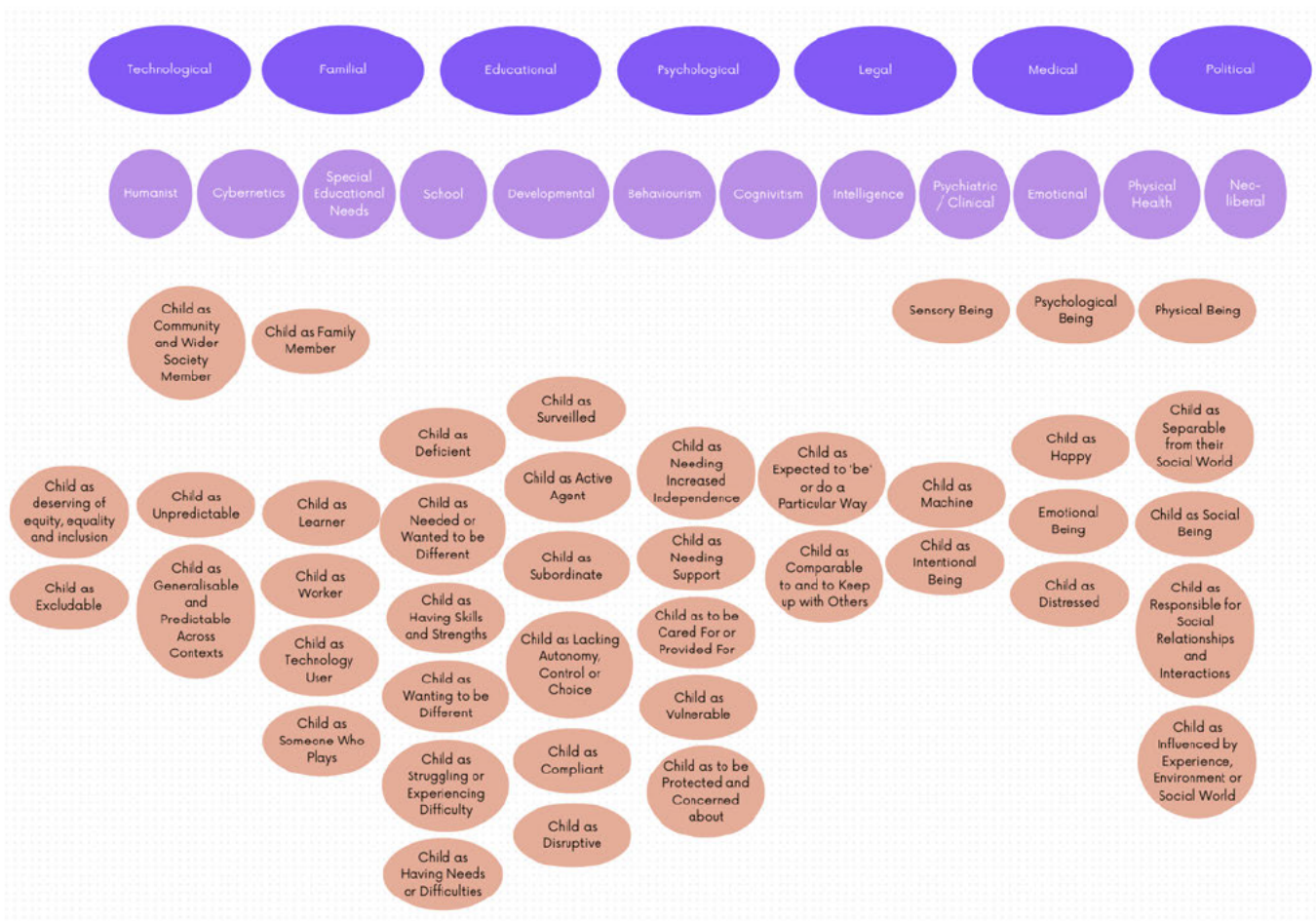
something)	tern memory	on their emotions	behaviours
engager	physical health problems	self-judgers (seeing self as good, bad or comparing)	as to be monitored
excludable or removeable	self-evaluation	that are to be interpreted	can be triggered or has triggers
expected to tolerate or experience sensations in a particular way	social anxiety	that can be distorted	having a capacity
clothing	social interaction skills	having wants or intentions	having levels
different food textures	speech	helpful	information processor
sudden or loud noises	previous settings attended	impulsive	noise maker
tolerate not feeling successful	previous support	independent or developing skills in	recipient of input
tolerate things being different to their wants	having or expressing views	IT user	mental or psychological constructs
family member	about what is helpful or unhelpful for them	job	attitude
feedback giver	as finding something difficult	key adult	that varies depending on mood
feelings	as having worries (inferred from another's perspective)	lacking confidence or skills to say when unsure	towards completing tasks
focuser	as saying that they have friends in school	lacking skills	towards school
friend	as stating reasons for something	lacks autonomy or independence (or choice)	balance and coordination
group member	having interests	learner	cognition
has things that are important to them	having likes and dislikes	expected to recognise numbers and have 1 to 1	concentration span
having a relevant past	as liking something (inc. possibly inferred)	expected to use phonics and sight read	emotional regulation
birth	as enjoying something	learns via explanations	general cognitive ability
cognitive assessment scores or interpretations	as loving something	learns via modelling	having cognitive strengths and weaknesses
early care	as not liking something (from another's perspective)	learns via practice	identity
previous activities	being fussy	to generalise	measurable and fixed (implicit)
previous or early concerns or difficulties	as not liking something (from child's perspective)	liked	memory
academic	as finding something annoying	listened to	motivation
communication	having preferences	listener	phonological awareness
confidence		manager - situations, school day, interactions, transitions	processing speed
flexibility or adapting		mechanistic (responder to stimulation)	profile of abilities or overall abilities
had outbursts or lashed out or hurt		as having functional	reasoning abilities
listening			resilience
phonological skills and short-			self-esteem
			short-term memory
			spatial ability
			verbal and non-

