The University Of Sheffield.

Through Their Eyes: A Mini Ethnographic and Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Children with Severe and Complex Learning Needs in a mainstream School.

Jill Breden

215976738

Research submitted in part requirement for the Doctor of Educational and Child Psychology.

The University of Sheffield: School of Education.

Research supervisor: Dr Penny Fogg

32,562

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all members of the research school, the parents, the school staff, and especially the children for welcoming me into their space with such openness and warmth.

I would like to thank Dr. Penny Fogg, my research supervisor. I am so grateful for your enthusiasm toward my project and for the thoughtful reflections and conversations we shared throughout this journey.

I would like to thank Lynne Mackey, my pastoral tutor, we've had some great conversations where you have encouraged me every step of the way, thank you.

I would also like to thank everyone at my placement for their interest and support—especially Dr. Caroline Gifford Dixon, for listening to me during moments when I felt 'stuck' in my research and for helping me manage my workload to carve out time for writing.

To my mum and dad, thank you for your endless encouragement and support. I know how proud you are of all of us. *We are, because of you.*

I owe immense gratitude to my partner, John, for your unwavering support for my change of career and your amazing cooking! To my two wonderful teenage daughters, Daisy and Sophie, your energy, enthusiasm, and curiosity about the world we live in continually remind me of the vitality of human life. You inspire me every day.

Lastly, I would like to thank my triplet sisters. Paula, I am deeply grateful for the support and love you have shown me as I embarked on this doctorate. Julie, you have given me more than you will ever know. I wish everyone could feel as fortunate as I do to be loved by you.

Abstract

This research thesis is an attempt to counteract the many assumptions that are made about the lives of children and young people who are defined as having a severe and complex learning disability (SCLD). Since the adoption of the Salamanca statement (UNESCO 1994) for the rights of all children to receive a quality education in 'regular' schools, the understanding of what inclusion means has been heavily debated in research (Graham & Slee, 2008). Left out of the debate and without a voice are the children with SCLD. Through a mini ethnographic and phenomenological methodology, I have attempted to hear two children's experiences of their mainstream school, through observation and field notes, participant observation and the act of 'being with' (Morris, 2003), alongside informal conversations with their teachers and parents and a process of critical reflexivity. The data was analysed through a structured inductive, immersive and iterative process of eidetic imagination (Finlay, 2012; Giorgi, 2009).

I identified emerging themes from the children's lived experiences, which I interpreted and explicated utilising metaphor, so that the reader can 'hear' their experiences. From 'listening' to the children's lived experiences I then made a case for what I believe to be important contributions relevant to the debate of specialist education and inclusion. Implications for educational psychologist practice are also discussed.

The University Of Sheffield.

A table of abbreviations

Acronym	Definition
SCLD	Severe and complex learning disability

PMLD	Profound and multiple learning disability
CYP	Children and young people
EP	Educational Psychologist
EHCP	Education, Health and Care plan
EHCNA	Education health and care needs assessment
LA	Local authority
TEP	Trainee educational psychologist
AA	Attention Autism/ bucket time
IE	Inclusive Education
PBS	Positive Behaviour Support
FBA	Functional behavioural Analysis
CDT	Critical Disability Theory
CEP	Critical Educational Psychology

Chapter one – Introduction

The idea for this research originated from a conversation with a parent whose child had been labelled as having severe and complex learning disabilities (SCLD). Despite being enrolled in a mainstream primary school, the headteacher expressed concerns that the current setting could not meet the child's special educational needs. A suggestion was made to the parent, that a specialist placement might be more appropriate, based primarily on the child's perceived reluctance to engage with their peers and the need for a fully differentiated, bespoke curriculum. The headteacher maintained that the provision on offer was not representative of 'true inclusion'. However, the parent offered a contrasting view, describing her daughter's experience of inclusion through the every day, relational moments, such as, her daughter greeting familiar people during the journey to school, and the visible joy she exhibited when passing the school building. This divergence in perspectives raised a question for me, regarding whose definition of inclusion should guide educational placement decisions and how the individual experiences of children with SCLD are frequently overlooked.

My professional background as an inclusion advisory teacher, and more recently, as a trainee educational psychologist (TEP) has further informed this research idea. I have often encountered definitive statements such as 'this isn't inclusion' or 'this wouldn't be inclusion,' said with an implicit assumption of shared understanding. Such claims, however, hide underlying inconsistencies and uncertainty about the conceptual underpinnings of inclusion. This prompted me to want to critically examine the origins, meanings, and broader implications of the term 'inclusion', therefore, I was inspired to question these words more closely within educational discourse.

A making sense moment in my academic journey was encountering Colley's (2020) critique of inclusive education policies. His paper titled, 'To what extent have learners with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties been excluded from the policy and practice of inclusive education?' exposes the systemic exclusion of CYP with severe, profound, and multiple learning difficulties (SLD/PMLD) from mainstream settings. His analysis reveals a

persistent gap between policy and practice, for example, systemic barriers such as under-resourced schools, insufficient teacher training, and entrenched societal biases contributing to the persistent segregation of these CYP. Colley argues that genuine inclusion requires structural reform, targeted resource allocation, and a cultural shift away from fixed ableist assumptions. The perspective that resonated most strongly with me, was the idea that this group of people are almost rendered invisible in policy by a refusal to acknowledge or address their existence within entrenched societal bias. This aligned with both my professional observations and my personal reflections as a sibling to an adult with SCLD.

Shortly before starting my doctoral training, I was engaged in advocating for my sister's care plan. This process laid bare the systemic power imbalances and ableist structures that frequently silence the voices of those with SCLD and their families (Johnson, 2009). Despite my persistent efforts to amplify her perspective, systemic resistance emerged when her lived experiences deviated from their pre-established narratives. This experience prompted a critical reflection on the concept of 'voice', both its presence and its absence, and on the lifelong impact of being unheard or misunderstood within institutional frameworks (Fricker, 2007; Morris, 2001). Consequently, this research is driven by an inclination to explore both inclusion and voice as interrelated constructs, motivated by a desire to challenge systemic inequities while fostering a more empathetic educational discourse.

This research also arises from tensions observed in professional practice, particularly in decisions regarding the placement of children with SCLD. Such discussions often rest on unchallenged assumptions about what constitutes a child's best interests, yet these deliberations rarely incorporate the perspectives of the children themselves. This omission reflects a broader epistemic injustice, whereby children with SCLD are presumed incapable of articulating meaningful viewpoints (Colley, 2020).

Observations made during my doctoral training further illuminate the systemic marginalisation of children with SCLD. Educational targets for children with SCLD frequently embody deficit framing, such as setting goals that pathologize differences by expecting, for instance, that a

child engage with a peer for a fixed duration. Dehumanising discourse, as evidenced by comments like ‘I’ve seen worse,’ (about a child I went to observe in year 1 of my training) further contributes to a policy environment that renders the voices of CYP with SCLD virtually invisible.

In conclusion, my study acts as both an academic inquiry and a moral obligation. I want to critically analyse the frameworks that marginalise CYP with SCLD, while simultaneously reinforcing a commitment to solidarity and justice. Drawing on my sister's lived experience and my professional background, my research seeks to interrogate unexamined assumptions and elevate perspectives that are often marginalised. Ultimately, I want to engage in an educational dialogue that emphasises empathy, inclusivity, and the fundamental right of *every* child to be seen, heard, and valued.

Chapter two: Critical literature review

Introduction

This section critically traces the contested evolution of 'inclusive education' (IE) as a concept, beginning with its historical emergence and the persistent ambiguity surrounding its interpretation. First, I examine how the term has been operationalised within policy and professional discourse, contrasting these institutional definitions with the lived understandings of children and young people (CYP). Building on this, I interrogate the concept of 'voice' in inclusive contexts, for example what it signifies to 'have' a voice, who is afforded this privilege, and how the denial of agency, often justified through deficit assumptions, perpetuates epistemic marginalisation. Finally, I situate this discussion within the broader research landscape, highlighting the scarcity of research centring CYP's with SCLD to have a voice. Through this review, the section establishes the rationale for this study's core aim, which is to amplify the voices of those systematically excluded from conversations about the systems designed for them.

Part one

History of education.

Prior to the 1970s, children with learning disabilities in the UK were deemed 'uneducable' and most often institutionalised in hospitals or excluded from formal schooling (Weheymer & Smith, 2016). This began to shift in the 1970s, when activism by disability rights advocates prompted a landmark inquiry into the education of children then labelled as 'handicapped' (De Boer et al., 2010). The resulting *Warnock Report* (1978) challenged this exclusionary paradigm, arguing that all children regardless of disability had a right to education. Its recommendations directly influenced the *1981 Education Act*, which urged local authorities to educate children with special educational needs in mainstream community schools where possible. Building on this momentum, the *Salamanca Statement* (UNESCO, 1994) enshrined IE as a global social justice imperative, declaring that all children should attend 'regular' schools alongside their

peers, a philosophy rooted in humanitarian principles of equity and belonging (Terzi, 2014). Today, inclusion is perceived as the practice of educating children with moderate to severe learning disabilities in mainstream schools, though debates persist about how to meaningfully realise this ideal (Dell'Anna et al, 2022).

The momentum behind the rapid and global shift in policy was the understanding that school is a microcosm of societal attitudes and practice (Artille's et al, 2006) and inclusive education was believed to be the most effective means of combatting discrimination and oppression and as an ethical expression of respect for the 'other' (Cigman, 2007). However, despite IE being theorised within social justice and equity discourses (Slee, 2001), it is widely agreed that the intended aim of honouring diversity and welcoming all learners into the same educational spaces has not been realised (Slee, 2001).

A possible reason for difficulties with realising the aims of the IE policies could lie in the ambiguous wording. For example, the 1981 Education Act specified that 'children with special educational needs should, where possible, attend mainstream schools' (Byers & Lawson, 2015), a provision that allows for considerable discretion. The Salamanca Statement similarly frames inclusion as conditional, urging nations 'to adopt the principle of inclusive education, enrolling children in regular schools *unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise*' (UNESCO, 1994). Current English policy retains this ambiguity: the SEND Code of Practice (2015) advocates inclusion unless it is deemed '*incompatible with the efficient education of others or the efficient use of resources*' (DfE, 2015). Such vague terminology suggests that inclusive education policies are inevitably mediated through the historical, cultural, and ideological perspectives of governments, institutions, and communities (Mittler, 2000). This implies that societal attitudes and locally-specific conditions (Wearmouth, 2011), alongside national or regional practical constraints (Ainscow, 2005), fundamentally shape how inclusion is conceptualised and operationalised.

English context

The needle returns to the start of the track and we all sing along like before

Following the landmark 1981 Education Act, which was informed by the Warnock Report (1978) and formally established a right to education for all children with special educational needs, England's special educational needs framework in the early 2000s operated under the twin pillars of the 1996 Education Act and the 2001 SEN Code of Practice. This era enshrined a formal 'presumption of mainstreaming' (DfES, 2001, p. 14), positioning mainstream placement as the default, yet granted local authorities significant discretion over both placement decisions and the nature of support provided. By 2010, however, a decisive shift was signalled by the incoming Coalition Government, declaring in its manifesto: 'We believe the most vulnerable children deserve the very highest quality of care... (and) will... remove the bias towards inclusion' (Cabinet Office, 2010). This statement heralded a decade-long policy trajectory explicitly aimed at 'removing the bias towards inclusion' and strengthening parental choice by improving the range and diversity of schools from which parents can choose (Department for Education, 2011).

David Cameron's argument for ending the 'bias towards inclusion' deliberately reframed the debate. Inclusion was no longer treated as an unquestioned ideal but rather as something requiring pragmatic management (Runswick-Cole, 2011). It was positioned as a response to what some identified as the 'problem of inclusion' and the unintended harms and challenges of implementing inclusion without adequate support, particularly for children with SCLD (Warnock, 2005).

The subsequent Children and Families Act 2014 (implemented 2015) introduced further nuance. Sections 33–34 reinstated mainstream placement as the statutory default, subject only to parental preference or demonstrable harm to peers' education. Simultaneously, the accompanying SEND Code of Practice (COP) (2015), heralded as the most significant overhaul in thirty years (DfE, 2011) replacing statements of Special Educational Needs with Education, Health and Care Plans, and extending support for children and young people (CYP) up to age 25. The COP (2015) centred on principles prioritising child outcomes, strengthening parental voice, focusing on individual needs, and enhancing accountability,

translating these into seven key aims including empowering participation, granting greater choice and control, and promoting inclusive practice and barrier removal (DfE & DoH, 2015; Tysoe et al, 2021).

In theory, the COP represented a progressive and widely welcomed framework, positioning parents as central decision-makers within the EHCP process (Satherley & Norwich, 2022). To some extent, parents uphold that the COP itself is not inherently problematic, (Charles, 2025) and in fact its legal mechanisms have enabled some to seek accountability. However, this aspirational framework has fostered what I conceptualise as an 'illusion of choice' (Meulder & Murray, 2024). While parents were formally granted a voice in placement decisions, the system frequently failed to equip them with clear, accessible information about the range and nature of available provision, or to secure their preferred choices (Meulder & Murray, 2024). Crucially, the COP's promise collided with chronic under-resourcing (Done & Andrews, 2020), placing severe pressure on local authorities and mainstream schools alike (Norwich, 2024).

Drawing on both professional experience and my unpublished masters research *'Why Do These Words Hurt So Much?'* (2020), I consistently interpreted the EHCP process producing ambiguity and profound distress for families through this illusion of choice. Parents often entered the process with trust and aspiration, only to find those hopes undermined by the very system meant to support them (Boddison & Soan, 2021). Martin's account in my research captures this with painful clarity. Despite his daughter's EHCP clearly detailing her needs, the headteacher approached him stating: *"we need to make provision for (Child), because she's not settling in, because she's exhibiting rather bad behaviour... I felt like they'd not even read it in detail."* In that moment, Martin expressed a yearning for the kind of collaborative, supportive partnership promised by the 2015 COP: *"If I was her, I would have gone, 'actually Martin, what we're going to do is this... we'll make a success of it.'"* Instead, he was confronted with the traumatic and unexpected conclusion: *"someone had just said to me my girl needs a special needs school... you have these hopes and aspirations and all this good stuff… and then nothing"* Martin subsequently removed his child from the school, not by choice but by a

broken hearted necessity. Martin's experience exemplifies how systemic pressures, deficit discourses, and resource constraints routinely override both parental agency and a child's entitlement to meaningful inclusion, (Cologon, 2022) transforming the COP's (2015) aspiration into a source of distress and exclusion. Witnessing Martin's and his child's experiences, prompts me to reflect that despite the COP (2015) being the biggest change to SEND policy in 30 years, nothing really has changed for CYP with SCLD since their right to actually have an education was borne out within the 1981 education act.

As of July 2025, Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson has signalled Labour's intention to revise the SEND COP (2015), with a focus on promoting 'inclusion in practice' (Rees, 2024) and increasing investment in mainstream settings. However, the absence of any explicitly stated ambition for children with SCLD renders this group largely invisible (again) within the emerging policy discourse. This silence appears to tacitly uphold the exclusionary logic underpinning David Cameron's (2010) call to 'end the bias towards inclusion.' This concern is amplified by Phillipson's recent comment on the DfE's Facebook page, where she stated, 'of course, there will always be a need for specialist provision for children with complex needs.' While this acknowledges the existence of these learners, it risks reinforcing the view that specialist settings are the default for children with SCLD, rather than affirming their right to inclusive education in mainstream environments.

Rees's, 'Inclusion in Practice' (2024) framework, although based on dignity-led aspiration (Newmark & Rees, 2022), reflects this tension through its three-tiered model of universal, targeted, and specialist provision. This structure subtly positions mainstream schools as primarily suitable for learners without significant additional needs, further marginalising children with SCLD. This perspective is echoed by Dempsey (2025), a Director of SEND in a large academy trust, who frames the current SEND crisis as a shortage of specialist places and promotes expanding special school provision as the main solution. This approach avoids deeper questions around inclusive rights and the wider aspirations of families such as Martin's.

Cologon (2022), highlights how many families seeking inclusion for their disabled children continue to experience systemic exclusion and lowered expectations.

Current proposed reforms risk entrenching a two-tier system, where equity is promised rhetorically (Newark & Rees, 2022) but denied in practice through weakened legal safeguards and structural exclusion (Charles, 2025). Consequently, I believe, the segregative status quo for CYP with SCLD is likely to persist.