verbal abilities	calming techniques	practical approaches	to manage child's behaviour
verbal memory	time in quieter areas	runner	charity services
mental or psychological processes	time to familiarise with new environments	safety can be compromised	Clinical Psychology or Neuropsychology
confidence	to be seen as an equal within peer group	stamina	Dietician
effort	to feel held in mind and not missing out	play	had involvement from EPS
enthusiasm	needs or special educational needs	potential	Healthy Young Minds
exhaustion	learning and cognition needs	practicer or rehearser	Medical Services
focus or concentrator	physical and sensory	progress maker (previously and current)	Occupational Therapy
perseverance or determination	self-care and independence needs	as made progress (previously or currently)	Physiotherapy
sense of belonging	sensory needs	as needing or wanted to make progress or change	SALT
sense of competence	social and emotional needs	communication	recipient of support
motivatable	speech, language and communication needs	emotional and social development	contingent on EHCP
movement or mover	observable	in relation to self-esteem	recipient of differentiation or adaptations
needing something	outcomes	independent learning skills and life skills	recipient of intervention
attend social activities	outside world go-er	with emotional regulation skills	recipient of opportunities
check-ins	participator	with reading spelling and maths skills	regulator
continued contact during absences	patient	with self-evaluation skills	as a sensory regulator
Indirect approach	body that can be physically manipulated	with social interaction skills	as an emotional regulator
key adult	needing treatment	psychological being (broad use of psychological)	responder
knowledge and skills	perfector	recipient of knowledge	risks
more time to process verbal information	performer	recipient of praise	school student
physical resources	personality or character types	recipient of rewards	sense of self
practice or familiarity	shy	recipient of services	sensory being
prior warning for things and change	phone user	additional needs or disabilities services	sensory receiver
prompts	physical being	as having Team around the Family (TAF) meetings	shopper
reassurance	can be physically hurt or damaged	to support others	singer
sense of belonging and inclusion	pencil gripper		skills
structure	physical space		copng skills
support from an adult			functional skills
support to recognise something			independence skills
support with			interaction and communication skills

learning skills	finishing lunch	regulation
life skills	managing stressful situations	maths or number
problem-solving skills	acted upon as a result of legislation and legislative guidance	organisational
self-care skills	dependent	processing skills or ability
speaking and listening skills	expected to be or do in a particular way (if not fit difficulties)	self-evaluation
sleeper	'toilet', in particular ways	social communication
social being	act or behave in certain ways	thinking
strengths	develop something at a particular age	tripod grip
structure	do the same as children the same age	Interact in a particular way (social communication skills)
supervised	dressing	listen and concentrate for long periods of time
taken to places such as clubs, trips, transition visits	eat or drink in particular ways	move in particular ways
talker...	go to sleep	show distress in a predictable, logical or gradual way
as a comment maker	have a broad or overall view of something	speak and use language
targets	have constructs of a particular standard or level	have clear speech
task, lesson, work completer, do-er, accessor or avoider	ability to concentrate	understand verbal language
thinker	awareness of danger	stay on task, do or complete tasks
thinking they are good at something	balance and coordination	Influenced by their experience
to be concerned about	confidence	not responsible for things (implicitly)
to be provided with something	flexibility	predictable (having things we can generalise about them)
toilet user	independence	separable from their social world
trainer	self-esteem	
transitioner	sense of belonging or inclusion	
TV watcher	have skills of a particular standard or level	
understanding	de-code, read, write and spell or literacy	
walker	emotional	
will be different		
writer or recorder		
Wider Ideas		
accountable or responsible		
for being socially included		
for developing positive relationships		
going to sleep, going to the toilet.		

Appendix D

Visual Showing Constructed 'Overview' of Discourses and Constructions in Early Stages of Analysis



This overview of discourses and constructions was constructed within the early stages of the analysis when I was still regularly being drawn into structuralist thinking. Working through the initial codes, these were collated into what were seen to be 'broader' constructions.

In purple are what I had named 'macro discourses', with the named discourses in pink being seen to sit within these. In orange are what became my initial constructions - here I experienced difficulty distinguishing between named constructions and what might be better described as subjectivities within constructions.

Appendix E

Examples of Analytical Thinking

Initial Code: as experiencing difficulties

There's an expected way to do something – if you could do it any way, it would be seen as a 'different way'

Child as deviating from what would be expected in something

deviating from an expected baseline of 'functioning' properly in something

Assumption of there being a 'proper' way to:

- communicate socially
- reason verbally and non-verbally
- access the curriculum (to understand language, to express ourselves and to apply prior knowledge)
- respond to tasks (considering all information)

How is the child being constructed?

As a social communicator

Expected to interact in a particular way

Azlam experiences difficulties with social communication skills. He has difficulties with turn taking and often interrupts to comment on topics of interest to him. Azlam can struggle to stay on topic during a conversation but can also talk about areas of interest for long periods of time with limited awareness of the needs of the listener. Azlam can need more time to process information given verbally.

- Who decides the topic?
- When not a topic of interest (implied), struggles to stay on topic
- When Azlam chooses, he 'can' stay on topic but can the EP?
- Is the EP struggling to stay on topic? And was the EP staying on topic for too long?

(something about power?)

Initial Code: having a trigger for doing something

'she feels that this is the trigger for him displaying disruptive behaviours'

That there are external causes for children's actions?

Trigger (DEFINITION)

Noun

1. *A movable catch or lever the pulling or pressing of which releases a detent or spring, and sets some force or mechanism in action, e.g. springs a trap. (OED 24.06.22)*

Verb

1. *transitive. To act as a 'trigger' (sense 3) for, causing another event (esp. a chain reaction) to occur; to stimulate or 'set off'; to activate, to bring about; to spark off (an idea, etc.). Also literal, to pull (depress, etc.) the trigger of (a gun or other device).*

Sense 3:

3. *In figurative and allusive uses. in the drawing of a trigger, in a moment, instantaneously. quick on the trigger, quick to act in response to a suggestion, to take advantage of a situation, or the like.*

Child constructed as 'stimulate-able' or 'set off-able' – can be acted upon to produce a particular effect – predictable?

Trigger to mean 'instant cause'? The word trigger feels mechanistic as stimulation response but the EP's and mum's description is richer, describing the trigger as inclusive of thoughts and feelings. Is the trigger the thing in the environment (the work not being understandable + absence of help + the children who might make fun) or the interaction between these and the thoughts of the child?
→ is this highlighting a tension within the construction?

e.g. child as acting instantaneously and mechanistically to particular circumstances but also as having thoughts (they might make fun of me) and feelings (this makes me feel worried) that meaningfully drive actions

Initial Code: Subordinate

Subordinate (DEFINITION)

2.

a. *Belonging to a lower rank, grade, class, or order, and hence governed by or under the authority of one that is higher. Frequently with to.*

(a) *Of a person or group of people.*

(b) *Of power, position, command, or employment.*

Construction: child as subordinate?

Child to be regulated and controlled (as opposed to oppressed)

I've become really confused having this as a construction category as I'm questioning if everything fits into it. Are children, by definition of being in school and being expected to do things and we as EPs writing about how to help make them more able to do things as we expect them to, subordinate and being controlled and regulated? If you're expected to be or do something in a particular way – is that a form of control or regulation?