Inclusion is a place

It is clear that ambiguities in IE policies have sparked a central debate over whether inclusion should be understood as a physical presence in mainstream schools or as a transformative process of participation. This debate is one of the most contested topics in the inclusion literature (Graham & Slee, 2008). UNESCO defines IE as the process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all children by supporting their active participation in both learning and community life, and by eliminating exclusion. This definition is grounded in the belief that every child has an equal right to achieve their potential within a mainstream system. Furthermore, framing IE in this manner suggests that inclusion is inherently transformative (Beacham & Rouse, 2012). In truly inclusive classrooms, educators, children, and families come together around a shared philosophy of equality, belonging, and acceptance (Salend, 2011), actively rejecting practices of exclusion and stigma (Florian, 2015).

Due to the above definition, IE has become interchangeable with the practice of ‘mainstreaming’, which is described as placing children labelled with having a disability in mainstream classrooms (Baglieri et al, 2010, Goransson & Niholm, 2014). The term inclusion is also often not defined within research, it is generally accepted and assumed that the reader will interpret the term to mean, within a mainstream school. For example, Dell’Anna et al (2022) stated that they conducted a systematic literature review to research the learning, social and psychological outcomes for children labelled with moderate, and severe learning needs in inclusive settings. ‘Inclusive settings’ isn’t defined it is just implied that the reader

understands the definition of inclusion in the same way as the research team and will assume that it refers to children with disabilities that attend mainstream school. Krischler et al, (2019) found that whilst the term inclusion remains ambiguous, the general population conceptualises inclusion according to student placement.

The children of the clauses

Research into UK educators' attitudes reveals a persistent tension between ideological support for IE and the practical realities of implementation. Avramides and Norwich (2002) highlight that while teachers broadly endorse the principle of inclusion aligning with the humanitarian ethos of policies like the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), their support, often hinges on implicit 'exclusion clauses' (Shuttleworth, 2013). These clauses mirror the conditional language of UK legislation (e.g., 'where possible' in the 1981 Education Act), allowing educators to justify exceptions for children perceived as too challenging to include. For instance, Loreman et al (2013) found that even teachers committed to 'full inclusion' frequently excluded pupils with complex learning needs or challenging behaviour, citing insufficient resources, training, or capacity to meet their needs.

This paradox reflects de Boer's (2010) finding that teachers' support for inclusion diminishes significantly for pupils with severe learning disabilities or emotional/behavioural needs. While educators may endorse inclusion in principle, their attitudes grow markedly more negative toward these groups, whom they often perceive as disproportionately demanding, requiring additional time, expertise, or resources that mainstream schools lack (de Boer, 2010). Such perceptions position these pupils as disruptive to the 'efficient education of others' (DfE, 2014), reinforcing an implicit hierarchy of acceptability. In this hierarchy, pupils deemed 'less challenging' are more readily included, while those defined with complex needs face greater exclusion. Inclusion thus becomes contingent on a child's perceived manageability within mainstream settings, a criterion starkly at odds with the universal rights framework of inclusive policy, which positions education as an unconditional entitlement rather than a privilege reserved for the 'easiest to include.'

The dissonance between ideology and practice extends beyond teachers to educational psychologists (EPs), who play a pivotal role in shaping inclusion decisions. Nkoma and Hay (2018) found that many EPs view ‘full inclusion’ as an unrealistic ideal, arguing that specialist provisions are more appropriate for children with profound needs. This perspective often stems from systemic pressures, as EPs must balance child-centred advocacy with institutional constraints like funding shortages, staff expertise gaps, and parental preferences. Winter (2016) further complicates this dynamic, revealing how EPs’ own professional self-efficacy and values influence their recommendations. For example, an EP who doubts mainstream schools’ ability to support pupils with profound needs may default to specialist placements, even when inclusion is theoretically viable. Collectively, these studies illustrate a systemic cycle, for example, ambiguous policies grant professionals discretion to interpret inclusion through pragmatic or deficit-focused lenses, perpetuating gatekeeping practices that exclude those deemed ‘too complex’ for mainstream environments (Runswick-Cole, 2008).

Kaufman et al (2020) argues that children who should attend inclusive settings are those who are observed to benefit academically and socially from being in close proximity to ‘typically developing children’. Cole, (2004) suggests that those children who fit into the current system with minimal support will be suitable for inclusion, while those with more significant needs will not. These perspectives position inclusion as conditional, contingent on perceived benefits to the child with disabilities, rather than as an unconditional right. Critics, however, contend that such frameworks risk reinforcing ableist hierarchies by framing inclusion as a privilege for those who can ‘adapt’ to mainstream norms (Goodley, 2014; Slee, 2018).

The children appearing to meet the conditions of inclusion are the ones that appear to meet societal/professional success criteria on a continuum of how similar to typically developing children they are. Gibb et al (2007) research of children transitioning from a specialist setting to a mainstream setting found that mainstream teachers indicated success if a child was observed to cope with a mainstream curriculum. Academic inclusion was measured in terms of whether the child was at an academically good level, that is in terms of the gap between

the level of the class and the level that the included child was attaining. The research also found that mainstream teachers measured success by a child's engagement with their peers and children who didn't engage were felt not to be benefiting from the mainstream environment.

Agran et al, (2020) research paper discussing the inclusion of CYP labelled as having severe disabilities describes measuring the success of inclusion through academic, social, communication and behavioural domains. Research from Fisher & Meyer (2002), describe children making progress academically and socially as a benefit of inclusion. Kramer et al (2021) systematic literature review describes the outcomes achieved by inclusive practice, which were related to academic, behavioural and socio-cognitive improvements. Tryfon et al, (2019) research regarding parental perspectives identifies improved social skills as a positive outcome of inclusion for their children. Measuring inclusion in this way is problematic and reinforces an idea that inclusion is suitable for some children but not all. Inclusion is deemed conditional, rather than a fundamental right as advocated through the Salamanca statement. Powerful, socially constructed rules apply to determine who should and shouldn't attend a mainstream setting (Goodley & Billington, 2017).

Power

The notion that certain children cannot benefit from inclusion or belong in mainstream schools is often reinforced by unchallenged historical and cultural biases held by those in power (Runswick Cole, 2008). This stance frequently arises from a failure to acknowledge the diverse learning, social, and communication needs of children labelled as incompatible with inclusive settings (Milton, 2017). For example, Broomhead (2019) used a 'peer nomination' method in her study of three groups of children aged five to six years: neurotypical children, those being monitored for SEND, and children already identified with SEND. Her findings revealed that children with SEND predominantly formed friendships within their own group, with little reciprocity in social connections with neurotypical peers. Broomhead (2019) identifies this

pattern as 'homophily' and suggests that when children with SEND do not meet social expectations aligned with neurotypical norms, which many parents associate with successful

inclusion, their experiences are framed as evidence of inclusion's shortcomings. She proposes social skills interventions to improve acceptance by neurotypical peers. However, this perspective prompts deeper questioning: instead of prioritising conformity to neurotypical standards, could fostering acceptance of individual differences and applying frameworks such as the 'double empathy theory' (Milton, 2012), which centres mutual understanding between neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals, create a fairer model of inclusion? This aligns with paradigms that emphasise acceptance over assimilation (Begon & Billington, 2018),

At odds with Broomhead's (2019) assumption of 'what parents want' is Cologon's (2022) research exploring the lived perspectives of inclusion by parents of children identified with S/PMLD. Cologon, (2022) found that the parents understood inclusion as fostering a sense of belonging, connection, access, opportunity, active participation, and the recognition of meaningful contributions. They emphasised the importance of appreciating differences and embracing human diversity, without forcing conformity, specifically addressing ableist bias and discrimination (Cologon, 2022). This closely aligns with a 'paradigm of acceptance' and rejects Broomhead's concerns of 'homophily'. Koutsouris (2014) explores the tension between social inclusion, which emphasises embracing diversity, and homophily, the sociological phenomenon where individuals gravitate towards others like themselves. The author contends that the ethical obligation to value difference may clash with people's inherent preference for homophilic social interactions. According to Koutsouris (2014), this conflict emerges when inclusion is reduced to mere 'shared presence' rather than meaningful participation in, and affirmation of, diversity. However, Koutsouris (2014) cautions that homophily should not be uncritically idealised, as it risks normalising exclusion by framing it as an organic social inclination. This is particularly evident when marginalised groups, such as disabled children and their families, seek out environments with shared experiences as a response to systemic oppression and stigmatisation (Cologon, 2022). Similarly, Salmon's (2013) research highlights

how disabled teenagers may self-exclude from non-disabled peers to avoid stigma, instead forming friendships with other disabled students. These relationships foster intersubjectivity, as they are grounded in mutual understanding of disability-related experiences (Reich, 2010).

Other problematic ideals of inclusion can be suggested, for example that professionals observing inclusive practice expect it to look a certain way. Webster's (2022) longitudinal study, The Inclusion Illusion (funded by the DfE), followed 19 students classified as having 'high support needs' during Years 5 and 9 of their education. Systematic observations highlighted that these children spent substantial time in segregated settings, interacting more with adults and less with peers compared to mainstream classmates. A central finding, as Webster (2022) emphasises, was the persistent isolation of these students during discrete lessons, which limited opportunities for meaningful peer engagement. The study argues that inclusion weakens when CYP are routinely separated from mainstream environments. This raises concerns about how inclusion is defined and assessed: schools may be criticised for failing to meet simplistic benchmarks of 'presence' in mainstream classrooms, yet such measures ignore the reality for students who remain socially and academically marginalised despite physical proximity.

These findings resonate with lived experiences reported by families. For instance, Hayley Newman (2014), a parent of a child with a learning disability, echoes Webster's (2022) observations through her own daughter's struggles in mainstream education. Newman (2014) describes how her daughter, Georgia, faced growing separation in Year 5 as peers focused on SATs preparation while she worked with a teaching assistant on basic literacy skills. Reflecting on her daughter's perspective, Newman (2014) notes, 'Georgia felt disconnected, both metaphorically and physically.' This sense of alienation led Newman to move Georgia to a specialist school for children with moderate learning disabilities. There, her confidence and happiness reportedly flourished, suggesting that mainstream environments, while inclusive in theory, may fail to meet the nuanced needs of some students in practice.

Hayley Newman's (2014) anecdotal description of her daughters experience, could be suggested to highlight Webster's (2022) findings as the damaging impact of inclusion on children and young people who feel separate and excluded in their 'inclusive setting'. However, the research fails to acknowledge and challenge neoliberal agenda's within the education system that are also having an impact upon the original conceptualisation of inclusion (Ainscow et al, 2006). The dominance of global neoliberalism positions the agendas of inclusion and educational standards as being in direct competition with each other, which results in staff prioritising high achievement over diversity, creating environments that are hostile to CYP with SEND (Norwich, 2007). Booth, (2002) articulates that schools become more interested in managing themselves rather than their pupils, in fear of being named and shamed as a low performing school. Goodley & Billington (2017) argue that in this climate of neoliberal schooling, different or underachieving children are implicitly and explicitly excluded from attending a mainstream school, as they are a threat to how successful a school is perceived to be, reaffirming Runswick Cole (2008) articulation that political, historical and cultural attitudes powerfully permeate and schools that are inclusive are so in 'spite of the system' (Weddell, 2008).

Inclusion as a feeling

Newman's (2014) description of her daughter's experiences articulates that, for children with SEND, inclusion is something that is experienced, rather than observed or measured. Kunc (1992) states that the fundamental principle of inclusive education is the valuing of diversity within the human community. Kunc (1992) conceptualises inclusion as being synonymous with a feeling of belonging and that belonging is an essential need and right for all children with and without disabilities. Maslow (1962) describes how all people have a fundamental need for love and belongingness. Baumeister & Leary (1995), hypothesised that the need to belong is innate and is fundamental to an individual's psychological well-being, with feelings of not belonging causing adverse reactions. Wilms (2000) defines school belonging as a

psychological construct relating to an attachment to a school community underpinned by feelings of acceptance and value by others.

Goodall's (2018) research with autistic secondary aged pupils found that their understanding of inclusion referred to a feeling of belonging. Most CYP could only define inclusion by the opposite word of exclusion, meaning that is what they felt much of the time. The CYP also defined inclusion as,

'being able to be oneself by being respected, valued and accepted by teachers and peers for the person who they are. It is about having relationships with others, being happy, safe and being part of the school community rather than being the outsider looking in' (p1304).

Other children in the research believed children should have a choice about what type of school they would like to go to, expressing that it wasn't fair to make children go to a mainstream school who couldn't cope or who were not supported properly. For one, attending a school for children with ASD was perceived to be better as they would be around other children who would be going through the same experiences. For the CYP in this research, inclusion is defined as belonging, being valued and should be uncoupled from the word 'mainstream' (Goodall, 2018). One of the participants expressed this when drawing the 'ideal school', calling it a 'school of identity'. Inclusion is therefore perceived to be about being able to be oneself by being respected and valued.

Pesonen's et al (2015), phenomenological research regarding a sense of belonging, explored the perspectives of five children who joined a specialist school after attending a mainstream primary setting after various amounts of time. Pesonen's et al (2015) purposive research stated that the CYP's sense of belonging had been jeopardised, with 'disturbing' (no example was given) relationships between teachers and peers, having had a negative impact upon their physical and emotional well-being. The researchers openly position the students as having been subject to ableism, stigmatisation and exclusion in their mainstream settings. The findings revealed that the CYP 'felt better' in their current special school due to the schools

positive and accepting climate. Pertinently, the children felt respected and appreciated by the adults and felt part of the whole school community. Pesonen et al (2015) theorised that it is the good relationships with the teachers that provided a protective factor, increased their emotional well-being and thus increased their sense of belonging in the school environment (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

Ware's, (2020) phenomenological research titled, '*Experiences of self and belonging among young people having learning difficulties in English schools',* explored the voices of 6 CYP in specialist and mainstream settings. Their stories were examined through the lens of a social relational model. Ware (2020) found that for most of the children, having significant supportive relationships with adults enhanced their feeling of belonging and well-being. Suggesting, as with Personen's et al (2015) research, adults who model acceptance, foster inclusivity through their actions and beliefs. Also important for the children attending mainstream settings was having a place they could go to where they felt accepted. For some, this was purposely designed such as a SEN hub and for others, places of their choosing, such as, a computer hub. Significantly in Ware's (2020) research, findings were not commented upon with judgement or bias as reasons for or against inclusion, they were just left open. Whereas other research such as Webster (2022) and Broomhead (2019) may have theorised that the children were not included due to spending too much time with adults or because they chose to be in spaces with other children with SEN.

End of part one- summary

In summary, the discourse circulating IE reveals a tension between structural interpretations of inclusion as placement within mainstream settings and lived experiences of inclusion as belonging. Research with CYP, particularly those with SEND, conceptualise inclusion as a feeling of safety, respect, belonging and acceptance (Goodall, 2018; Kunc, 1992; Pesonen et al., 2015). Critically absent from the discourse are the perspectives of CYP with SCLD, who are often excluded from mainstream environments and research, due to pervasive assumptions about their 'unsuitability' (Colley, 2020; Kaufman, 2021). This omission

perpetuates a cycle where policy and practice default to segregation, justified through unchallenged ableist norms (Runswick-Cole, 2008). For the definition of IE to evolve beyond its binary framing as location versus experience, centring the voices of children with SCLD becomes imperative. How can assumptions about their capabilities and what they 'need' be explored and challenged without their voices being heard?

Part two

Assumptions (noun: A thing that is accepted as true or as certain to happen, without proof.)

Children with the most significant learning needs are frequently viewed as unsuitable for mainstream education and disproportionately placed in specialist settings (Imray & Colley, 2017). This practice is often justified by the assumption that such placements better address their 'expressed complex needs', reflecting widespread professional and societal beliefs (Winter, 2017). For instance, an educational psychologist recently argued on X (formerly Twitter) for a 'send revolution', critiquing the trend of families seeking specialist provisions due to systemic failures in mainstream education. While clarifying they were not 'against' special schools, the psychologist conceded there remains 'a small proportion of children for whom a specialist provision is what they need' (Stanbridge, 2024). As highlighted earlier, such assumptions about mainstream inaccessibility often stem from unchallenged historical, cultural, and ableist biases perpetuated by professionals in positions of authority (Runswick Cole, 2008). These implicit and explicit beliefs permeate research, policy, and public discourse. Goodley et al (2016) argue that these attitudes expose a dehumanising aversion to CYP with SCLD, framing the uncritical acceptance of segregation as a manifestation of systemic 'othering'.

There is very little research into inclusion and belonging that focuses upon children with SCLD, possibly this is because there is an overall assumption that those children do not attend mainstream settings. It is perceived that specialist settings are much better for children with

SCLD because of the extra facilities they may have, the smaller class sizes and training of the staff. However, currently across the UK, there is described to be a national shortage of specialist placements. Children who previously were placed in a specialist setting are now attending mainstream settings (Hirschmann 2017). Their experience in these settings is often assumed that 'it isn't fair' on them or the other children. However, very little or nothing is known about what it is actually like to have SCLD and attend a mainstream school. This is because it is often assumed that children with SCLD are not able to share their views.

Whilst dominant narratives and assumptions exist regarding school placements of children with SCLD, In my role as a TEP, gathering pupil views remains a statutory requirement of the Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) process. However, when working with children with SCLD, I frequently encounter scenarios where their direct perspectives are absent. In such cases, I summarise observed preferences, challenges, or interests based on interactions with the child, followed by a statement such as, '*Child X was unable to provide their views directly,'* and defer to parental accounts. This approach risks contravening the SEND COP *(2015)*, which explicitly mandates that:

'Local authorities must ensure that children, their parents and young people are involved in discussions about their individual support and about local provision' (p. 20).

Crucially, it adds:

'Local authorities must not use the views of parents as a proxy for a young person's views. Young people will have their own perspective and local authorities should have arrangements in place to engage with them directly' (p. 22).

These directives align with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child *(*UNCRC 1989*)*, which asserts every child's right to express their views and be heard (Lewis-Dagnall et al, 2023). Despite this international commitment spanning over three decades, children with SCLD, who often communicate in non-normative ways, remain disproportionately excluded from decision-making processes (Shier, 2001). This exclusion renders them vulnerable to

marginalisation and assumptions that undermine their agency (Cascio et al, 2021). Lundy (2007) terms this systemic erasure a ‘double denial’ (p. 935), where children face both barriers to communication and dismissal of their right to participate .As stated earlier, this groups exclusion from having a voice has meant that many assumptions are made about their lives, (Kittay & Carlson, 2010). The right to have a voice is an important one if we consider how not having a voice is linked to marginalisation, othering and social injustice (Shulze et al, 2019). Marginalisation significantly impacts individuals labelled as having SCLD, with documented lower levels of health and well-being outcomes (Women and equalities committee, 2024). However, ascertaining the ’right’ to have a voice is complex as reflecting on what voice means is rarely explored in research. Below is an anecdotal story of how gaining and hearing voice isn’t a straightforward process, especially when you are dependent on additional resources to facilitate your experience in the world. I have chosen to take this example from my sisters life, as my reflection of her voice is deeply embedded in my research idea. Whilst the research I have undertaken is with children, by referring to my adult sisters voice, I want the reader to understand that whilst all children may not have much of voice in school due to power dynamics within education and society, most children will grow up to be adults who will have a voice due to their independence. Many children with SCLD will grow up to be adults who will require the support of others when living their lives. The ‘right’ to a voice becomes tricky if voices are unable to be heard.

This account is from my own personal experiences as an advocate for my sister who is labelled as having a severe learning disability. she is an adult now, however she has been denied a ‘voice’ in part because the complexities of how ‘voice’ is conceptualised is not understood (Bloom et al, 2020). This has had huge ramifications on her ability to fluidly advocate for herself and make clear how she wants to live her life on a daily basis. I say daily, because another difficulty with collecting voice, (in particular for additional resources) is the permanence this creates in what might be changes in her daily life. Misunderstanding voice can mean a person can end up doing something that they don’t want to do or had any intention of doing. For example, my sister was asked to volunteer in a ‘work opportunity’ in a shop at a local care home. My sister loves taking photos of care homes so we could say that her views were considered in the decision making process. She was asked by the social worker if she would like to do some volunteering and she said ‘yes’. However, I propose that within the question, she didn’t understand the depth and complexity regarding time, date, place, people. This decision and ‘consent’ from my sister meant that her care plan was updated to her now spending all day on Saturday at the care home ‘helping’ in the shop. My

sister went a few times and then began to say to me that she didn't want to go. I informed the social worker, who now said that she 'had to go' (because there wasn't anyone to look after her in her house) and perhaps she was attention seeking or perhaps she was peri-menopausal. My sister then began to cry before going, 'she is fine once there'. I went to observe my sister in the shop and I could see that she was becoming cognitively overloaded, the support worker was helping her to put numbers into the till, whilst simultaneously saying to her, 'come on look for the 2, you know what 2 is'. Her facial expressions told me that she was finding it difficult and I imagined a full day would be exhausting and demoralising for her. I informed the support worker that we would be leaving, to which she retorted, 'ha, I wish I could leave work because I am unhappy'. (Breden, 2024).

'Voice' in the above example, is much more complex than being asked a question and giving an answer. 'voice' is something to be challenged, described as lacking any meaning or accuracy and when finally 'heard' by the support worker, disregarded in favour of having to live in the real (normative) world. Ashby, (2011) highlights the overlooking of children who communicate in non-normative ways, 'we have to remember how often these voices that do not speak have been overlooked, dismissed or even discounted as valid'. Acknowledging the link between marginalisation, oppression and not having a voice, means that we as professionals have a moral imperative to try and gain the views of children who don't speak or act in normative ways, so that we can explore the nature and limits of concepts such as social justice and human rights (Kittay & Carlson, 2010).

Conceptualisation of voice.

In qualitative research, 'voice' is typically conceptualised as representing others' perspectives by understanding their experiences of the world. This involves interpreting how people reflect on, feel about, and make sense of situations, capturing their thoughts, emotions, and understandings. For example, the children detailing what inclusion meant to them, used their voice to explain their experiences of having additional needs and attending schools.

Most research exploring the views of people with disabilities tend to focus upon people who can communicate using spoken language. For example, Tesfaye et al. (2019) conducted a comprehensive scoping review examining various disability types, age groups, sectors, and topics, drawing on findings from 284 studies across disciplines not limited to autism or

education. They found that in-person, oral interviews were the predominant method used for data collection. However, they concluded that individuals with speech and language difficulties or complex communication needs were significantly underrepresented in research focusing on first-person perspectives compared to peers with strong verbal skills. We could say that the exclusion of individuals who don't use typical language to express themselves is discriminatory and a failure enacting a child's right to have a voice. Therefore a more detailed conceptualisation of voice is required.

An inclusive concept of 'voice' in the context of children's rights encompasses both the literal ability to vocalise and the broader, socially constructed ways children express their perspectives, which include non-verbal forms like gesture, facial expressions, and bodily movements (Moloney & McCarthy, 2018). Beyond mere speech, voice represents a child's lived experience and identity, which may be expressed through multi-faceted, often non-verbal means that society may undervalue, especially for children facing communication challenges (Boggis, 2011). This expanded view aligns with Bakhtin's (1981) concept of polyphony, where multiple voices within social contexts, such as family narratives, contribute to a richer understanding of each child's unique experience and identity, thus affirming their voice regardless of their verbal abilities. Under international human rights instruments like Article 12 of the UNCRC, children's voices, whether verbal or not, are recognised as intrinsic to their participation rights, supporting expressions through diverse media and nurturing voice formation with adult guidance when needed (Bennet Woodhouse, 2003).

How have children with SCLD been heard in research?

There is very little research aimed at understanding the experiences of children with SCLD in any school setting, mainstream or special (Lewis-Dagnall et al, 2023). Therefore, in this section I will attempt to explore and critique some of the research that attempts to hear the voices and experiences of children labelled with SCLD as they navigate various educational experiences, detailing the a range of methods and interpretations.

Hart, (2021) facilitated inclusive interviews to try and understand the perspectives of young adults with significant learning needs who were transitioning between school and college. They utilised ‘agentic ethnography’, underpinned by the capability approach (Nussbaum, 2006), which is a belief that all individuals are capable, competent and agentic, regardless of their ability. Thus signifying the young adults to be capable of leading their own transition, (Hart, 2021). Hart used many different tools to gather the views of the participants, such as the use of visuals for ranking, ‘show me’ and the taking of photographs, important objects, informal chats and observations. However, it was unclear what the findings ‘produced’ and how this enabled clear participation in the transition experience.

Rouvali and Riga (2021) conducted a study to understand the perspectives of a six-year-old, non-verbal autistic child attending a mainstream kindergarten in Greece. Their research focused on designing an individualised education plan (IEP) centred on the child’s strengths and interests rather than deficits. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the researchers gathered data through observations, structured interaction sessions, video recordings, activity-based assessments, and parent/teacher questionnaires. Findings revealed the child’s sensory preferences, need for visual routines, and favoured activities, which informed tailored educational adjustments.

A key methodological tool was Talking Mats (Murphy, 1997), a visual communication framework designed to help individuals with communication challenges express preferences. While this tool has been widely applied in contexts like goal-setting and mental health assessments (MacLeman, 2010), critics argue that its reliance on pre-selected symbols risks imposing predetermined responses (Brewster, 2004). However, Rouvali and Riga (2021) mitigated this limitation by triangulating Talking Mats data with observational insights and caregiver input (Cameron, 2004), potentially enhancing the study’s validity.

The researchers’ multi-dimensional methodology facilitated a nuanced understanding of the child’s needs, leading to IEP adaptations that were suggested to improve their social and emotional well-being. While some findings might theoretically have been inferred through

parent reports alone, the intentional inclusion of the child's voice likely fostered more authentic and sustainable interventions. This aligns with evidence that participatory approaches that are rooted in the belief that all children, regardless of communication ability, hold valid perspectives, strengthen policy and practice outcomes (Shulze et al., 2021).

Other research exploring the experiences of children with SCLD or who are minimally verbal have utilised methods from within creative arts. Parsons et al (2021) used an 'innovative digital story telling methodology' to explore the perspectives of 5, 4 year old autistic children as they transitioned from their 'inclusive day nursery' to primary school. Inclusive in this context appears to be a mainstream nursery school that receives local authority funding to support children with identified additional needs. Parsons et al (2021) research stems from a similar rationale for my research, in that there isn't much research at all that attempts to hear directly from those who are unable to use spoken language to communicate or those who may behave in ways that are different to expected, citing Raibee et al (2005). Parsons et al (2021) explain that whilst there are lots of creative visual methods being used in early childhood research such as, drawing, photographs, collage and painting, they often rely on a verbal discussion to make meaning (Pascal & Bertram, 2009).

Subsequently, Parsons et al (2021) drew inspiration from Morris (2003), research exploring the experiences of children with significant cognitive difficulties who lived in a residential children's home. Morris (2003) conceptualised an idea that I have taken for my own research of 'being with' as a methodological approach to get close to the experiences of others. Parsons et al 2021 research proposed to extend the concept of 'being with' by utilising a digital story telling methodology which aimed to access children's views and experiences by representing children's actions and behaviours via short videos and webcams. The rationale for using video was because Parsons et al (2021) didn't want to rely on a researchers reports of a child's views and experiences. The findings of the research revealed that the approach enabled a much deeper constructed knowledge of the child, ahead of their transition to primary school. The videos showed what the children liked, what they found difficult and how they responded

to support. The researchers claim that the digital stories are a much better representation than words alone as they enable others to really 'see' who the children are. Disseminating the research findings with educational psychologists led to meaningful reflections during feedback sessions. EP's expressed that learning about the research enhanced their awareness of how ableist assumptions have shaped some of their perspectives. This shift encouraged them to reframe their perspective, instead of viewing differences in play as deficits, they endeavoured to begin recognising and valuing the agency and autonomy children demonstrated through their unique choices (Kossyvaki & Papoudi, 2016).

I believe, however that the perception that recorded images are 'better' than a researchers field notes and observations could be damaging to the future growth of inclusive research because of the ethical implications of recording people without their consent, in particular when that research is made available publicly. I also wonder how relevant the study is as 'research'. For example, the research presents as very good transition practice. The receiving primary schools will be able to 'get to know' the children before they start their school. However, there is nothing within the research to suggest that the assumptions that are made of children with SCLD were changed or developed within their receiving primary school. The inclusive nursery is positioned as an environment that 'enables freedom of expression, choice, and exploration' (Parsons et al pg.173), but there was no information about how the knowledge was received and utilised to support transition at the children's new schools, where they may not have positioned the children in the same way. We don't know if their 'voices' were heard, however this is not uncommon in child voice work (Lundy, 2018).

The positioning of children as competent and agentic in having a voice appears to make a difference in how their voice is seen and heard (Hart, 2021). There is a danger however, that where children are 'read' against ableist standardisations, there is a risk of epistemic injustice and research becomes even less emancipatory and more dehumanising. Hill et al (2016), employed participatory methodologies to explore the experiences of CYP with SCLD in a residential specialist setting. Central to their work was upholding children's rights to

participation and voice, as outlined in the UNRC (1994). The researchers adopted an ethnographic design, structuring observations using the SCERTS framework (Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, and Transactional Support; Prizant et al, 2006), which prioritises socio-emotional development and communication strategies for autistic individuals. While SCERTS emphasises adult-guided support for skill development, its reliance on norm-referenced checklists risks reducing children's experiences to decontextualised metrics.

This approach raises concerns about the ethical representation of non-verbal agency. For instance, interpreting children's voices through rigid, normative frameworks may inadvertently reinforce deficit-based assumptions about CYP with SCLD (Hall, 1997). Stalker (1998) cautions that participants with disabilities often lack control over how their perspectives are interpreted, a challenge compounded by methodologies that prioritise standardisation over lived experience (Nind, 2008). Paradoxically, Hill et al.'s (2016) ethnographic narratives, rich with qualitative insights into CYP-staff relationships offered a more holistic, humanising portrayal of the children's lives. This tension emphasises the importance of balancing structured methodologies with flexible, person-centred practices to authentically amplify marginalised voices.

Sometimes 'voice' is interpreted by the theoretical lens applied by researchers. For example, Recchia & McDevitt (2023), in their study exploring the lived experience of inclusion for a child with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD), framed their analysis using the social relational model of disability. They positioned their research within the social relational model of disability, which conceptualises disability not as an individual deficit but as the result of social and relational barriers interacting with impairment effects. This model emphasises how oppression and discrimination uniquely shape disability experiences, moving beyond activity limitations and rejecting purely materialist or postmodern frameworks (Reindal, 1998; Thomas, 2004). Recchia & McDevitt (2023) articulated the child's expressed feelings of belonging and agency with a general nursery setting. As his own sense of self, identity and empowerment (Slee, 2019) was realised, the child became an agent for inclusion as he taught the other children

and teachers to reconsider what they viewed as play, interaction and group membership. This example of a child's experience at school enables a perspective of disability that is a resistant alternative to ability and ableism. Giving children with disabilities the power to redefine what is human (Goodley & Runswick Cole, 2016).

Simmons and Watson (2015) adopt an ethnographic narrative methodology to offer an immersive exploration of Sam, a child diagnosed with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD). Departing from behaviourist and cognitive frameworks such as those outlined by Hill et al. (2016), the study prioritised a phenomenological framework to interpret Sam's experiences. The research aimed to examine how differing educational environments, for example, mainstream versus specialist might foster distinct opportunities for engagement. Methodologically, the work adopted an interpretivist paradigm, employing semi-structured interviews with caregivers and educators alongside participatory and non-participatory observational methods. Over a 60-day period, the researchers systematically documented daily vignettes across both settings, accumulating rich qualitative data to identify emergent themes.

Analytical processes were grounded in Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenological principles, which emphasise the role of lived experience in shaping human understanding. Findings indicated enhanced engagement levels for Sam within mainstream environments, particularly through increased peer interactions. Notably, the study's outcomes influenced practical decisions: Sam maintained partial attendance at the mainstream school following the study's conclusion. This investigation highlights the nuanced challenges inherent in amplifying non-verbal perspectives, illustrating how environmental opportunities became essential channels for interpreting Sam's communicative agency.

Summary and research questions.