Distinguishing Constructions Human vs. Meaning Making

I'm realising I am drawn to distinguishing 'child as meaning-maker' from 'child as human' as I am drawn to wanting to convey a possibility of EPs seeking to explain what is happening from a child's perspective in terms of what the meaning they might be making. I am wrestling with this word 'meaning' and what I really mean by this. My initial response is considering what they might be thinking and feeling – how they might be making sense of the situation.

I think I am drawn to separating out human as there seems to perhaps be more surface level child perspectives which reference what a child likes/doesn't like, feelings they think they have but these in themselves having explanatory power i.e. Because of anxiety the child is... For me, this does not offer a sense of the meaning a child is making – where might this anxiety be arising from?

Another aspect that has stirred confusion has been my drawing to put some possible surface level things in the meaning making construction. These include:

'The child is sociable':

For me, this indicates a more in-depth layer of mental life than simply having thoughts and feelings. It suggests they are able to have meaningful and interesting conversations with others which, for me, conveys a capacity to be making meaning.

Why should it fit human?

Because it could simply mean talks to people, they could just talk about what they see or could even talk nonsense. If this was the case though, it feels as though the adult would be more likely to use different language.

'Does not want to miss out on anything':

– instead of something more surface level such as follows others around, likes being around others, this feels to suggest a constructing of 'missing out on things' – the child is seen to see a situation, see that something is happening, then experience perhaps a curiosity to know what this is and be involved.

Why should it fit human?

Could be a simple preference of not wanting of something – of not wanting to be alone. But there seems to be the constructing of 'missing out on something'.

There feels to be something about constructing/construing.

Appendix F

Excerpts from Reflective Journal

02.08.22 Needs or Special Needs?

I keep coming back to this question.

In practice, I was advised to detail all needs as to ensure all of the child's needs would be recognised and responded to.

By definition, SEND is

Special educational needs (SEN)

- xiii. A child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.
- xiv. A child of compulsory school age or a young person has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she:

Within EHCNAs 'needs' is used, and, from my experience, we generally use the term 'needs' as in when someone needs something i.e. when trying to advocate for the child having something you know might benefit them in school.

However, by writing all needs, are we pathologising 'normal' human needs?

Should we only detail what should call for special educational provision to be made for them?

Often we write what should be included as quality first teaching - which brings me back around to the question of transparency and this idea that an EHCNA is to be 'read' for some implicit, underlying meaning or message regarding financial decision-making.

07.08.22 Fixed vs. Fluid?

This concept feels important and I've found there's a lack of clarity around underlying assumptions due to the variety of discourses drawn upon - there's a big focus on progress and development yet cognitive assessments, abilities and disorders are also talked about implying fixed and limited potential. Is this what discourse analysts mean when they refer to contradictions?

I wonder if I might have these as overarching headings for different constructions/discourses? I.e. showing which imply fixed and which imply fluidity, potential and growth? Although I'm not sure it's that simple as it feels even discourses might have within them contradictions when it comes to this idea...

07.08.22 Overwhelmed, Fear of 'Getting it Wrong' - Where to Start?!

I've been trying so hard to get to this point, avoiding putting codes into constructions, now I'm finally ready to 'go for it' and I'm feeling terrified and overwhelmed.

I'm struggling to know where to start, which to pick. I'm fearful of 'getting it wrong'.

Where has this come from? I guess it is normal, but why did I feel less worried prior to this point?

I guess I can see how many directions I could take in terms of my time and I need to find a way of boundarying this so it is realistically manageable in the time I have. I'd love to go in depth in relation to everything but I'm not going to be able to.

I want to have a way of capturing all of the constructions more broadly - so perhaps a graphic with the fuller number of constructions. I feel like I want to put my codes into them but it just feels so time-consuming. I hope I'll work this out as I start focusing in more detail on what I have.

So I want to have:

- An overview of constructions, wider discourses and macro discourses (and possibly some detail in relation to subjectivities and assumptions if this is feasible)
- A deeper focus on a smaller number of constructions / discourses - how will I choose which to prioritise? I will ask myself a set of questions:
 - What stood out the most to me in terms of poignance?
 - What feels to be significant and important to be exploring with the wider EP community
 - What feels as though it might have the most impact?

07.10.22 Reference Points

I'm realising that we crave certainty and 'knowing' to give us a reference point for where we are - our position - and for where we might be headed - what direction.

This is making me think of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle and how maybe it's not possible to know both at once - one is always in the past.

When things are in flux, they are constantly moving and changing - and so to really 'know' is impossible at any one moment - how do we know what to do? Where to go? Who I am?

This has been a personal crisis and I can now see how, practically, it can feel important to have these things - a somewhat stable reference point from which to view and navigate the world from.

Are there ways to capture the uncertain, complex dynamic nature of being and relations whilst also offering a clear reference point from which to stand and think?

07.10.22 Narrative Ideals and EHCNA Outcomes

In narrative, in noticing something pointing to an ideal we can explore where this thought/idea came from, how they feel about it, how it makes them feel as a person and whether this idea adds to their life or is taking away.

It means we can move away from questioning truth to be looking at how ideas influence their life.

One question I'm noticing come up is 'what is our role in creating or reinforcing some of these ideals?' Are there ways in which EPs might contribute new ideals or disrupt status quo ideals?

And, for my EHCNA work, the primary focus being 'what ideals does the yp want?' With these being the outcomes.

Another question coming up is 'what do we do when school/education system/other societal ideals are creating distress for the child and / or conflict with what the child seeks?'

In cases where it cannot come from the child, what ideals do I want to be working from? Why? Might these change?

19.01.23 The Categorisation and Splitting up of 'Needs'

Who decided this? And what does this imply? Do we all experience conflicts and confusion as we try to decipher what is what and where to put our hypotheses?

Should this splitting up of concepts be predetermined by a template before the psychologist has even begun? Does it overrule the idea that a psychologist is applying psychological theory, with the framework already presenting a pre-decided way of conceptualising the human experience? Is the psychologist allowed to defy this way of categorising and conceptualising human experience? Do EPs view their theorising and conceptualisations as neutral as they fit them into these categories? Do they feel these influence and shape how they hypothesise?

28.04.23 Help!!! Different Stories

I'm finding it so hard, even just to write a literature review as I can see so many ways of telling the story - or stories - with some contradicting! I'm feeling myself being pulled towards this idea of 'accuracy' and 'getting it right' again and again, despite knowing there simply is no right. There is no single history of knowledge. There are many, from many different perspectives, each telling a unique (some similar, some contracting) story.