This critical literature review has highlighted that there is a population of individuals who society remains indifferent to. This indifference is emphasised in ambiguous international and

national policy and through invisibility in research. Advocates within disability research (De Haas et al 2022; Colley, 2022; Simmons & Watson, 2015; Nind, 2017) claim that this invisibility perpetuates indifference and the continued dehumanisation of individuals with SCLD. Therefore, the primary goal of this research is to explore the lived experiences of children with SCLD, with the hope of drawing attention to their exclusion from educational discourse. By amplifying these marginalised voices, a key aspiration of the research is to invite critical reflection among educational psychologists and researchers with the aim of sparking dialogue about how prevailing assumptions may perpetuate indifference and dehumanisation, and how inclusive practices might be reimagined. The concept of inclusion and belonging have been discussed, not because I want to state or identify a school preference for learners with SCLD but because I want to highlight that the exclusion of children with SCLD from research regarding their experiences at school has meant that research agendas have been underpinned by gross, negative and mistaken assumptions about their lives (Ryan, 2021).

By conceptualising school inclusion as an embodied intersubjective experience (Simmons & Watson 2015), we have to engage with the voices of all disabled children to enable them to make themselves heard and to have their perspectives available to others in the construction of their experiences of inclusion in education (Ashby, 2011). Tomlinson, (2017) believes that children with SCLD and their families need to be part of a social movement towards deeper complex constructions of inclusive school policies and practice. One such movement is the 'nothing about us without us' disability activist movement that emphasises the importance of endeavouring to empower and emancipate disabled selves through centring their experiences and amplifying their voices (Charlton, 2000). Therefore, this research proposes the following research aim to enable CYP to have a proverbial 'seat at the inclusion debate table'.

'Explore the lived experiences of children with SCLD who attend a mainstream setting.'

Chapter three - Methodology Chapter

Overview

This chapter discusses the journey navigated within this research process, from understanding my rationale and positionality to developing a nuanced sensitive methodology to explore the lived experience of children who do not use spoken words to express themselves. To begin, the chapter explores the research underpinnings of critical theory which inform my positionality and orientate my epistemological and ontological considerations. Next I rationalise an ethnographic research framework informed by phenomenology before discussing a collection of research methods aiming to explicate the lived experience. Analysis is encapsulated as a 'dance of improvised steps' (Skarsaune, 2023), demonstrating the creativity, flexibility and layered approach to the research process.

Positionality

This research represents a collaborative production of knowledge, co-created between myself as the researcher and the ethnographic field notes collected. My beliefs, values, life experiences, and continuous reflection and introspection have shaped both the research process and its final outcome, making it impossible to separate myself from the work (Corlett & Mavin, 2018).

Understanding and reflecting on positionality is essential when conducting qualitative research in order to recognise the subjective impact I could have over the research (Folkes, 2023). This research idea emerged from a lifelong personal and professional interest in the lives of children who are identified as having a severe and complex learning disability (SCLD).

I have a triplet sister who has always been labelled as having a severe learning disability throughout our lives growing up together. Now as an adult, I am acutely aware of how disablism impacts upon her daily life as she experiences frequent micro and macro transgressions from within her supported home and community. This, understandably has made me angry, but mostly I feel sad that she has to live her life with the weight of this

oppression, something she awe inspiringly manages to achieve. Knowing my sister as an adult changes the way I perceive children that I meet in my work as a TEP, as I situate an assessment of them within the oppressiveness and discrimination I have observed within my sisters life.

In my previous professional roles as a specialist teacher and an advisory teacher, supporting the inclusion of children with SCLD in mainstream settings I noticed frequently that the discourse around children with SCLD was often negative, in particular when children expressed themselves through behaviours that challenged individuals and systems within schools. Therefore, I have spent a great deal of my career listening to, interpreting and advocating the possible meanings behind these behaviours with the aim of enabling others to be more understanding of a child's needs.

Through starting on the doctorate I have noticed that I am perhaps also more hyper aware than my fellow TEPS and colleagues of the ways in which children with SCLD are spoken about and perceived within professional practice. This noticing has made me wonder about the role of critical disability theory (CDT) within my positioning, in the same way critical race theory may underpin a black person's positioning within research. When reflecting on the way that I thought about my research, I noticed that it was underpinned by what I have come to understand as a 'critical theory' paradigm. A paradigm is a way of perceiving the world through an overarching value and belief system, and contributes to an underlying philosophy of research practice (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Braun & Clarke, (2022) state that there is a clear relationship between the positionality of the researcher, the methodology, the way the research is approached and how the research is understood.

I feel it is important to be fully transparent about my positionality and highlight the part this may operate within my reflective research diary so that the reader is made aware of the subjectivity within my observations and conversations within the school setting. By recognising and being transparent about my positionality, I will also be able to engage in appropriate critical reflexivity (Corlett & Mavin, 2018).

Before starting the doctorate, I hadn't heard of critical theory or CDT, however I knew I 'felt' different to my colleagues and peers about how children with complex learning disabilities were perceived in educational settings. I didn't have the words to articulate these thoughts, their discrimination was often subtle and framed within assumptions of 'what is best'. Learning about CDT has given me a framework and a lens to not only situate my thinking, but also enable me to critically reflect, challenge and make sense of my thoughts and experiences. Reflecting on my positioning has illuminated how deeply intertwined the researcher is to the research beginnings, process and outcomes.

Critical Disability Theory (CDT) *Critical Theory paradigm*

CDT is a framework that rethinks how disability is understood and addressed in society. Unlike traditional views in which disability is primarily framed as a medical issue or individual problem, CDT argues that disability is fundamentally about politics and power dynamics (Devlin & Pothier, 2006). CDT emphasises that the way society is structured often marginalises people with disabilities by limiting their access to economic and social benefits, which are instead distributed as negotiable privileges (Oliver & Barnes, 1993).

Minich, (2017) argues that CDT involves the scrutiny of normative ideologies that should occur not for its own sake but with the goal of producing knowledge in support of justice for people with stigmatised bodies and minds (Hall, 2019). Thinking in these terms posits CDT as an emancipatory and developing discourse (Goodley et al 2019). Minich (2017) implies that CDT refers to lived experiences and attempts to transform the circumstances under which oppressed subjects live, through critical intersectional analysis.

Ableism and **Disablism** are interrelated concepts central to critical disability theories, articulated through the framework of the dis/ability complex, which recognises the co-constitutive relationship between disability and ability (Goodley, 2018).

Ableism is defined as a pervasive cultural logic and set of beliefs, processes, and practices that privilege particular abilities, normalising 'able-bodiedness' and establishing hierarchies based on valued capacities. It shapes how individuals perceive themselves, their bodies, and their relationships with others and the environment (Wolbring, 2008). Ableism operates both

consciously and unconsciously within society, embedding normative ideals of ability such as autonomy, self-sufficiency, and rationality, which inform social, political, and economic structures (Goodley, 2018). Moreover, ableism extends beyond disability to intersect with other forms of systemic discrimination, including racism and sexism, thus functioning as an overarching framework that justifies social hierarchies (Wolbring, 2008). The concept also encompasses internalised ableism, where disabled individuals may adopt and replicate ableist norms, further perpetuating marginalisation (Goodley, 2018).

Disablism, on the other hand, refers specifically to the discriminatory practices and social oppression targeted at disabled people. It is understood as the 'disabling use of ableism' that manifests both actively, through intentional exclusion or prejudice, and passively, through ignorance or lack of accommodations (Wolbring, 2021). Historically emerging as a critique against the medicalisation and individualisation of disability, disablism is analysed within the social model of disability, which locates disability in social, economic, and cultural barriers rather than individual impairments (Goodley, 2018). Disablism enforces ableist norms by framing disability as a problem needing intervention or correction and thus marginalises disabled individuals from full citizenship and societal participation (Goodley, 2018).

Critical Educational Psychology (CEP)

I am interested in the lived experiences of people identified as having a SCLD across their whole lives. However, as I am training to be an EP and work predominantly with CYP, I also believe my positioning whilst underpinned by CDT aligns with CEP. CEP frames the doctoral training at Sheffield University and it is one of the reasons I chose to study at Sheffield. CEP is concerned with how power, privilege and oppression affect individuals and groups (Billington & Goodley, 2017). CEP challenges traditional psychological theories that often assume neutrality or objectivity (Corcoran & Vassallo 2023). CEP also has an underlying aim of seeking to discover and address the ways in which educational practices can reinforce inequalities, aiming to create more inclusive and equitable learning environments (Corcoran & Vassallo 2023). As my research is borne out of the assumptions that are made about CYP

with SCLD attending mainstream settings, it makes sense that it is naturally positioned within a CEP framework.

Rationale

The rationale for the research stemmed originally from some reflections during my previous role as an inclusion coordinator. Often I would be involved in discussions between professionals and parents where they articulated their belief that a child should move to a more specialist school, either for educational, well-being or both purposes. Sometimes it would be the school staff advocating for this and at other times the parents. Whilst I understood the reasons for these articulated perspectives were complex, varied and coming from different lived experiences, I began to wonder about what school life was like from the child's perspective. It was often assumed that they were not happy, or that they would do 'better' elsewhere. An understanding of the child's actual lived experience was lacking from decision making, they were perceived as being incapable of articulating a voice and therefore an opinion.

I began to understand that my rationale for the research was also deeply intertwined within my positionality. I wanted the research to acknowledge the existence of children with SCLD as human beings, with thoughts, feelings and as a person who had a lived experience. I wanted them to be seen and *heard*. Positioning my research within CDT also indicated my intention/rationale for the research to be partly emancipatory. I wanted other professionals, in particular educational psychologists, social workers and learning disability professionals to be prompted to interrogate their assumptions of what they think they know about what CYP with SCLD need.

Whilst I have mixed feelings in claiming that this research will be emancipatory or transformative for CYP with severe and complex learning needs, I cannot separate that the desire for this research is rooted in my wanting to amplify the existence of these children in research and educational psychology practice.

Epistemological and Ontological thoughts

As a novice researcher, understanding the epistemological and ontological orientations of this research was a complex and confusing process. I couldn't easily turn to previous doctoral research, as the research I was attempting to undertake wasn't wholly evident within the literature, especially acknowledging my critical positioning. Research that I did read exploring the experiences of children and adults labelled as having a Profound and Multiple Learning Disability (PMLD) discussed the need to develop a 'sensitive methodology' to ensure an ethically sound approach that captures the complexity and nuance of the subject matter (Redmore, 2022; Simmon's & Watson, 2015; Skarsaune et al 2021; De Hass et al, 2022). I therefore utilised these research methodologies as a starting point to developing my own 'sensitive methodology'.

Epistemology

Assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope, and foundational basis, significantly influence the focus of research, the methods employed in conducting it, and the manner in which research outcomes are presented (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). By positioning myself within a critical theory paradigm, I was articulating that knowledge is understood as socially constructed and deeply intertwined with power dynamics, ideology, and historical context.

Epistemology: Social Constructionism and Interpretive Inquiry

Social constructionism provides the epistemological foundation for this research, emphasising a critical stance towards taken-for-granted assumptions about the world, particularly societal constructs such as 'normalcy,' 'ability,' and 'childhood' (Burr, 2015; Thomas, 2012). This approach rejects objectivist and empiricist epistemologies that position knowledge as static, measurable, and independent of social context (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Instead, social constructionism aligns with interpretivism by foregrounding the role of embodied meaning-making in human experience, ascertaining that knowledge is co-created through social interactions, sensory engagements, and shared interpretations (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 2009).

By adopting this lens, I explicitly examined how CYP with SCLD navigated their social world through actions, routines, and affective responses, while interrogating how dominant discourses (e.g., educational practices, ableist norms) shaped their lived realities.

Central to this interpretive approach is the recognition of researcher subjectivity. Through adopting a social constructionist epistemology, I acknowledge that knowledge is not discovered but co-produced through sustained engagement with participants' embodied experiences, contextual interactions, and sociocultural discourses (Corlett & Mavin, 2017). My beliefs, values, and prior experiences as a teacher and advisory teacher working with CYP defined as having SCLD inevitably shaped how I interpreted observations, necessitating ongoing reflexivity.

Ontology

Ontology is the study of being: 'it is concerned with 'what is', with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such" (Crotty, 1998, p.10). I believe that critical realism best aligns with my adopted epistemological stance.

Critical Realism and Interpreted Realities

Ontologically, this research is grounded in critical realism, which asserts that while an objective reality exists independently of human perception (Bhaskar, 1975), our understanding of it is always mediated by social, cultural, and interpretive frameworks (Danermark et al., 2002). This stance bridges the materiality of children's experiences with the interpretive nature of their lived realities. For example, while a school's physical infrastructure constitutes an objective reality, its meaning, whether it feels 'safe' or 'overwhelming' is shaped by children's subjective interpretations and interactions.

Critical realism's stratified view of reality complements interpretivism by distinguishing between the empirical, the actual, and the real (Bhaskar, 1975). This framework allows me to explore how CYP with SCLD actively engage with and negotiate these layers. For instance, a child's refusal to participate in a classroom activity (empirical) may reflect both sensory

overwhelm (actual) and systemic failures to accommodate neurodiversity (real). Crucially, critical realism upholds children's agency (Lansdown, 2005), framing them not as passive recipients of social structures but as embodied meaning-makers. (Clark & Moss, 2001).

Interpretivism enriches this ontology by prioritising the how and why of children's experiences. Through methods like participatory observation, I interpret how children's actions, such as retreating into books or resisting transitions, constitute agentic responses. This approach rejects naive realism's assumption that reality is directly accessible (Sayer, 2000), instead positioning children's realities as plural, dynamic, and contextually interpreted through their embodied interactions.

Rationale for utilising Phenomenology

Just a child going about their day as children do.

As stated, this research was prompted during my previous role as an inclusion coordinator, when often I was asked, 'is this the right place?' and 'it's not inclusion, though is it, if they are not spending any time in their class?'. These questions made me wonder about the child and their experiences and what they would say if asked. Therefore, I had a strong feeling of the child staying central to this research, as a child in their own right. This meant separating out discourses of what we know about children from a developmental, cognitive and behaviourist paradigm and separating out from my projections of power, discrimination and rights based discourse.

Phenomenology focuses on closely examining the nature of experience as it is directly lived (Van Manen, 1990), rather than through psychological explanations or scientific abstractions (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). While cognitivism relies on specific theories of the mind (Anderson, 2005), phenomenology rejects these theoretical frameworks. Instead, it aims to be critical and open, avoiding theoretical assumptions wherever possible (Husserl, 1970; Van Manen, 1990). As I wanted to understand how the children experienced school from their own lived

perspective, this led to the decision to situate the research within a phenomenological framework.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a philosophical movement focused on the analysis of consciousness and the structures of experience. It emphasises the direct perception and description of phenomena as they appear, aiming to avoid any preconceived theories or assumptions (Moran, 2000). Phenomenology is a philosophical approach focused on exploring human experience. It aims to understand what it truly feels like to be human, illuminating the aspects of life that hold significance and shape our experiences (Smith et al, 2009). Unlike cognitive psychology, which examines how the brain processes experiences, phenomenology is concerned with how we consciously experience the world around us (Langdridge, 2007).

Edward Husserl, the founder of phenomenology contended that there was value in researching experience as a scientific endeavour (Husserl, 1970). He was interested in the subjective, pre reflective experiences that were independent of historical, social or cultural contexts. Husserl suggested that consciousness is always directed towards something, be it an object, a thought or perception (Moran, 2000). Utilising Phenomenology in this way invites researchers to the method of 'epoche' (bracketing), which enables them to suspend their assumptions about the external world and focus purely on how experiences appear in the consciousness (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

Martin Heidegger, Husserl's student, shifted phenomenology from a focus of consciousness to an exploration of being (Heidegger, 1962). Heidegger's concept of 'being in the world' highlights that human existence is fundamentally connected to the world we live in. This deep integration between life and the world encourages researchers to explore meanings found within everyday practices (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 729). Unlike Husserl, Heidegger argues that achieving complete 'epoché', the suspension of all preconceptions, is impossible. Instead, he suggests that researchers should recognise and, when relevant, incorporate these

preconceptions into their work. The meaning of a phenomenon is co-constructed through the subjective interaction between researcher and participant, as they engage together within a specific context (Koch, 1999).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, centred on embodiment, perception and intercorporeality. Merleau-Ponty (1962) argues that perception is always embodied, meaning that we experience the world through our bodies, not just our minds. Merleau-Ponty maintains that perception is not an event or state in the mind or brain, but an organism's entire bodily relation to its environment Merleau-Ponty (1962).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) also speaks of the lifeworld (Lebenswelt), which refers to the pre-theoretical world we inhabit before any formal thought or scientific understanding takes place (Ashworth, 2016). This lifeworld is rich with meanings created through our bodily experiences and interactions with the world around us. To understand lived experience, one must immerse oneself in this everyday world of perceptions, emotions, and interactions, where meaning is generated through our embodied engagement with others and the environment (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Lifeworld

In the context of my research, the concept of 'lifeworld' emphasises how the children develop a sense of who they are (like all of us) through their bodily experiences and interactions within the educational environment. According to Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology of perception, individuals experience the world through their embodied presence, and for the children in my research, their interactions with peers, teachers, and the school environment are key to shaping their experiences. By adopting this philosophy of phenomenology, I am recognising how shared language, cultural norms, and institutional practices influence experiences in the classroom (Husserl, 1970). CYP with SCLD lifeworld's are constructed in the present moment, as they navigate school spaces filled with social, emotional, and academic meanings (van Manen, 1990). While they share this lifeworld with their peers, their

unique learning needs provide a distinct perspective on how they engage with educational activities and social relationships, highlighting the importance of understanding their individual experiences (Goodley, 2011).