So return to the clearer notion of 'literature review'. You can easily say what others say. I say easily but then that's the other struggle - if I change their words, I see that I'm saying something different. Paraphrasing to try to say exactly the same thing is really hard - there's a need to let go of the risk of it being different. Your reading of it may be different to their intentions anyway...

This line of thinking keeps having me return to a 'what's the point?' and so I think I need a little mantra to put up and keep returning to...

Appendix G

Ethics Approval Letter



Downloaded: 17/01/2022

Approved: 12/01/2022

Jade Charleson
Registration number: 190117665
School of Education
Programme: DEdCPsy

Dear Jade

PROJECT TITLE: How do Educational Psychologists construct 'the child'?

APPLICATION: Reference Number 044241

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 12/01/2022 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 044241 (form submission date: 10/01/2022); (expected project end date: 10/06/2022).
- Participant information sheet 1100027 version 3 (10/01/2022).
- Participant information sheet 1100028 version 3 (10/01/2022).
- Participant information sheet 1100029 version 1 (06/12/2021).
- Participant information sheet 1100030 version 3 (10/01/2022).
- Participant consent form 1100031 version 1 (06/12/2021).
- Participant consent form 1100032 version 1 (06/12/2021).
- Participant consent form 1100033 version 1 (06/12/2021).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Anna Weighall
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure>
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.6710661/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

Appendix H

Information Sheet: Educational Psychologists



A Research Project:

How do Educational Psychologists write about children and young people?

Possible Risks

As this research is adopting a critical discursive lens, it is possible that a level of discomfort may arise through the exploration of discourses that are drawn upon within Educational Psychology and the tracing back to the social and historical conditions that gave rise to these.

This could have the potential for feelings of increasing discomfort and perhaps some level of psychological distress should they be incongruent with your professional or personal values. This risk extends beyond participants taking part to anyone who may experience connection with the discourses explored.

It is important to highlight discourses result from the cultural meanings that circulate within our profession, as well as within society more widely. Thus, the analysis is collective in form, looking across reports, with the focus on discourse and not individual authors.

Discourses result from the cultural meanings that circulate within our profession, as well as within society more widely.

A collective analysis focus is on discourse and not authors.

Steps taken to protect

Several steps have been taken to help mitigate against such risks which include:

All reports used will be anonymised before analysis.

Anonymisation
This involves changing or omitting details that might be identifiable such as names, dates and uncommon circumstances and experiences.

The analysis is collective

Text used directly from reports in the presented research will be captured as partial statements be paraphrased.

The presented research will relate to discourses drawn upon within today's culture of Educational Psychology - not individual EPs.

There may be more reports with consent than needed for the analysis. This means you will not know if your report/s are included (these will be randomly selected).

It is possible that full statements are to be included (e.g. to justify analysis and retain meaning if this appears to be lost).

Should I recognise a case or author, this report will be removed from the sample.

Multiple authors will be included

This aims to provide more distance between potential participants and the research that is presented.

If text used is considered potentially identifiable to you or others with personal knowledge, I will look for this to be redacted beyond assessors.

Confidentiality

Your consent in this research will be kept strictly confidential outside of consenting schools and families.



A Research Project:

How do Educational Psychologists write about children and young people?

Possible Benefits

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this research will help to develop the profession of Educational Psychology by drawing attention to some of the discourses we currently use, alongside their socio-historical roots.

It is hoped that this will enable us as a profession to reflect on the ways in which we write and talk about children and young people and the potential implications in terms of how children and young people are constructed.

It is anticipated that the presentation of such research will enable Educational Psychologists to feel an increased sense of agency when choosing which discourses to privilege in their work. It is also hoped that this research can help to support the profession in its continued strive towards social justice.

What will happen to collected data?

If included, your anonymised report/s will be sent to me securely by a trusted person in the administration team. This will then be stored on a university encrypted secure drive for up to 6 months after the research is written up.

Consent forms, in addition to the collected data (anonymised reports) will be destroyed within 6 months of the research being written up.

Whilst steps have been taken to keep all data anonymised, it will be treated with the level of security given to sensitive personal data as described in the data protection legislation.

Once enough data has been received and can be included in the study, any stored data the admin contact has linking your school to the anonymised reports will be destroyed.



Information about how to raise a complaint relating to the handling of personal data can be found at <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

If you would prefer, you can share something you are unhappy with anonymously by [clicking here](#). Try to give enough details as it will not be possible to contact you unless you share a method of contact. Please be aware that the sharing of particular details may forfeit your full anonymity.

You also have a right to contact the Data Protection Officer for the University of Sheffield or the Information Commissioner's Office if you have a complaint about the use of your personal information within the research.

What happens after the research?

The research will be written up as my thesis and this is something you will be able to access.

I will also look to present the research in a summary form, you will also be able to access this if you would like to.

The research is likely to complete in the summer of 2022.

Details of how to do this will be shared with you once this becomes available.



What if something goes wrong?

How do I make a complaint?

If you are unhappy with something within the research process, you can contact [redacted] who will then liaise with myself whilst maintaining your anonymity.

If this remains unresolved or you would prefer to, you can contact my research supervisor, Sahaja Davis, on t.s.davis@sheffield.ac.uk



For issues relating to something serious occurring you may prefer to speak directly to my research supervisor, Sahaja Davis.

If this is not resolved to your satisfaction, you can contact the Programme Director, Anthony Williams, on anthony.williams@sheffield.ac.uk who can escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels.

A Research Project:

How do Educational Psychologists write about children and young people?

Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that University of Sheffield is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?



This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by The School of Education's department.

What happens now?



If you decide you would be happy to be a potential participant in this research [clicking here](#) will take you to an online consent form.

You will be able to download and save a copy of this information sheet for your records.

You can print a completed consent form (by pressing 'file' and 'print' before pressing 'submit') or you can download and save a copy of the consent form for your records by [clicking here](#).

Contact  

If you would like further information, please contact [redacted] on [redacted] or my research supervisor, [redacted] should [redacted] be unavailable.

They can pass on any questions or forward information whilst protecting your identity as a potential participant.

This research relates to my training on the Doctorate for Educational and Child Psychology (DEdCPsy) course at the University of Sheffield and is expected to finish in 2022.

THANK YOU



This research is organised and funded by



for taking the time to read about my research

Appendix I

Information Sheet: Schools

Information Sheet for Schools

A Research Project:

How do Educational Psychologists write about children and young people?

What is this for?

I would like to use some statutory assessment reports that were carried out for a number of children and young people in your school in my research - but first I want to check that you would be happy for me to do this.