Accessing 'voices' and experiences in research

Methodologies, (as mentioned in the literature review) often developed to explore the experiences of children with SCLD have focused on the facilitation of their participation through creative and visual approaches (Ridout et al, 2011) talking mats (Stewart et al, 2018) and multi-modal approaches (Doak, 2018). However, these remain inaccessible to children who communicate through body language, vocalisations and who are not able to understand and manipulate the intentions of the researcher. These approaches also, in my opinion risk tokenism due to the significant input required from the researcher, staff and parents (Simmon's & Watson, 2015) and reductionism as a child's experience of the world is reduced to a view, typically around likes and dislikes**.** That said, however, I do believe it may have been useful to utilise some of these methods to triangulate some of the insights I was developing. As these approaches were not something the children in my research had experience of using, it therefore, didn't make sense to list them within the research materials.

In exploratory qualitative research, interviews are often a primary method of data collection, as they provide a space for participants to articulate, reflect on, and co-construct deeper meanings and understandings through verbal dialogue (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In my research, this dialogical process is facilitated through repeated engagement and a practice of 'being with' (Morris, 2003) the children over time, which allows for the development of richer interactions and understanding (Redmore, 2021). Redmore's (2021) study on the experiences of 'Ben', a young man with profound autism, in attending a day service, highlights that repeated engagement and attentive data collection during fieldwork were essential for fostering participation and establishing a form of dialogue, especially for Ben, who primarily communicated through body language, vocalisations, and gestures. Therefore the research approach that I have chosen, is that of ethnography, as it is believed that spending time in the

children's lived school environment would enable me to gain repeated exposure to their experiences at school and everything that impacts upon their experiences.

Acknowledging the tension between individual and relational agency

In working to 'hear' the children's lived experiences, my practitioner skills, such as attuned observation and interpretative sensitivity, were essential in discerning their individual agentic expressions beyond spoken language. This ability acknowledges the child's personal autonomy, intention, and unique perspective, affirming their capacity to influence their own narrative and experience (James, 2010). However, it is vital to recognise the tension in claiming such individual agency while emphasising that agency is fundamentally relational and dynamic. Agency is not merely an internal attribute but is continuously shaped, constrained, and co-constructed within complex webs of social relationships (with teachers, peers, families), material environments (e.g., the school setting), and the systems within education (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Morris, 2003). The very act of 'being with' and listening through observation illuminates this relational nature.

Navigating this tension, between honouring the child's individual voice and recognising agency as emergent through relational contexts, is crucial to the integrity of this research. My methodology embraces this duality by situating children's nonverbal agency within the dynamic flow of interactions rather than as isolated acts. This approach aligns with O'Reilly & O'Grady's (2024) conceptualisation of authentic student voice, where agency is realised through engagement within enabling or constraining structures, shaped by teacher beliefs and classroom dynamics. As Biesta et al (2015) argue, agency is not something one possesses but something one does, enacted in interaction with others.

Ethnography – lifeworld analytical

I adopted an ethnographic approach to explore the lived experiences of the two children attending their mainstream school. Honer & Hitzer (2015) articulate that when a researcher is keen to take a scientific interest in the lives of others, an acute problem is to what extent one

can succeed in seeing the world through the eyes of another person. Honer (2004) suggests that utilising ethnography as 'lifeworld analytical' motivates researchers to devote themselves more determinedly and explicitly than others to investigating how people subjectively experience their world and the certainties that shape it. Goodley, (2011) emphasises the importance of focusing upon the everyday realities of children with disabilities to better understand their lived experiences, particularly within systems that are designed for normative experiences.

Therefore, I decided to ethnographically situate my research in the children's school and I observed and participated with them in many different spaces, such as a 'nurture base' (a space that was developed primarily for children with additional learning needs), the lunch hall, the entrance foyer, the playground, the children's individual year group classrooms, the playing field and an outdoor space, specifically designed for children who access the nurture base.

Participants and context

Ethical approval was obtained from the university of Sheffield before recruiting participants and in this document it was made clear that the context for the participants was selective. The rationale being that having good established relationships is useful when utilising ethnographic methods (Fusch et al 2017) and I didn't have a long time to collect the data due to the constraints of completing the research within the doctoral timeframe. I also wanted to choose a school whereby I believed them to have an 'inclusive ethos' and where my professional experiences caused me to believe communication with parents was mostly effective and positive. For ethical reasons, I believed the school placement of the child needed to be in a stable position because I didn't want my research to influence decisions being made about children's educational journeys. Therefore, the research took place in a small one form entry catholic primary school that I had known previously through my role prior to starting the doctorate. I had worked with the school for approximately 8 years under the remit of providing support and advice to the educational professionals within the setting regarding children who

were identified as having complex learning disabilities. Knowing the school meant that I already knew some of the staff members and I believe this enabled lots of incidental and informal conversations that may not have been possible in a completely new setting within the timeframe.

The selection criteria for the participants was as follows:

- A child aged between 5-11 with a presentation of a severe and complex learning disability and who were 'minimally verbal', as it is these children that are predominantly missing from research (McCoy et al, 2020).
- Complex learning disability. A definition by Barry Carpenter, (2015) was thought to be most fitting:

"Complex needs typically refers to individuals who require support across multiple domains of development, such as cognitive, social, emotional and physical. These individuals often have a combination of disabilities or challenges that require a comprehensive and individualised approach to support their learning and well-being." (Carpenter et al, 2015).

- Have an EHCP and be considered by the school to need an enhanced level of support, including a bespoke and personalised timetable.

Participants

Two children were chosen that met the identified criteria. Joshua and Xavier (Pseudonym). The children were chosen through discussions with the headteacher regarding the criteria noted above. There were only two children in the school who met the criteria and their parents were approached directly by the headteacher to ascertain their interest in their child taking part in the research. I then engaged with both sets of parents to go through the participant information sheet and checked that they gave explicit consent for me to observe their children in school, whilst simultaneously converse with school staff about their children, within the context of the research.

Joshua- Joshua was 5 and 6 years old during the research process. He was in the reception class (June 2024) and year one (October 2024) respectively. Joshua was a small child, with beautiful blond curls. He was very active, and rarely stood or sat still. He was fascinated with the movement sensors, creating routines to check they were working. He presented as quietly determined as he went about his day, acknowledging that rules existed, of which he would check their consistent application. Sometimes cheekily and sometimes through necessity to provide internal equilibrium. Joshua's observation skills and attention to small details was admirable and I predict that their wasn't a moment where he wasn't scanning, checking and making sense of his environment. During the research process I thought of a song that reminded me of the way Joshua moved through his day, the song was 'Human' by the Killers and I would invite the reader to listen to this song, whilst imagining Joshua going about his day, to better understand his vibrancy, his enthusiasm for lights and movement sensors and the levels of activity he exerted whilst going about his day.

Xavier- Xavier was a little boy aged 6 and 7 during the research process. He was in year one (June 2024) and year two (October 2024) respectively. Xavier was a tall child with mousy floppy hair that gently covered one of his eyes, some of the time. He was very inclusive towards me, welcoming me into the school by taking my hand and clapping voraciously. He loved any opportunities to play on the school hammock. Most mornings, Xavier would retreat to the book corner and rejoice quietly in the large number of books that belonged in a series, for example the Julia Donaldson collection. Xavier also loved the small group routine sessions, where a song or two was played repetitively throughout the week. He observed his fellow peers dancing, with a look of amusement. Xavier displayed great curiosity about the behaviours of the teaching staff, often cheekily testing a boundary and engaging in a smile towards them. He was generally a very happy boy, loving nothing more than the chance to be outside, playing in water, laughing on the swing and careering around the playground.

The school site

The school was a small one form entry primary school, located in the north of England. The school has a higher than average number of EHCP's than other schools in the local authority. Reflecting this, the school were given additional funding to employ a teacher whose primary role for 4 mornings a week was to facilitate a whole school provision for meeting the needs of children with an EHCP. The school therefore utilised the position of the deputy headteacher to take on this role. The school has additional facilities that they have developed over time, such as a large purpose developed and fluid classroom space, designated 'nurture' base staff, and a sensory outdoor area with swing, water play, toys and grassy area.

Research methods

Participatory observation

Gillham, (2008) proposes that the main purpose of observations is to acquire 'sensory impressions', to experience things and to register phenomena. This really resonated with me and the research I conducted. 'sensing' the classroom when all of the children were in it, the emotions when an activity was going well for teachers and children and when 'turbulence' was prevalent. I captured the glances between adults, the rise of noise and the emotions expressed.

Morris (2003) and Simmons and Watson, (2015) describe participant observation as the act of 'being with' and as an alternative way of getting to know someone, to enable an understanding of their communication. Wellington, (2000) states that participatory observation enables rapport and trust to be built quickly with participants and staff members which is particularly important for joint knowledge construction to occur (Harrison et al, 2001).

Tedlock, (2000) suggests that participant observation entails a dual process of emotional engagement and objective detachment occurring simultaneously. This best describes how I experienced conducting participant observation and also the uncomfortableness within this. For example, originally I anticipated that I would take on the role of secondary support assistant, participating in the child's classroom routines and activities. However, I had

underestimated how this would make me feel and how this would interact with my quest to understand the children's lived experiences.

Honer & Hitzler (2015) articulate this uncomfortableness as a key feature of participatory observation and it is what separates it from simply observation. Setting participant observation apart from 'normal' participation illuminates the intentional differences. Therefore, 'participant observation' means becoming existentially involved, or allowing oneself to be existentially involved in as many things as possible and in doing so not only observing other people but also oneself (Honer & Hitzler, 2015). Through the awareness of oneself it is anticipated that another layer of data emerges that is my own lived experience in the field and thus making a special contribution to the interpretation and descriptive understanding of the experiences of the CYP.

Being an 'observing participant' meant at times I performed actions based on the rules of the school/classroom. I stopped playing a game with a child if it wasn't approved of, e.g. tipping boxes of toys onto the floor. I also closed the door to the classroom firmly shut to prevent a child from leaving the room. On one occasion I inadvertently contributed to a child becoming distressed because I followed his lead which meant us moving outside of the boundary of the playground. As a participant observer, I was also invited into discussions about some of the children's negative behaviours in front of them, which made me feel I was complicit in that particular narrative of them.

Non-participatory observations

Non-participant observation is regarded as a valuable method for capturing children's lived experiences. As highlighted in health research by Klinke & Fernandez (2023), this approach avoids reducing a patient's experience to mere observable actions. Instead, by adopting a phenomenological lens, researchers can attend to embodied expressions of subjective experience, such as desires, intentions, and emotional states, thereby foregrounding the individual's internal world alongside their outward behaviour

Throughout the collective research phases I dedicated up to 30 minute blocks of time, where I simply observed the child as they went about their activity. When their gaze shifted, I tried to

see where it was they were looking, to gain a sense of school, 'through their eyes'. Each observation is framed within a context of who was in the observation space, what was happening around the child in terms of the teacher, classroom/outdoor, and other children. Often during the observations I was able to pay close attention to the interactions between the child and adults, as well as interactions within their environment and other children. Simmons & Watson (2015) utilised a similar method within their research exploring the intersubjectivity of 'Sam' a child labelled as having a profound and multiple learning disability. They found that constructing 'vignettes' from their non-participatory observations enabled pieces of writing, rich in description of Sam's experiences and their interpretation of them. They found that they were able to share the constructions with staff in real time to enable meaning making to occur though a shared understanding of Sam's experience.

Whilst I am not sure non-participatory observation enabled me to claim I was fully understanding the child's experiences in the moment, I found that I was able to notice tiny details that I had perhaps missed during participatory observation. The feeling of 'being phenomenological' was a lot more apparent as I was able to immerse myself in their experience, particularly from a sensory perspective (Merleau-Ponty 2002).

Reflection of a non-participatory observation session

After I spent time observing J in the classroom, I reflected on the experience. The act of writing for 15 minutes everything he was doing, where he was looking, how he was moving not only enabled a 'rich descriptive account' but also provided me with a deep immersion into his 'human ness'. I found myself wanting to touch the paper he had been fiddling with, climb on the furniture, and look out of the window all in quick succession. I noticed his gaze on the photographs, the handwashing routine, the kick of the door and the glance of the movement sensor. I noticed the tiny barely audible counting as the other children watched number blocks. I didn't just 'notice' them though, 'I felt them in 4D surround sound'

Semi-structured interviews – 'what is J's & X's experience of school'

Typically, semi-structured interviews are designed to provide an opportunity for the researcher to hear the participant talk about a particular aspect of their life or experience (Willig 2013).

However with my research, I utilised semi-structured interviews for the parents and professionals to speak on behalf of their children.

I decided to informally incorporate the voices of the children's parents and professional staff at the school. Facca et al (2020) argue in their paper, 'working the limits of giving voice to children: a critical conceptual review', that child voice should be conceptualised as relational, produced through entanglements and as a coproduction of dialogue. Facca et al (2020) paper is in reference to child voice in general, with typically speaking children, however I believe it lends itself to this research also. Teachman & Gladstone (2020) suggest that we should be moving beyond simply 'giving voice' to children and paying attention to the inseparability of individual children from the social relations and conditions of which they are immersed. Teachman & Gibson (2018) reflect that the families role in the co-construction and representation of a non-speaking child's voice, isn't just acceptable but also vital (O'leary & Maloney, 2020). Clark, (2007) believed that the perspectives of both children's and parents views is a significant part of the listening process.

The decision to not record the interviews is because I was conscious of not wanting to privilege the spoken language of another over the children's own unique ways of communicating their experiences. A reviewer of my ethics application stated that I needed to pay close attention to ensuring that the research analysis doesn't rely too heavily on the inputs of other people as it could mean the research findings potentially colluding with discourses I am seeking to deconstruct. Therefore, the relevance of the interviews with parents and professionals was about finding out more about the interactions and moments that make up the school experience and to hear stories which incorporated the, sociality spatiality, materiality, and embodied aspects of their lived experiences. Simply, I was trying to capture the 'phenomenological essence' (Finlay, 2008).

Therefore the interviews had a dual purpose in a) listening to the children's voices through the people that knew them best and b) gaining information to inform me more about their day to day experiences.

Preparing for the interviews

Before each 'interview', I prepared a few questions to enable the interview to provide information relevant to the research question. As I had already engaged in observations of and with the children I asked a few questions relevant to some of the things that I had observed, as well as a general unstructured question around, 'how do you think Joshua experiences school?' The questions formed following observation where generally around the spatial, material and social aspects of the school experience, such as 'I noticed Xavier loved the outdoor hammock' which would invite the interviewees to comment further. Willig (2013) states the importance of striking a balance between maintaining control of the interview and allowing the interviewee the space to reflect and interpret for themselves the meanings of the questions, which would allow the generation of novel insights. Therefore I formulated an interview question agenda ahead of the meetings, whilst being prepared to 'go with the flow.'

Participatory conversations

As the research was ethnographic in nature, part of the field notes collected included conversations with the staff who predominantly supported the children. As I became part of the 'team' albeit with some distance, I utilised this position to explore in the moment questions about a child's experience. At the same time, information was shared with me about events on the days I hadn't been in school. I wondered about this information and how useful or relevant it was to the exploratory research as the remembered words were only an approximation of the conversation. Rutakumwa et al (2020) suggests that contrary to beliefs around what constitutes 'proper data', the approach of utilising participatory conversations as a data collection method sometimes creates the richest, most expansive and most authentic data. There are ethical implications (Swain & King, 2022) with this type of data collection, therefore at the outset of the research, I transparently discussed with staff members that I would be asking questions about the children's experiences to enable me to interpret their experiences from within their daily perspective also. The staff appeared happy for this to happen and recognised it as an integral part of exploring the children's experiences.