Any details that would make it easy for me to know who the children, school or EP are would be removed or changed before I am able to see a report.

Purpose of Research

I am really interested in how we write about children and young people in Educational Psychology.

I am curious about the different kinds of ideas we use in Educational Psychology and the things this might say about how we think about children and young people.

The overall aim is to draw attention to these ideas and to consider how they might influence how we think about children and young people in different ways.

I am also hoping to explore what might have been happening in history when these ideas first began to see what might have led to these ways of thinking.

This research is not looking at the children or young people in the reports - or the school - instead it looks at the ideas that are used to talk about them.

All taking part is anonymous

Why have I been chosen?

Reports from your school were randomly selected - these are statutory assessments completed as part of the Educational, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process that were completed within a given timeframe and by an EP who has consented for their reports to be used.

TO NOTE

As this research aims to keep highly anonymous to help EPs feel more comfortable with their reports being used, we are asking those to take part who feel comfortable and able to not share their participation with the consenting EP.

What would I have to do?

If you agree to take part, you do not have to do anything other than give consent. This can be done online, a link is provided on the last page.

What would happen?

1) EP Consent
The EP who wrote some of the reports at your school, and other EPs, have consented their reports being used.

Only members of the administration team and our Assistant EP will know who has consented.

I won't know who the child, school or EP is in the reports that I look at.

2) Anonymise
If all consents are gained, those reports will be anonymised and sent securely to me for analysis

This means changing/removing details e.g. names, dates and uncommon details

3) Analysis
I will look at the different ways the children and young people are talked about and the different ideas used across a number of different reports.

4) Write up
This would then be written up as part of my thesis.

5) Summary
You will be offered a summary of the research.

School Consent
A number of schools where a consenting EP has written EHC needs assessments, including yours, are being asked for consent.

Family Consent
Families are also asked if they are happy for their child's report to be used.

Jade Charleson - Year 3 Trainee Educational Psychologist - University of Sheffield - P...

The University of Sheffield

A Research Project:

How do Educational Psychologists write about children and young people?

Possible Risks

As taking part in this research is indirect, any possible risks only apply if you choose to read about the research once it is complete (including a summary which you will be offered).

You may also learn about some of the things that have happened in history that may have led to some of the ideas which are used Educational Psychology. Some of these things might feel uncomfortable or upsetting.



The presented research may draw attention to the idea that there are different ways of thinking about things. It might talk about some ideas in a different way than you are used to and might lead you to question some of the ways in which you think about things.

There is the potential for feelings of discomfort in becoming more aware of particular ideas and how they might influence the way we think about children and young people.

Hearing about the different ways of talking and their possible influences on how we think about children might affect the way you think when you hear people talking about or read something written about a child or young person.

This could be a **negative, neutral or positive** experience depending on how you feel about the ideas and how open you feel to thinking about certain things in different ways.

This might particularly be the case if you feel the ideas have been used in talking about your children in your setting and you feel this is in some way negative in terms of their influenced how they have been thought about.

This could be a **negative, neutral or positive** experience. A negative example might be that it negatively impacts how you think and feel about the person talking/writing as you may prefer other ways of thinking about what they say - this might include working with the same, or a different, EP.

IMPORTANT NOTE
This research sees the ideas people use when they speak and write as developing within a culture - they develop between people and can often becoming typical ways to speak and write about something.

This research is hoping to explore some of the ideas that might have become typical in the wider culture of Educational Psychology..

Whilst unlikely, it is possible that I may recognise, or think I recognise, the authoring EP, your school and/or a child in an anonymised report e.g. previously working with them.

Steps taken to protect

There may be more reports with consent than needed for the analysis. This means you will not know if a report from your school, or by the EP you know, is included.

All reports used will be anonymised before analysis.

Any words/details that look like they might give clues to who an EP, school or child is will be changed.

Should I recognise a child, EP or school their report will not be used in the research and will be deleted.

This can help the research that is presented feel less personal to children who attended your school or the EP you know.

Reports will not be analysed individually but will be combined with other reports written by multiple EPs, from multiple schools.

The presented research will not apply individually but will relate more generally to how we write about children and young people.

If text used is judged to have the potential for the identity of an EP, child or school to be known, I will look for these text examples to be hidden in the presented research (redacted) and only available to the people assessing my thesis.



A Research Project:

How do Educational Psychologists write about children and young people?

Possible Benefits

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this research will help to develop the profession of Educational Psychology by drawing attention to some of the ideas we use, alongside their historical beginnings.

It is hoped that this will enable us as a profession to reflect on the ways in which we write and talk about children and young people and the possible influences on how children and young people are thought about.

In reading the presented research, you may find there are other benefits for you, such as Learning something new, being more aware of different ideas used in psychology as well as being more aware of some different ways of thinking about children and young people - some which you might find helpful as someone who works with children and young people..

What will happen to collected data?

If included, anonymised reports will be sent to me securely. This will then be stored on an encrypted university secure drive for up to 6 months after the research has been written up.

Consent forms, in addition to the collected data (anonymised reports), will be destroyed within 6 months of the research being written up.

Whilst steps have been taken to keep all data anonymised, it will be treated with the level of security given to sensitive personal data as described in the data protection legislation.

Once enough data has been received and can be included in the study, any stored data linking your school to the anonymised reports will be destroyed.

If you would prefer, you can share something you are unhappy with anonymously by [clicking here](#). Try to give enough details as it will not be possible to contact you unless you share a method of contact. Please be aware that the sharing of particular details may forfeit your full anonymity.

You also have a right to contact the Data Protection Officer for the University of Sheffield or the Information Commissioner's Office if you have a complaint about the use of your personal information within the research.

What happens after the research?

The research will be written up as my thesis and this is something you will be able to access.

I will also look to present the research in a summary form, you will also be able to access this if you would like to.

The research is likely to complete in the summer of 2022.

Details of how to do this will be shared with you once this becomes available.

What if something goes wrong?

How do I make a complaint?

If you are unhappy with something within the research process, using the subject 'Jade's Thesis Complaint' please contact [redacted] who will then liaise with myself whilst maintaining your anonymity.

If this remains unresolved or you would prefer to, you can contact my research supervisor, Sahaja Davis, on t.s.davis@sheffield.ac.uk

For issues relating to something serious occurring you may prefer to speak directly to my research supervisor, Sahaja Davis.

If this is not resolved to your satisfaction, you can contact the Programme Director, Anthony Williams, on anthony.williams@sheffield.ac.uk who can escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels.

Information about how to raise a complaint relating to the handling of personal data can be found at <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/privacy/ta-protection/privacy/general>.



A Research Project:

How do Educational Psychologists write about children and young people?

Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that University of Sheffield is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by The School of Education's department.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part is your choice.

You can withdraw consent anytime before the analysis begins and do not have to give a reason.

If you wish to withdraw consent, please contact [redacted]

As reports will be anonymous and the analysis involves different reports, removing reports from your school after the analysis has begun may not be possible.

This is expected to be late May 2022.

This research is not linked with the Local Authority and your decision or taking part will not influence the EHCP process or access to any services, such as the Educational Psychology Service.

What happens now?

If you decide you would be happy for reports from your school to potentially be included, [clicking here](#) will take you to an online consent form.

You will be able to download and save a copy of this information sheet for your records.

You can download and save a copy of the consent form by pressing 'file' and 'print' then changing the printer name/destination to 'PDF'. You should then be able to 'print' which allows you to save your form as a PDF file.

Contact

If you would like further information, using the subject 'Jade's Thesis Query', please contact [redacted] or my research supervisor, [redacted] should [redacted] be unavailable.

They can pass on any questions or forward information whilst protecting your identity as a potential participant.

This research relates to my training on the Doctorate for Educational and Child Psychology (DEdCPsy) course at the University of Sheffield and is expected to finish in 2022.

This research is organised and funded by



THANK YOU



for taking the time to read about my research

Appendix J

Information Sheet: Carers and Parents

Information Sheet for Carers, Parents and Guardians

A Research Project:

How do Educational Psychologists write about children and young people?

Purpose of Research

What is this for?

I would like to use your child's report in my research but first want to check that you would be happy for me to do this.

Any details that would make it easy for me to know who your child is would be removed or changed before I am able to see it.

This research is not looking at the children or young people in the reports but instead the ideas that are used to talk about them.

I am really interested in how we write about children and young people in Educational Psychology.

I am curious about the different kinds of ideas we use in Educational Psychology and the things this might say about how we think about children and young people.

The overall aim is to draw attention to these ideas and to consider how they might influence how we think about children and young people in different ways.

I am also hoping to explore what might have been happening in history when these ideas first began to see what might have led to these ways of thinking.

Why have I been chosen?

The reports chosen for this research are those written by EPs as part of the Educational, Health (EHC) and Care Needs Assessment process.

Your child's report was randomly selected and so you are being asked if it would be okay for this to be used in this research.

'EP' is used to refer to Educational Psychologists for short.

What would I have to do?

If you agree to take part, you will not have to do anything other than give consent. This can be done online, a link is provided for this on the last page.

All taking part is anonymous

What would happen?

- 1) EP Consent**
The EP who wrote your child's report, as well as other EPs, have consented to their reports being used.
- 2) School Consent**
A number of schools where a consenting EP has written EHC needs assessments, including your child's school, are being asked to consent.
Only members of the administration team and an Assistant EP will know who has consented.
- 3) Your Consent**
Families are also being asked if they are happy for their child's report to be used. This is your decision - it is okay to say no.
- 4) Anonymise**
If you are happy for your child's report to be included, this will be anonymised and sent securely to me for analysis.
This involves changing or removing details such as names, dates and uncommon details to help protect everyone's identity.
- 5) Analysis**
As part of this, I will look at the different ways the children and young people are talked about and the different ideas used across a number of different reports, written by a number of different EPs.
- 6) Write up**
This would then be written up as part of my thesis.
- 7) Summary**
You will be offered a summary of the research.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part is your choice. You can withdraw consent anytime before the analysis begins and do not have to give a reason.

As reports will be anonymous and the analysis involves different reports, removing your child's report after the analysis has begun may not be possible. This is expected to be late May 2022.

If you wish to withdraw consent, please contact [redacted] on [redacted]

IMPORTANT NOTE
This research is not linked to the Local Authority and your decision and any taking part will in no way influence the EHCP process or access to any services, such as the Educational Psychology Service.

The University Of Sheffield.

Jade Charleson - Year 3 Trainee Educational Psychologist - University of Sheffield - Page 1

A Research Project:

How do Educational Psychologists write about children and young people?

Possible Risks

As taking part in this research is indirect, any possible risks only apply if you choose to read about the research once it is complete (including a summary which you will be offered).

The presented research may draw attention to the idea that there are different ways of thinking about things. It might talk about some ideas in a different way than you are used to and might lead you to question some of the ways in which you think about things.

There is the potential for feelings of discomfort in becoming more aware of particular ideas and how they might influence the way we think about children and young people.

Hearing about the different ways of talking and their possible influences on how we think about children might affect the way you think when you hear people talking about children or when you read something written about young people.

This could be a negative, neutral or positive experience depending on how you feel about the ideas and how open you feel to thinking about these things in different ways.

This might particularly be the case if you feel the ideas have been used in talking about your child/ren and may lead you to wonder about influences on how your child has or is thought about, if you feel this could be in some way negative.

Again this could be a negative, neutral or positive experience. An example of this being negative might be that it negatively impacts how you think and feel about the person talking/writing as you may prefer other ways of thinking about what they say - this might include working with the same, or a different, EP.

You may also learn about some of the things that have happened in history that may have led to some of the ideas which are used Educational Psychology. Some of these things might feel uncomfortable or upsetting.

IMPORTANT NOTE
This research sees the ideas people use when they speak and write as developing within a culture - they develop between people and can often becoming typical ways to speak and write about something.

This research is hoping to explore some of the ideas that might have become typical in the wider culture of Educational Psychology.

Whilst unlikely, it is possible that I may recognise, or think I recognise, the authoring EP, your school and/or a child in an anonymised report e.g. previously working with them.

steps taken to protect

Your child's report will not be analysed individually but will be combined with other reports.

The presented research will not apply individually but will relate more generally to how we write about children and young people.

All reports used will be anonymised before analysis.

Any words/details that look like they might give clues to who a child is will be changed.



Should I recognise a child or EP, their report will not be used in the research and will be deleted.



There is an aim to have consent for more reports than needed so a smaller number of anonymised reports can be randomly selected for analysis. This means that your child's report, and the EP, might not be included to help the presented research feel less personal to your child - and the EP.

If text used is judged to have the potential for the identity of your child to be known, I will look for these text examples to be hidden in the presented research (redacted) and only available to the people assessing my thesis.



A Research Project:

How do Educational Psychologists write about children and young people?

Possible Benefits

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this research will help to develop the profession of Educational Psychology by drawing attention to some of the ideas we use, alongside their historical beginnings.