However, what I hadn't anticipated was the 'disclosure' of information outside of my initiating conversations. Staff members naturally shared information which, I couldn't help to hear and reflect upon. I wondered about consent and whether if asked, they would give me consent to use this information in my reflections. Swain & King (2022) has considered similar dilemmas and posit that sometimes it is difficult within informal conversations to ensure that participants understand the full purpose and motivation behind the research. I considered this idea to be true of my own exploratory research, which evolved and transformed overtime. Swain & King (2022) suggests that the most important consideration in these circumstances is for the researcher to ensure that they preserved the participants anonymity and confidentiality.

Swain & King (2022) also articulate that as the methodology within the research is 'bottom up' and inductive, this acknowledges perception of the research as an active enterprise of a knowledge construction and requires a flexible research strategy. Therefore, this expresses that there are likely to be moments that cannot be pre-anticipated or predicted. Guillemin & Gillam (2004) refer this to the 'micro ethics' of fieldwork. Pinksky (2015) refers to such encounters as 'incidental ethnographic encounters'. What became paramount within the procedure and data collection phase was my own ability to be reflexive and reflective as a researcher.

Reflexivity – Researcher diary

in my research, reflexivity has been an essential and continuous practice, deeply embedded within the social constructionist epistemology that informs the study and consistent with the embracing of a 'phenomenological attitude' (Finlay, 2012). Social constructionism acknowledges that researchers are inherently part of the research process, contributing to the co-construction of meaning through their own subjectivity (Willig, 2013).

In my research, I employed reflexivity to critically examine my own biases, assumptions, and positionality throughout the research process. Recognising that my background and perspectives could shape the interpretation of participants' experiences, I engaged in regular

self-reflection and journaling to document my thoughts and feelings as they arose during data collection and analysis. This approach aligns with Finlay's (2002) emphasis on the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research, where researchers must be aware of their influence on the research context and findings. Additionally, I sought feedback from my research tutor to challenge my interpretations and assumptions, as suggested by Hill et al, (2005), who advocate for collaborative reflexivity to enhance the credibility of qualitative research. By consciously reflecting on my engagement with participants and the broader school environment, I aimed to ensure that my interpretations were rooted in the authentic voices of the children, rather than my preconceived notions about their experiences (Halling, 2008). This commitment to reflexivity ultimately enriched my understanding of the complexities of their lived realities, allowing for a more nuanced and empathetic representation of their life at school.

As part of the data collection and when writing field notes, an ethnographers memory in field is also utilised as a source of data. I found that after my visits to school, and throughout the subsequent days, specific memories and reflections would be more prominent than others, therefore I started to reflect and write about that specific memory, and tried to understand why I found that particular memory significant. I then tried to take my new insight and apply it directly to its relevance in understanding the child's lived experience.

There was one occasion, where Xavier was sitting at a group snack table making some loud, what could be described as 'happy' sounds. Another child within the group asked him to be quiet, which Xavier immediately did. I was quite surprised that he stopped making the sounds as when asked by adults, he hadn't responded on previous days. My initial thought, was 'aha, this situation wouldn't occur in a specialist school for children with SCLD as the other children would also probably be non-speaking. I then tried to imagine Xavier's experience of that moment, did he like being told to stop by a peer (albeit an older one), did he feel scared, was he confused. Ultimately the answer will never be fully known, however I began to wonder how my own projections of a 'good experience' where maybe influencing the data collection process. I was placing a very normative value onto the snack experience. I decided to employ the 'double empathy theory' (Milton, 2012) to imagine an alternative perspective for Xavier. Utilising the double empathy problem, enabled me to think more deeply about Xavier's lived experience today and in the future. Initially, he may have been confused or scared and suppressed his loud noises, without understanding why, or without having the opportunity to reflect upon the moment. I imagined that his future would be made up of many confusing moments of being told to stop.

This ambiguous insight is one example, of how whilst the data collection process was ongoing, I used reflexivity to make sense of my memories and utilise them to gain insights for further exploration.

First stage data collection

The first stage of data collection occurred during the summer term of 2024. I attended the school for 6 Fridays from 8.30-12 on four of the weeks and 12-3 on two of the weeks. I conducted structured observations, participatory observations, spoke with the mothers of both boys, spoke with the teachers and head teacher and had participatory conversations with the support assistants. I wrote up field notes whilst I was in school, a reflective account when I got home, and as memories came to me, I took some time to write them down, as much as I could remember about the experience and then reflected on what it was about that memory that interested me. I also made a conscious effort to immerse myself in the fieldwork, when I was away from the school, asking myself the research question over and over again, 'what was the child's experience in that moment?' 'How did I know?' Reflexive insights from this informal analysing of the data, provided me with, what I feel researchers conducting semi-structured interviews gain from being attuned and responsive, regarding their questions for exploring a person's lived experience. I, in attuning to the data that was being collected, used it to effectively 'ask another question' of the participants, or to check that I understood 'what they were saying'.

Second stage of data collection

The second stage of data collection followed the routines of the first. I visited school on four separate occasions in October 2024. However, this time, due to my insights that had been forming throughout the first stage of data collection, and because I knew the environment, staff and children a little better, I felt I was more attuned in my data collection, towards the children's facial expressions, their interactions with adults and children and the way they moved and interacted within the spaces at school.

Data analysis

Analysing the 'data' or knowing how I would or should analyse the data wasn't a straightforward process. I was a novice researcher utilising a complex emergent methodology

(Redmore, 2021). As the research was heavily informed by a phenomenological approach, I initially turned to IPA for guidance (Smith et al, 2011). However, as the children would not be giving a verbal, reflective narrative of their experiences and photo/symbol based methods were not appropriate this was discounted.

I then initially thought that reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2016) would be appropriate as a flexible approach to use to guide me in analysing the data. RTA compared with a general procedural coding approach emphasises a depth of engagement and interpretation with the data, underpinned by the researchers academic knowledge, theoretical assumptions and cultural beliefs (Braun & Clarke, 2019). However, this didn't feel right either. This is because the data I was collecting wasn't from a one off event, I was immersed in making sense of my and the children's experiences from day one of the study and I couldn't stop reflections happening as I left the research site, particularly as I was writing a reflective diary after each session.

I searched in literature that focused upon ethnographic methods and/or phenomenology and it was here that I found the beginning 'niggles' of how I might begin to analyse the data through a guided process. Having a guided process was important to me, as I felt, because everything about the research was heavily dependent on field notes that I had written, rather than recorded pieces of evidence. Skarsanne et al (2021), in their research around people who are identified as having PMLD and self-determination, discusses utilising Linda Finlay's, (2008) 'search for a phenomenological attitude' as a 'guiding light'. Finlay, (2008) discusses that where practical guidance for phenomenological methods have been developed with protocols for analysing data, they have been criticised for being simplistic and reductionist. She further suggests that a 'recipe' approach to analysis stands in stark contrast to the 'spirit of phenomenological inquiry' (p.3) where understandings are seen to emerge intuitively. This reflection resonated with how I was feeling about data analysis protocols I had read about, which had contrasted with papers that had utilised ethnographic methods within their research. She then concludes with saying that because of this contradiction, the gap between theory

and practice is fraught with confusion and uncertainty, which is exactly what I was feeling. Finlay, (2008) then goes onto state that 'phenomenological analysis is both a logical procedure and an exercise in creativity, where the researcher is simultaneously intensely involved and analytically different' (p.305).

Finlay's (2008) use of the word 'intuitive' helped me to orientate myself to memories that 'popped' up of my experiences through the field stage of the research. I found myself thinking about conversations that had occurred and facial expressions of the children. I decided to take each 'memory' and spend time thinking about why that particular word or moment was more remembered than others. Emerson et al, (1995) describes this as writing 'theoretical memo's', which is suggested to link to researchers who use a grounded theory approach, as the data collection and analysis occur simultaneously (Mitchell & Noble, 2016). Further alignment is the inductive nature of interrogating the memories, in my case not to generate theories but to generate insight into CYP perspective. In Finlay's (2008) phenomenological analysis, this is referred to as a shift between bracketing prior preconceptions and exploiting insight.

O'Reilly, (2012) articulates how my memories turned into 'memo's' are part of the data collection phase, along with pure descriptive accounts, participant observation reflections, participant conversations and informal interviews and the reflexive diary. O'Reilly (2012) explains that ethnographic research is iterative-inductive, a way of doing research that is 'sophisticated inductivism' (p.180). Meaning there is an inextricable link between the writing down, analysis and writing up phases of ethnography that can't be separated. O'Reilly (2012) suggests a helix model is needed to represent this inextricable link, to resolve what Berg, (2004) suggests is a tension between a 'theory before research' model and the 'research before theory mode'. When I substitute the term 'theory' with 'insight', Skaursane et al. (2021) articulate this helix spiral metaphor, described as 'a dance of improvised steps' (p. 4), which aligns with what Finlay (2008) terms 'processual phenomenological analysis' (p. 4).

Explicating lived experiences- phenomenological analysis

In exploring the lived experiences of children with SCLD, phenomenological analysis requires a deep commitment to understanding their world beyond verbal communication. Nearly everything I have read regarding phenomenological analysis refers to exploring the lived experiences of people who use language to communicate, despite there being an emphasis on embodied experiences. Finlay's (2012) paper, 'Unfolding the Phenomenological Research Process: Iterative Stages of Seeing Afresh' suggests fluid stages of iterative analysis, that appeared to be a useful guide for both approaching and analysing the research.

The **phenomenological attitude** emphasises the need for myself as a researcher to set aside preconceptions and biases, enabling me to engage authentically with the participants' lived realities. This involves the process called 'epoché', where I temporarily suspended my assumptions to let the participants' experiences reveal themselves naturally (Husserl, 1970). Van Manen, (2011) emphasises the importance of genuine openness, enabling the children to present themselves authentically, (Giorgi, 2009). For my research, this translated to the concept of 'being with' (Morris, 2003) and my positioning of the children as having an 'embodied consciousness' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) and that a person and their world are intentionally and intersubjectively intertwined (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Dwelling, or the act of immersing oneself in the data, allows for the slow and reflective uncovering of the meanings embedded in the immersive data collected (Giorgi, 2009). Rather than rushing to conclusions, this process demanded attention to the written about subtle movements, sensory reactions, engagement and discussions within the ethnographic 'hanging out', helping me grasp how the children experienced time, space, and relationships (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Imaginative eidetic analysis are critical methods within the explication of the lived experience. They helped to distil the essential structures of the children's lived experience by interrogating the actions and behaviours that I observed. This approach requires moving beyond surface-level interpretations, allowing me to understand the core elements of how the children experience school life (van Manen, 2011). In essence, the process of

phenomenological analysis becomes an embodied lived experience and not simply a cognitive or intellectual exercise (Finlay, 2005). By trialling the imagining of the world from children's perspectives, I was able to explore the sensory, emotional and interpretative layers of their experiences.

Example in relation to a non-participatory observation.

I observed a group session in the nurture room, Joshua was on the periphery, moving between looking out of the window ,the construction and the marble run. Occasionally he looked at the white board. Xavier was sat on the carpet, repeating 'purple spot', touching the books under the teachers chair, looking at her, whilst she said, 'put them down'. Xavier repeats 'put them down'. (Field notes, Oct 2024)

Imagining Joshua's world, he steps into the nurture base with a sense of purpose. The sensors, his silent sentinels, must be checked to ensure his environment is just right. Each sensor, a ***beacon*** *of* ***predictability,*** *offers him comfort in its consistent operation. The marble run, with its rhythmic clatter of balls, captivates him, providing a soothing visual and auditory experience. His* ***periodic checks*** *on the sensors are like a* ***ritual,*** *grounding him in the present. The whiteboard, a distant but acknowledged presence, hints at the broader world he is aware of but not fully engaged with. In this space, Joshua's actions are a dance of reassurance and sensory satisfaction, a delicate balance that helps him* ***navigate*** *his day.*

(imaginative eidetic analysis from field notes November 2024)

Xavier sits down on the purple spot, a place that seems to hold both ***familiarity and comfort****. His action is deliberate, the spot a small anchor in the flow of his day. When he moves, he utters 'purple spot' in response to the TA's prompt, his words a quiet echo of the routine, as if confirming his awareness of the expected structure. The repetition of 'purple spot' becomes more than a simple phrase, it's a marker of his understanding of where he belongs, a reminder of the place he's meant to return to. Nearby, a set of books sits under the table, inviting* ***curiosity****. Xavier picks one up, his hands lightly touching the cover, yet his actions don't push for exploration. Instead, he repeats the teachers words, 'put it down,' the words like a gentle,* ***curious*** *command to himself. . Each time he touches the book, there's a sense of testing boundaries, what does it feel like to pick it up? What happens if he places it down again? His gaze shifts to the adult, seeking a* ***subtle form of reassurance or perhaps gauging their response****, his actions a dialogue of sorts between him and the environment. This exchange, though quiet and simple, is* ***charged*** *with meaning, reflecting a moment of* ***sensory engagement*** *and* ***ambiguous*** *emotional processing within the routine.*

Only when I had engaged in this iterative process of collecting, immersing and interrogating the data was I then in a position to articulate the essence's (acquired through the highlighted words in bold) of the phenomenon and begin the explication of the data (Finlay, 2012).

Explicating the data

As I eidetically analysed all the information I had gathered, along with my memories and reflections, I felt that I was developing an embodied understanding of the essences belonging to the children's lived experiences. Themes began to emerge that related to this understanding. However, what troubled me was how I could describe and locate these themes in relation to their individual experiences. At its core, I wanted the readers of this research to 'see' the children as I had, experiencing their lives at school on a day-to-day basis. I wanted them to 'feel' the children's embodied movements and actions, and I wanted to do this in a way that would offer an almost hermeneutical understanding of their lived experiences.

Reflecting on my memories of being ethnographically situated in their school experience, and the emergent themes that were arising through the eidetic analysis process, naturally and somewhat unexplainably led me to exploring the use of metaphor to explicate their individual experiences. For example, a metaphorical theme that I associated with my immersion and subsequent understanding of Joshua's experiences were around him as a 'science professor'. This is because the words associated with Joshua to describe his experience from the analysis were around his testing, anchoring, curiosity. It doesn't really sound very scientific or objective, however this emerged from my constant asking of the question to myself, 'how do I tell their stories, in way that not only is humanising but also relatable?'.

Metaphor

Lakoff & Johnson (1980) argue that metaphors are not just linguistic flourishes but fundamental to how we conceptualise the world. My use of 'Joshua is a scientist' metaphor exemplifies this. It's not just a way of describing Joshua, it's a way of understanding him. It creates a new conceptual framework for interpreting his behaviours, shifting our understanding from 'atypical student' to 'active researcher.' This aligns with Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) idea that metaphors shape our very thought processes.

Gibbs (1994) emphasises that metaphors are not merely cognitive but also embodied. They are grounded in our physical experiences and interactions with the world. Joshua's

interactions with the sensor lights, the door, and the paper towels illustrate this beautifully. These are not just random actions, they are physical explorations of his environment, providing him with sensory data that informs his understanding, much like a scientist's experiments provide data. The ‘Joshua is a scientist’ metaphor connects these embodied actions to a larger conceptual framework, making them meaningful and interpretable.

Kovecses (2010) highlights the role of shared conceptual frameworks in communication. By using the readily understood metaphor of ‘a scientist,’ I hopefully create a shared framework (King, 2024) for understanding Joshua. The reader doesn't need knowledge of Joshua to grasp the metaphor. The image of a scientist, with their focus on observation, experimentation, and data collection, is culturally familiar. This shared understanding allows the reader to connect with Joshua's behaviours and actions in a new way, fostering empathy and understanding. Connected to the idea of a shared framework (King 2024), the metaphor attempts to reframe Joshua's behaviours. Instead of viewing him through a lens of deficit or deviance, the ‘scientist’ metaphor reframes him as resourceful, intentional, and actively engaged in making sense of his world. This reframing, I believe has profound implications for how we interact with and support Joshua, shifting the focus from trying to ‘fix’ his behaviours to understanding and accommodating his unique way of navigating his environment.