It is hoped that this will enable us as a profession to reflect on the ways in which we write and talk about children and young people and the possible influences on how children and young people are thought about. This might help us to feel more able to choose to write in ways we think might be the most useful for children and young people.

In reading the presented research, you may find there are other benefits for you, such as Learning something new, being more aware of different ideas used in psychology as well as being more aware of some different ways of thinking about children and young people - some which you might find helpful as a carer or parent.

What will happen to collected data?

If included, your child's anonymised report will be sent to me securely by a trusted person in the administration team or an Assistant EP. This will then be stored on an encrypted university secure drive for up to 6 months after the research is written up.

Consent forms, in addition to the collected data, will be destroyed within a period of 6 months following the research being written up.

Whilst steps have been taken to keep all data anonymised, it will be treated with the level of security given to sensitive personal data as described in the data protection legislation.

Once enough data has been received and can be included in the study, any stored data the admin contact has linking your child to the anonymised reports will be destroyed.

What happens after the research?

The research will be written up as my thesis and this is something you will be able to access.

I will also look to present the research in a summary form, you will also be able to access this if you would like to.

The research is likely to complete in the summer of 2022.

Details of how to do this will be shared with you once this becomes available.

What if something goes wrong?

How do I make a complaint?

If you are unhappy with something within the research process, using the subject 'Jade's Thesis Complaint' please contact [redacted] on [redacted] who will then liaise with myself whilst maintaining your anonymity.

If this remains unresolved or you would prefer to, you can contact my research supervisor, Sahaja Davis, on [redacted] or t.s.davis@sheffield.ac.uk

For issues relating to something serious occurring you may prefer to speak directly to my research supervisor, Sahaja Davis.

If this is not resolved to your satisfaction, you can contact the Programme Director, Anthony Williams, on anthony.williams@sheffield.ac.uk who can escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels.

If you would prefer, you can share something you are unhappy with anonymously by [clicking here](#). Try to give enough details as it will not be possible to contact you unless you share a method of contact. Please be aware that the sharing of particular details may forfeit your full anonymity.

You also have a right to contact the Data Protection Officer for the University of Sheffield or the Information Commissioner's Office if you have a complaint about the use of your personal information within the research.

Information about how to raise a complaint relating to the handling of personal data can be found at <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/department/privacy/general>.

A Research Project:

How do Educational Psychologists write about children and young people?

Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that University of Sheffield is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?



This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by The School of Education's department.

What happens now?

You can download and save a copy of this information sheet for your records.

If you decide you would be happy for your child's report to potentially being included, [clicking here](#) will take you to an online consent form.

You can download and save a copy of the consent form by pressing 'file' and 'print' then changing the printer name/destination to 'PDF'. You should then be able to 'print' which allows you to save your form as a PDF file.

Contact

If you would like further information, using the subject 'Jade's Thesis Query', please contact [redacted] on [redacted] or my research supervisor, [redacted] should [redacted] be unavailable.

They can pass on any questions or forward information whilst protecting your identity as a potential participant.

This research relates to my training on the Doctorate for Educational and Child Psychology (DEdCPsy) course at the University of Sheffield and is expected to finish in 2022.

THANK YOU

for your time

This research is organised and funded by



Appendix K

Consent Form: Educational Psychologists

Educational Psychologist Consent Form

This consent form relates to the research 'How do Educational Psychologists Write About Children and Young People?' which is detailed in the 'Information sheet for Educational Psychologists'.

Taking Part in This Project

Please tick to confirm your agreement with the following statements. If you disagree with a statement, please leave the tick box blank. *

- I have read and understood the project information sheet entitled 'Information sheet for Educational Psychologists' relating to the research project 'How do Educational Psychologists write about children and young people?' or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you 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 my taking part in this project is indirect and I would not need to do anything. I understand that giving my consent would mean that one or more of my reports written as part of the Education, Health and Care (EHC) Needs Assessment process may be anonymised and used as part of this research.
- I understand that even if I give consent, my report/s may not be used.
- I understand that if my report/s are anonymised and selected to be used, a critical discourse analysis will be carried out. I understand that this will be done collectively across multiple reports which will be from multiple authors.
- I understand that steps will be taken keep my potential participation confidential, including from the researcher who will be carrying out the analysis. This will be done with the support of a trusted third party from the administration team.
- I understand that if the researcher recognises aspects of a report which leads to my, a school's or a young person's, identification, this report will be removed from the sample and not used in the research.
- I understand that steps will be taken to keep the school and young person in the reports confidential, including from the researcher who will be carrying out the analysis. This will be done with the support of a trusted third party from the administration team.
- I understand that the school and parent/carer of the child or young person in the report will also be asked for their consent with the help of a trusted third party in the administration team.
- 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 I can withdraw from the research/study, with or without notice, at any time up until the data has been anonymised and the analysis has begun. An estimated date for this is the week commencing 28th March 2022. I understand that 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 the information will be used during and after the project

Please tick to confirm your agreement with the following statements. If you disagree with a statement, please leave the tick box blank. *

- I understand that all personal details within the reports, such as names, phone numbers, addresses and email addresses etc. will be removed and that steps will be taken to anonymise reports by changing or omitting any details that might appear likely to lead to identification. I understand that measures will be taken to keep this information confidential to a trusted third party from the administration team.
- I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that steps will be taken to ensure that my, and the young person's, identity will remain protected which may involve paraphrasing, using partial statements or changing details that may be particularly uncommon.
- I understand that it may be deemed necessary for the researcher to use full and unedited statements from my report/s and that if the researcher feels this poses a risk to myself, the school or the young person in terms of potential identification, they will look for these to be redacted beyond those assessing the research. I understand that if this happens, assessors will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Participant's Full Name Printed:
(Educational Psychologist)

Signature:

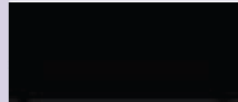
Date:

Researcher's Full Name Printed:

Signature:

Date:

Jade Charleson



Project Contact Details for Further Information

██████████ (Trusted Third Party Contact
from the Administration Team)
Email address:
██████████

██████████ (Research Supervisor)
School of Education,
University of Sheffield
Western Bank
Sheffield
S10 2TN
Email address: ██████████

PLEASE NOTE: If you contact me directly, this may have direct implications in terms of maintaining your anonymity from the researcher within the project.

Appendix L

Consent Form: Schools

School Consent Form

This relates to the research: 'How do Educational Psychologists Write About Children and Young People?'

Taking Part in This Project

Please tick to confirm your agreement with the following statements. If you disagree with a statement, please leave the tick box blank. *

I have read and understood the project information sheet entitled 'Information Sheet for Schools' relating to the research project 'How do Educational Psychologists write about children and young people?' or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you 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 my taking part in this project is indirect and I would not need to do anything. I understand that giving my consent would mean reports written as part of the Education, Health and Care (EHC) Needs Assessment process for children and young people attending my school could be anonymised and may be used as part of this research.

I understand that measures are in place to help Educational Psychologists (EPs) feel safer in having their reports used in this research and that this includes EPs not knowing which reports might be used. I can confirm I will not actively share with the EP that our school was selected and the reports that might be included.

I understand that I may be asked to help share information with the carers, parents and guardians of the young people named by a member of the administration team. I understand that this information will be provided to me and that I might need to help a carer/parent/guardian access the consent form or sign a printed consent form.

I understand that even if I give consent, report/s from my school might not be used.

I understand that if reports from my school are anonymised and selected to be used, an analysis will be carried out. I understand that this will be done collectively across multiple reports relating to different children and which will be written by multiple EPs. I understand that this analysis will look at how children and young people are talked about, including the different ideas used in psychology and their historical origins.

I understand that if the researcher recognises aspects of a report which leads to the EP's, a school's or a young person's, identification, this report will be removed from the sample and will not be used in the research.

I understand that steps will be taken to keep the EP who wrote the report, the school, young person and anyone else mentioned in the reports confidential, including from the researcher who will be carrying out the analysis. This will be done with the support of a trusted third party from the administration team.

I understand that the EP who wrote the report and the children and young people's carers/parents will also have been asked for their consent before a report is anonymised and potentially used in the research.

I understand that this research is not linked with the Local Authority and my decision will in no way influence my school's access to services, such as the Educational Psychology Service. I also understand that it will in no way influence processes such as the EHCP process.

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 I can withdraw from the research/study, with or without notice, at any time up until the data has been anonymised and the analysis has begun. An estimated date for this is January 2022. I understand that 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 the information will be used during and after the project

I understand that all personal details within the reports, such as names, phone numbers, addresses and email addresses etc. will be removed and that steps will be taken to anonymise reports by changing or omitting any details that might appear likely to lead to identification. I understand that measures will be taken to keep this information confidential to a trusted third party from the administration team.

I understand and agree that words from the reports written for children and young people from my school may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that steps will be taken to ensure that the school's, young person's and EP's identity will remain protected. This may involve paraphrasing, using partial statements or changing details that may be particularly uncommon.

I understand that it may be deemed necessary for the researcher to use full and unedited statements from the reports written about young people from my school. I understand that if the researcher feels that this poses a risk to a child, or young person, the school or EP in terms of potential identification, they will look for these to be redacted beyond those assessing the research. I understand that if this happens, assessors will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Participant's Full Name Printed:
(representative of school)

Signature:

Date:

Researcher's Full Name Printed:

Jade Charleson

Signature:

Date:

Your Role In School:

Your School/Setting Name:

Project Contact Details for Further Information

██████████ (Trusted Third Party Contact from the
Administration Team)
Email address: ██████████

██████████ (Research Supervisor)
School of Education,
University of Sheffield
Western Bank
Sheffield
S10 2TN

Email address: ██████████

PLEASE NOTE: If you contact me directly, this may have direct implications in terms of maintaining your anonymity from the researcher within the project.

Appendix M

Consent Form: Carers and Parents

Carer, Parent or Guardian Consent Form

This relates to the research: 'How do Educational Psychologists Write About Children and Young People?'

Please see 'Information sheet for Carers, Parents and Guardians' for more information

Taking Part in This Project

Please tick to confirm your agreement with the following statements. If you disagree with a statement, please leave the tick box blank. *

I have read and understood the project information sheet entitled 'Information sheet for Carers, Parents and Guardians' relating to the research project 'How do Educational Psychologists write about children and young people?' or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you 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 my taking part in this project is indirect and I would not need to do anything. I understand that giving my consent would mean that one of my child's reports written as part of the Education, Health and Care (EHC) Needs Assessment process would be anonymised and may be used as part of this research.

I understand that even if I give consent, my child's report/s may not be used.

I understand that if my child's report is anonymised and selected to be used, an analysis will be carried out. I understand that this will be done collectively across multiple reports relating to different children and which will be written by multiple EPs. I understand that this analysis will not look at my child individually but will look at how children and young people are talked about, including the different ideas used in psychology and their historical origins.

I understand that if the researcher recognises aspects of a report which leads to the EP's, a school's or a young person's, identification, this report will be removed from the sample and will not be used in the research.

I understand that steps will be taken to keep the school, young person and anyone else mentioned in the reports confidential, including from the researcher who will be carrying out the analysis. This will be done with the support of a trusted third party

I understand that the school and the EP who wrote the report will also have been asked for their consent with the help of a trusted third party in the administration team.

I understand that this research is not linked to the Local Authority and my decision will in no way influence my child's ability to access services, such as the Educational Psychology Service. I also understand that it will in no way influence processes such as the EHCP process.

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 I can withdraw from the research/study, with or without notice, at any time up until the data has been anonymised and the analysis has begun. An estimated date for this is January 2022. I understand that 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 the information will be used during and after the project

Please tick to confirm your agreement with the following statements. If you disagree with a statement, please leave the tick box blank. *

- I understand that all personal details within the reports, such as names, phone numbers, addresses and email addresses etc. will be removed and that steps will be taken to anonymise reports by changing or omitting any details that might appear likely to lead to identification. I understand that measures will be taken to keep this information confidential to a trusted third party from the administration team.
- I understand and agree that words from my child's report may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that steps will be taken to ensure that my child's identity, as well as the school's and EP's identity will remain protected which may involve paraphrasing, using partial statements or changing details that may be particularly uncommon.
- I understand that it may be deemed necessary for the researcher to use full and unedited statements from my child's report and that if the researcher feels that this poses a risk to my child, the school or EP in terms of potential identification, they will look for these to be redacted beyond those assessing the research. I understand that if this happens, assessors will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Participant's Full Name Printed:
(carer, parent or guardian)

Signature:

Date:

Researcher's Full Name Printed:

Jade Charleson

Signature:

Date:

Your Child's Full Name:

Your Child's School:

Project Contact Details for Further Information

██████████ (Trusted Third Party Contact from the Administration Team)
Email address: ██████████

██████████ (Research Supervisor)
School of Education,
University of Sheffield
Western Bank
Sheffield
S10 2TN
Email address: ██████████

PLEASE NOTE: If you contact me directly, this may have direct implications in terms of maintaining your anonymity from the researcher within the project.