Chapter Four: Findings

My analysis in this chapter emerges from an iterative process of reflection and phenomenological 'dwelling' on field notes (Appendices 1 & 2), weekly observational reflections (Appendix 3), and imaginative eidetic analysis (Appendices 1 & 2). Themes arose not from discrete moments but through immersive engagement with ethnographic memories and the eidetic process, a method of imaginatively distilling the essence of lived experience. Here, I invite the reader to step into my phenomenological stance, where observations, memories, and reflections intertwine (Appendices 1-4), to trace how meaning was co-constructed.

To illustrate this, I have selected representative extracts that epitomise key themes. By foregrounding these moments, I aimed to recreate the children's daily rhythms as I witnessed them, while acknowledging how the eidetic process itself reshaped my interpretations. This reflexive cycle, where analysis generated new insights that, in turn, informed further reflection, mirrors what Finlay (2012) describes as a 'dance of improvised steps' (p. 4). Below, I articulate the meanings distilled from this immersive, recursive journey.

Exploring Joshua's lived experience of school.

Joshua is 5 years old. He is a small, agile little boy and appears busy all of the time. He has limited verbal communication and when he repeats words it seems like it takes a lot of effort to form the word in his mouth and articulate the sounds. Joshua currently spends half of his time in school in the reception classroom and half of his time in the school nurture base, a provision designed for children presenting with additional and complex learning needs. The base is staffed by the deputy headteacher for four mornings a week and two full time teaching assistants. Other children who use the base, probably use it for a third of their week and the rest of the time with a whole year group class.

Through exploring Joshua's lived experience, utilising imaginative eidetic analysis to explore the possibilities within his world, I propose there are four themes relating to his lived experience of school.

RQ 1: Exploring Joshua's lived experience of attending a mainstream school

Theme one -School is a science laboratory

When I first met Joshua in June 2024, he was very observant of the lights and the movement sensors in school. They served as a distraction, a comfort and a source of joy for Joshua. Along with the continual checking of the lights and sensors, Joshua developed patterns of behaviour which seemed to be 'testing' the sensors. The 'testing' behaviour could be suggested to be rooted in a desire to make a messy and chaotic (to him) environment a little more predictable.

Joshua arrived in the 'nurture base' and immediately began checking the sensors in the room, where they on, he moved or open the door to check they were functioning. He picked up a little ball marble run to watch the balls go down. Every few seconds – minutes he moved to check the sensor was still working and he would glance at what was happening on the white board. (Field observation June 2024 App 1, pg. 1, no 1.)

Metaphorical interpretation

Joshua navigates his environment with the precision of a scientist in a lab, (Appendix 3, pg.1, no. 68) where the room's sensors become his instruments, offering him a steady stream of data to interpret. His repeated checks of the sensors, ensuring they are on and functioning, reflect his need for consistent feedback, much like a scientist would constantly monitor their equipment during an experiment. The act of testing the door's functionality, whether through movement or physical contact, serves as another method of gathering sensory data, each push and pull providing confirmation that his surroundings are as they should be. His interaction with the marble run, watching the balls travel down, mirrors an experiment in motion, where the predictable path of the balls offers a sense of control and understanding.

The periodic glance at the whiteboard adds another layer of observation, ensuring his focus remains aligned with the variables at play. Joshua's actions are a carefully constructed series of checks and observations, providing him with the reassurance he needs to feel secure within the structure of his world.

The following week, Joshua displays similar 'testing' behaviours in the reception classroom. The class TA explains that at the beginning of the school year, Joshua also needed to turn the whiteboard on and off, however now he understood not to.

In the classroom, Joshua developed a routine of grabbing paper towels from the sink area, checking the sensors, kicking the door, checking the sensors, opening the cupboard, checking the sensors. Reliably the sensor light moved on and off continually, however other children were moving in the classroom and I wondered if Joshua knew that they were also partly responsible for the sensor lights also. The class teacher mentioned that at the start of the year, they were unable to use the class whiteboard as Joshua wanted to control the on/off swich and watch for the red light that came on. This was problematic for them as lots of the lessons for the other children was planned on the whiteboard, however through persistence of explaining to Joshua that the whiteboard had to stay on, he now doesn't try and turn it on/off. I watched him watch the maths lesson about tangrams and shapes, at the same time he completed the maths inset puzzle that the TA pulled out of her bag. He did this a few times, and said the numbers as he placed them into the puzzle.

(Field observation, June 2024. App 1, pg. 2, no 3.)

Metaphorical interpretation

Joshua responds to the predictable rhythms of his school day, where his consistent routines mirror the controlled conditions of a laboratory. For Joshua, the sensor lights serve as his 'instruments,' providing reliable feedback about the world around him. His repeated checks on the sensor lights, monitoring their flicker as a constant variable, illustrate his reliance on these predictable signals to anchor himself. Similarly, his interaction with the door, kicking it to feel

its resistance, and his engagement with paper towels reflect an ongoing need to test and retest the physical properties of his environment. His self-developed routines act as a procedural framework for Joshua, offering him the reassurance he needs to engage with his surroundings.

During the second phase of the ethnography, I noticed that adaptations to the nurture space environment had taken place (Appendix 3, pg.2. no. 82). Also Joshua stayed utilising the reception classroom whilst his previous class mates moved into year one. This presented changing variables, which appeared to complement 'Joshua the scientist' profile. For example, the nurture base developed specific areas for specific activities and the classroom whilst staying the same, had a whole mix of new children.

Joshua is calmer and enjoying being part of the class. He appeared a lot more focused on activities, likes the routine, giving more eye contact, showing enjoyment in his face (almost like how he looked with the movement sensor). Singing during the group whiteboard and saying the colours in a song. Counting lots to himself. In the reception classroom I noticed him noticing the other children more, wanting to do things that they did but not initiating, like he doesn't know how to, but knows not to take or grab. What else is he thinking but not expressing. Very self -sufficient, it doesn't make him unhappy. (App 1. pg. 15, no 26.)

The introduction of 'bucket time' taken from the Attention Autism approach, appeared to be particularly appealing to Joshua and provided him with a platform to explore in and share his delight and wonder with sensory items.

Joshua is shown the symbol, 'bucket time'. He moves to the enclosed space and sits at the table. The first item is a 'press on nails' Joshua looks attentively swinging his legs and smiling. Miss says 'ready, steady, …' Joshua says 'go' so that miss presses the nails in again to make a shape. 'patterns finished'. The next object in the box was a squishy snake toy, Joshua sat on his hands and watched the toy, watching Xavier reach out to grab it. Joshua gets pinched by Xavier but he doesn't seem to feel or notice the pinch. As Xavier gets removed from the table, Joshua is given the bucket item, 'blower', he appears delighted and begins trying to

blow it, something he appeared to struggle with. 'bucket time finished' (Field notes Oct, 2024 App 1.pg. 17, no 28.).

Metaphorical interpretation

The bucket time experience aligns seamlessly with the school as a science laboratory theme, reflecting Joshua's process of exploration, observation, and interaction within a structured and controlled environment. During 'bucket time', the activities resemble a carefully designed experiment where each component serves a specific purpose. The 'press-on nails' toy, with its repetitive, predictable actions, provides Joshua with a clear cause and effect relationship. His focused gaze and the joy of participating in the ritualised 'ready, steady... go' interaction mirror the satisfaction a scientist might feel when observing a successful and repeatable result. This activity fosters a sense of mastery within the boundaries of a defined task, reinforcing his understanding of the environment.

Joshua's interaction with the squishy snake toy introduces an element of unpredictability, similar to an experiment encountering external factors. Sitting on his hands to regulate impulses, Joshua exhibits a scientist's restraint, observing the dynamics at play without directly intervening. The transition to the blower presents Joshua with a challenge, a novel task that tests his abilities. His joyful determination to blow effectively reflects the spirit of experimentation, where failure is part of the process, and each attempt is a step toward success. The structured environment ensures that the challenge is manageable, creating a safe space for Joshua to persist without frustration. His enthusiasm for mastering this small but complex task mirrors the excitement of discovery and problem-solving in a laboratory setting.

'Bucket time' exemplifies how the classroom, provides a carefully calibrated environment for him to explore, test, and grow. Every toy, interaction, and transition acts as a variable or stimulus in his experiment. Through these moments, Joshua refines his understanding of cause and effect, sensory dynamics, and social interactions. This structured yet exploratory

space allows Joshua to thrive, reinforcing his need for predictability while gently encouraging him to adapt to new challenges.

Theme two – The school experience as a jigsaw puzzle

Stepping back and simultaneously immersing myself in Joshua's overall experience of school, also prompted me to think of a jigsaw puzzle metaphor, where the pieces sometimes fit, sometimes they are missing, sometimes the puzzle is easy and other times there are many interlinking pieces that are difficult to arrange, but when they do perfection emerges. This can be demonstrated through my observations of Joshua making sense of routines from snippets of concrete information such as a familiar song or a whistle on the playground. Where the routine isn't making sense, we see Joshua searching for a 'missing piece' to feel secure again.

Outside play- Joshua was watching the door and wanted it closed, but he looked at an adult and paused and stopped, 'he knows the rule', and ran off to the climbing area and then ran back to check the door. Sat at the snack table outside but didn't eat anything, almost waiting there. When the whistle was blown, he was straight to the front, wanting to go in immediately. There was a bottleneck of children entering the school, Joshua appeared very focused on the lights being on/off. Seemed to get very upset and ran to the hall, 'to check the lights were on' Miss mentioned how he seems to have an idea of what the lights needed to be doing to make the 'world' ok. The lights were actually off, and he seemed happy then and was happy to go back to class. Miss was surprised and confused 'as last time he wanted them on' 'can't keep up'. (Field notes June 2024 . App 1, pg. 4, no.10)

Metaphorical interpretation

During outdoor play, Joshua's glance at the adult upon noticing the open door demonstrates his grasp of the rules, a critical piece of his puzzle. This moment of restraint shows how his understanding of boundaries acts as a framework for his actions. The climbing area provides an outlet for his energy, yet his periodic checks on the door suggest an unresolved question in his mind, for example, does the situation align with his expectations? Here, Joshua is

aligning routines with his internal schema, ensuring every piece fits into place. His position at the front of the line when the whistle blows reflects another piece sliding effortlessly into the puzzle. The whistle, a concrete auditory cue, provides a clear signal for what comes next, reducing ambiguity and allowing Joshua to act with purpose.

As the children re-enter the building, the bottleneck disrupts the seamless transition Joshua might expect. His focus on the lights reveals a moment where a piece of his puzzle feels missing or out of place. The lights, for Joshua, seem to symbolise order, an element that must align with his internal expectations for the environment to feel 'right'. His distress and subsequent run to the hall reflect his determination to search for the missing piece, an action driven by his need to restore balance. The surprising resolution, his contentment with the lights being off, despite previously preferring them on, shows that Joshua's puzzle is dynamic. Pieces can shift, adapt, or transform based on context, revealing the fluidity of his internal framework. While Miss finds this shift puzzling, for Joshua, it might represent a moment of clarity where the puzzle makes sense in a new way, even if the configuration is different from before.

Other moments of alignment come from the teaching staff knowing and understanding Joshua's need for predictability. Often working in between the nurture base and the classroom can be tricky for supporting staff as activities may have had to change without their knowledge, which then disrupts Joshua's experience, as observed in the following field notes.

*Joshua was shown a bag which indicated that it was time to go to his reception classroom. 'he has an clock and knows when it is time, very routine oriented' He walks runs to the classroom, on the way miss is telling him what is happening , doing some painting' ' he likes to be prepared' 'we found if we told him what he was doing he would be better'. In the class, there was no painting available, it was colouring, Joshua wouldn't sit down or do the colouring, 'this was because he was expecting painting'. Miss knew this was the case, she changed the activity and got some paints out. He did sit down and had a very quick go of mixing the paints with a cotton bud. (*Field notes June, 2024 App 1. Pg 15, no 25).

Metaphorical interpretation

The transition to the reception classroom begins as a piece that fits perfectly into Joshua's puzzle. The use of the familiar transition bag serves as a visual cue, offering Joshua a clear framework for what is to come. This structured approach mirrors the edge pieces of a puzzle, the foundational elements that provide stability and define boundaries. Miss's verbal cues about the upcoming activity, 'painting,' further solidify this sense of predictability, allowing Joshua to anticipate and prepare for the next step. Upon arrival, the discovery that the expected painting activity has been replaced with colouring disrupts the puzzle's emerging image. For Joshua, this unexpected change creates a gap in his understanding, a 'missing piece' that challenges his sense of order. His avoidance of the activity reflects his struggle to reconcile the new reality with his established expectations. The deviation, though minor to others, feels significant to Joshua, highlighting how each piece no matter how small contributes to the overall coherence of his world.

Miss's adaptation, introducing painting materials, symbolises a reshaping of the puzzle to better suit Joshua's needs. By reintroducing a familiar and anticipated element, she bridges the gap between expectation and reality, helping Joshua find the missing piece. This flexibility ensures that the puzzle, while momentarily incomplete, regains its form, offering Joshua the reassurance he craves. This interaction emphasises how Joshua's experience of school is a dynamic process of assembling and reassembling the puzzle of his day. Each predictable routine and adaptive response adds to the picture, while moments of unexpected change highlight the gaps he works to fill. With support from those around him, Joshua's puzzle continues to take shape, revealing a world where flexibility and structure coexist to help him navigate, engage, and grow.

Putting pieces of the puzzles together is necessary for Joshua to engage in activities that are on offer in school. They are also necessary to enable Joshua to have his basic needs met. For example, when I first began the field work, I observed Joshua being given a green cup to drink from, and was told he would only drink from a green cup. When he went to the class with

an unfamiliar adult, who didn't know the green cup rule, Joshua when offered a blue cup, and he simply and quietly wouldn't drink. Later in the second half of the field work, Joshua was given his drink in the enclosed space area, he brought a bottle from home. Through an awareness of supporting predictable routines, Joshua was beginning to articulate and request water.

Later on in nurture whilst the rest were having snack, miss got him a drink, which he sat down and drank- miss said he didn't drink for ages but then they realised he wanted a green cup. (Field notes June 2024 App1. Pg 5, no. 11)

he went to get a cup from the sink but placed it back down again. TA went to fill up the cup but I noticed that it was a blue cup. The TA was new so I mentioned that the previous week, he only drank from a green cup, which miss had said that he only drinks from a green cup. New TA changed cup and Joshua sat down to have a drink. (Field notes July 2024 App 1. Pg 12, no. 22)

Joshua was waiting at the enclosed area making some shouting noises, he then enters the area, miss says, 'I'll get you a drink' 'Water, water, water' (Field notes October 2024, App 1. Pg. 21, no. 34)

Metaphorical interpretation

In nurture, the missing piece of the puzzle was the green cup. Initially, the adults around Joshua were unaware of the significance of this detail, resulting in his reluctance to drink. The TA realized this and provided the green cup, completing the puzzle and allowing Joshua to relax and engage in the snack routine. The moment revealed how small, specific preferences, seemingly inconsequential to others are essential for Joshua's sense of order and comfort. When a new TA was present, a similar scenario unfolded. Joshua retrieved a cup from the sink but placed it back down when it was the wrong colour. This action was his way of signalling that the puzzle wasn't fitting together as it should. The TA, unaware of this nuance, offered a blue cup, which Joshua refused. After being reminded of Joshua's preference, the

green cup was provided, and Joshua sat down to drink, completing the puzzle for that moment. Later in the year, in the new enclosed work area, Joshua's vocalisations of 'water, water, water' and his willingness to enter the space when the TA reassured him by offering a drink suggest his growing ability to guide others in piecing together his puzzle. His vocal repetition highlights how he is beginning to communicate his needs actively, signalling to adults what is required to align his environment with his expectations.

The adults around him play a critical role in assembling this puzzle, learning to interpret his signals and preferences to create an environment that aligns with his internal sense of order. Joshua, in turn, is gradually becoming an active participant in this process, vocalising his needs and helping to guide others toward completing his puzzle. Through this interplay, Joshua's experience at school reflects a balance between fixed pieces, (his need for consistency and specific preferences) and evolving pieces, (his developing communication and the responsiveness of the adults around him). Together, these elements create a picture of Joshua's growing ability to navigate his environment while feeling supported and understood.

Theme three- School is a ship, sailing the seas of discovery

This theme refers to the interpretation that the school experience for Joshua relies on strong anchor points, a continual journey of growth which is supported by him being 'known', and his ability to send 'distress' signals when he becomes overwhelmed.

The marble run is out, the structure is quite simple, it usually stays in the position it is, occasionally being fixed if it breaks. Joshua plays with the marble run intermittently whilst walking fast around the room. in between he is watching the white board. Checking out of the window, looking at the movement sensor. He made something out of the plastic construction materials and occasionally uses it to look through before placing it down. He is stacking the circular construction toy whilst looking out of the window.

. (Field notes, June 2024, App 1, Pg. 12, no.21)

Joshua was waiting in reception when I went to see his Mum. He was shouting in distress and his mum said that he didn't like the amount of people. The staff in class said it was because he could see the lights on in class 1 – however both could be correct and causal in this situation. (Field notes June, 2024. App 1. Pg. 4, no.8)

Metaphorical interpretation

Joshua's engagement in the classroom reflects the ongoing rhythm of a sailor navigating the seas, where the environment offers both familiar structures and opportunities for exploration. The marble run, a steadfast structure within his world, serves as an anchor, a predictable element that offers reassurance. Though it may break and require fixing, its reliability mirrors a ship's mast, standing firm even when the winds of his curiosity shift. Joshua's intermittent engagement with the marble run reflects his natural ebb and flow between grounding and exploration. His fast-paced movement around the room is like a sailor pacing the deck, surveying the surroundings for points of interest or signs of change. The whiteboard, window, and movement sensor become his navigational markers, offering him visual cues and sensory stimuli to guide his internal compass. Each glance is purposeful, as though checking his bearings amidst the currents of activity around him. The plastic construction materials and the circular stacking toys represent Joshua's tools for charting his course. His use of the construction material to look through, then placing it down, suggests moments of exploration, peering into the horizon, perhaps imagining possibilities before continuing his journey. Meanwhile, the act of stacking while looking out the window reflects his ability to balance action and observation.

Utilising the ship metaphor, Joshua's experience in the reception area can be likened to navigating stormy seas, where multiple factors act as turbulent waves disrupting his sense of stability. The crowd of people represents a sudden swell, overwhelming him with sensory and social stimuli, while the lights in Class 1 act as an unexpected shift in the winds, pulling his focus and unsettling his internal compass. Joshua's shouting in distress becomes his distress signal, a call for help to recalibrate his course. Both his mother's observation about the crowd

and the staff's note about the lights offer potential 'causes' of the storm, illustrating how multiple environmental variables can compound to create uncertainty in his navigation. The lack of clarity around which factor was more disruptive highlights the complex interaction of external conditions that influence his journey. To steady his ship, Joshua may need an anchor, a predictable routine or a comforting object to ground him, or a trusted crew member (like his mum or a staff member) to help steer him back to calmer waters. This moment illuminates the importance of reading his distress signals carefully and responding with coordinated strategies to guide him through these challenging waters, allowing him to regain his equilibrium and continue his journey.

Later, in my ethnographic research, Joshua appears calmer overall, he doesn't appear to rely on the movement sensors and lights to anchor his journey, suggesting his 'sea' is less stormy. This could be because of the changes that have been made to 'steady the ship' or because Joshua is utilising several anchors to structure his day which give him more clarity and a deeper sense of understanding school.

Joshua is in the new reception class as the other children from last year have now moved into year 1. The teacher said that this new class was already a lot calmer than last year. She feels that Joshua is a lot more settled this year and the routine in nurture is facilitating this. He doesn't seem to mind that the children are different. Joshua was playing with metal hooks on a green ledge. He was looking at them from different angles. On occasion he glanced at the whiteboard which had the school logo on it in standby mode. He moved to play with the peg board, then went outside. Outside he was running up and down along the fence, occasionally looking up at the sky. A child threw a ball onto him, which he let bounce off him. He was holding a yellow ball, a child tried to take it, he made a crying noise but then left it. Continued to run up and down and through the extended outdoor play area. Back inside he looked out of the window. Inside he noticed a child who had made an aeroplane out of lolly sticks and was moving across the classroom making a flying motion. A few minutes later, I noticed Joshua walking around holding the lolly sticks, I made a gesture for him to sit down next to me, and I

made them into the same aeroplane shape, he then went off holding the sticks in the air, looking at them from different angles, occasionally looking out of the window. A child that was playing with a large peg tower moved, and Joshua swooped in to take the tower apart and put the pegs away. On the carpet a small group activity was starting with drums and beaters, Joshua walked over and miss gave him a drum, 'do you want to sit down?' and he did, miss did hand over hand to make a beat to the song, which Joshua smiles to, the beat was cat, cat, monkey, cat. (Fieldnotes October 2024, App.1 Pg. 19, no.32)

Metaphorical interpretation

Using the ship metaphor, Joshua's experience in the reception class reflects his ongoing journey of navigating the seas of school life, where calmer waters have emerged, enabling steadier sailing. The teacher's observation that the new class is less chaotic represents a quieter tide, giving Joshua a more predictable and navigable environment in which he can chart his course. The structured routine in nurture serves as his anchor, grounding him amidst the flux of new peers and activities. Joshua's interaction with the hooks on the ledge and the aeroplane made of lolly sticks can be seen as his careful observation of the details of the world around him, similar to a sailor inspecting tools or mapping out constellations to guide his way. His gaze at the whiteboard in standby mode and the sky outside reflects moments of scanning the horizon, seeking clarity or inspiration. The interplay between independent exploration, such as taking apart the peg tower or holding the sticks, and his engagement in structured activities like the drum session shows Joshua responding to both self-guided navigation and guidance from the crew (his teachers). The hand-over-hand support provided by Miss to create the beat mirrors how Joshua is learning to steer in unfamiliar waters with the help of experienced navigators.

Theme four: Joshua in bloom

This final theme representing Joshua's experiences at school portrays the growth I have observed in Joshua from the beginning of my fieldwork. He embodies and exudes a quiet

confidence and contentment in his familiar surroundings. This strange school environment is starting to make predictable, enjoyable sense to him.

Joshua bounces into the room looking very happy and bunny hopping around. He looks at Miss leaving the room and makes a low noise. He walked over to where I was and looked at me directly in the eye, I gave a smile. He went over to the table with a peg board on top and started putting pegs in, starting with all of the red colours. He moved to his spot on the carpet and settled sitting on a TA's knee. He sat down for singing hands. 'sit on the red spot' Joshua is told. He is watching the whiteboard intently, someone opens the door and he looks to see who it is. He is saying bbbb b, smiling at the song, 'bbb-bbb' . Miss tickled his body to the beat of the music, he giggled, he then closed his eyes in a squint. He laughed again when the TA moved her arms over him. As soon as the song is finished, Joshua gets up and moves to the peg board, it sounds like he is saying some words. On the whiteboard there is now a colour song and Joshua shouts out the colours as they come onto the screen. When an adult moves he gets distracted, he then moves back shouting out the colours. Joshua moved away again and was asked to move back, he made the noise lalalala, wiggle and ddd. Joshua seems to enjoy the physical movement of hand over hand. Joshua gets up to leave the group area, he returns when requested, but lies on the floor rather than sitting on his spot. (Field notes October 2024 App 1. Pg. 16, no. 27)

Metaphorical interpretation

Interpreting this extract of Joshua's experience at school, my 'knowing' of him was of a little boy who was confident, secure and happy in his environment, like the correct conditions had been provided to help him grow. His arrival, full of energy and 'bunny hopping', mirrors the vitality of a young bud breaking through the soil, eager to explore the world around him. The peg board becomes his garden, where he carefully tends to the 'red flowers' of his attention, placing the pegs deliberately, momentarily grounding himself in focused growth. During singing hands, Joshua responds to the warmth and rhythm of his teachers like a blossom swaying in a gentle breeze, his laughter and smiles reflecting the joy of a flower kissed by the

sun. His giggles, vocalisations, and attentive eyes are signs of his sensory and emotional flourishing, small yet profound moments where the world nurtures his growth.

Though Joshua's movements shift and wander, like a breeze stirring petals or a vine adjusting its path, there is beauty in his exploration. His bursts of enthusiasm during the colour song, shouting out each hue with confidence, are moments of radiant bloom, vibrant and full of life. Even when he lies on the floor instead of sitting, it's a quiet reminder that growth isn't rigid or linear, it bends, twists, and finds its own way. Joshua's journey is one of becoming, rooted in connection, watered by care, and blooming in his own time. As he navigates his day, his growth is a testament to the tender work of nurturing, and like any flower, his presence adds a special, irreplaceable beauty to the classroom.

Exploring Xavier's lived experience at school

Xavier is a 6 year old boy. He is currently in year 2 and attends his local mainstream primary school. He is a mostly happy little boy who enjoys the visual and musical delights of school. He spends most of his time when in school in the nurture base, a provision designed and adapted for children presenting with additional and complex learning needs. The base is staffed by the deputy headteacher for four mornings a week and two full time teaching assistants. Other children who use the base, probably use it for a third or up to a half of their week and the rest of the time with a whole year group class.

Through analysis of Xavier's lived experience, utilising imaginative eidetic analysis to explore the possibilities within his world, I propose there are three themes relating to his lived experience of school.

RQ 1: Exploring Xavier's lived experience of attending a mainstream school

Interpreting and explicating Xavier's lived experience posed challenges, primarily due to the multilayered influences shaping his daily reality. His interactions at school were deeply entangled with adult perceptions and school dynamics, such as; staff routines, professional visitors' assumptions, and the subtle power of external expertise Appendix 3, pg. 4. No 95).

While Xavier's actions and reactions were vivid, interpreting them required untangling this web of adult interpretations, many of which framed his behaviours through deficit-based or compliance-driven lenses.

Central to this difficulty was the tension between Xavier's embodied expressions and the societal expectations imposed upon him. For example, staff often described Xavier's spontaneous laughter or resistance to demands as 'confusing' or 'unpredictable,' fluctuating between viewing him as the child they 'knew and cared for' and a 'problem' requiring correction (Appendix 3, pg. 6. No. 120). This inconsistency mirrored the unpredictability of the environment itself, a space outwardly calm and structured yet fraught with unspoken tensions. Professional visitors compounded this ambiguity with well-meaning advice, which often clashed with Xavier's sensory and communicative needs, deepening the cycle of 'not knowing' among staff and, arguably, for Xavier himself. Rather than seeking definitive conclusions, this research embraces the ambiguity inherent in Xavier's story as a reflection of his reality. His lived experience resists simplistic translation because it is, by nature, co-constructed and shaped by others' perceptions, societal constraints, and his own non-verbal communication.

Theme one: School is ambiguous, curious, confusing, and disorientating.

Given Xavier's deep interest in Disney movies, (as discussed in a conversation with his mum in June 2024, App 3, pg. 2, no.120), and through a detailed process of imaginative eidetic analysis, key words emerged that characterised his school experience: curiosity, ambiguity, and the feeling of being misunderstood. My choice to use the Alice in Wonderland metaphor is particularly fitting because, much like Alice's journey through a realm where familiar rules are upended and ambiguity reigns, Xavier's experience at school is one of navigating a space that simultaneously inspires wonder and imposes rigid, often confining, expectations. The Alice in Wonderland narrative captures the tension between an imaginative, exploratory self and the demands of 'official school' practices, (Appendix 3, pg 2, no.76) such as the structured, expert-driven approaches that sometimes leave little room for authentic expression. In Wonderland, Alice confronts a world that defies logic and challenges conventional norms.

Similarly, Xavier's school life is marked by adaptations meant to support him, yet it also enforces a bottom line where established routines and expert directives prevail.

Xavier, during my ethnographic field work, always entered the school in a seemingly happy state, secure in the consistent and inviting routine.

Xavier arrived in school on the playground with mum, he had walked to school and appeared happy to come in. He knew where he was going. He liked the books and quickly sat, flicking through the 'Hairy Maclary series' he didn't like anyone to read the words of the book and if they did, he wandered away.

He had a spot on the carpet that he sat at and occasionally he would get up and move from it, especially when a song came on the whiteboard that he wanted a better view of. (Field notes June 2024. App 2, Pg. 1, no. 32)

Metaphorical interpretation

Xavier's school day unfolds like Alice stepping through the looking glass into a world of wonder, rules, and curious encounters. Arriving with his mum on the playground, he seems content, as though he knows exactly which path to follow through the peculiar garden. The familiarity of his surroundings gives him confidence. He knows the way, much like Alice confidently navigating the initial paths of Wonderland. In the classroom, Xavier's retreat into the Hairy Maclary books is his version of falling down the rabbit hole, diving into a world of his own making. On the carpet, his designated spot serves as a sort of 'Mad Hatter's tea party' a place he knows is his, but one where he doesn't always stay put. The lure of the songs on the whiteboard pulls him from his spot, like Alice being distracted by the Cheshire Cat or the White Rabbit. He shifts to get a better view, drawn toward the music.

Sometimes the nurture room would provide Xavier with the opportunity to be autonomous and agentic, pursuing his own interest and thought processes, but often there would be a source of tension between the 'rules' and Xavier's exploration.

Later on when J was having his table top activity, X was wandering around the room he looked at me and I thought he was looking because he was going to throw the pegs onto the floor. He picked up a handful and dropped them onto the floor. I moved the whole lot, partly because I was trying to be helpful to miss. Initially I thought he looked at me because he wanted to initiate interaction, however miss believes he looks to check if anyone is watching, or of they will stop him. He proceeded to post the pegs behind the easel, they were still in sight, however they were posted behind. He appeared happy once he posted all of the pegs. Miss got the large post box out and a box of toy figures. It was just X and J in the room. They both participated in the posting and looking at the back of the post box. X seemed happy with the activity, he was happy at the posting, he appeared happy, laughing and banging his knee. X wanted to post a different box of toys, he was told 'no', he began to hit J. X taken out of the room for timeout. (Field notes October 2024 App 2. Pg. 13, no.56)

Metaphorical interpretation

Through the lens of Alice in Wonderland, Xavier's actions unfold like a scene in a whimsical and unpredictable wonderland, where curiosity, mischief, and emotion guide his journey. His initial look towards me, filled with ambiguous intent, mirrors Alice's encounters with cryptic Wonderland characters whose motives are never quite clear. Dropping the pegs to the floor and later posting them behind the easel reflects a playful yet purposeful defiance, parallel to Alice testing boundaries in a world that doesn't conform to usual rules. The act of posting the pegs behind the easel becomes Xavier's version of painting the roses red. It is a task he invests in, transforming a simple activity into something purposeful, even joyful. Posting the figures into the large post box is another layer of this Wonderland logic. The act delights him, much like Alice's discovery of the Mad Hatter's tea party, seemingly nonsensical yet full of hidden meaning to him. When denied his choice of toys, Xavier's frustration manifests in hitting Joshua, as though the Queen of Hearts herself had ordered 'Off with their heads!' This escalation might symbolise a disruption to his Wonderland's fragile balance. Being removed

to timeout mirrors Alice's retreat into the house of the White Rabbit after growing too large, a moment to recalibrate and adjust, though perhaps not fully understood by Xavier.

Throughout, Xavier's laughter, knee-banging, and expressions of happiness reflect the whimsy and joy that can come from finding moments of alignment in his world. Yet, like Alice, he is constantly navigating between freedom and the constraints imposed by the peculiar rules of the Wonderland he inhabits.

The tension between structured interventions and Xavier's autonomy is further illustrated in the following field notes, which document his participation in a group activity called Attention Autism (AA). Developed by specialist Gina Davies, AA is a widely used intervention in UK schools, with sometimes the name, 'bucket time' depicted. Whilst training as an educational psychologist, I have observed AA/bucket time being recommended as specialist provision by educational psychologists and speech and language therapists as part of an Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA). The program aims to build attention and communication skills through highly structured, visually engaging activities led by an adult. Critically, it operates on a strict rule-bound framework: children are expected to observe without touching during the initial 'stage one' demonstration, a requirement designed to cultivate shared focus and delayed gratification.

*Xavier is shown the symbol, 'bucket time'. He moves to the enclosed space and sits at the table with Joshua. The first item is a 'press on nails' Joshua looks attentively swinging his legs and smiling. Miss says 'ready, steady, …' Joshua says 'go' so that miss presses the nails in again to make a shape. 'patterns finished'. The next object in the box was a squishy snake toy, Joshua sat on his hands and watched the toy, watching Xavier reach out to grab it. Joshua gets pinched by Xavier but he doesn't seem to feel or notice the pinch. As Xavier gets removed from the table, (*Field notes October 2024. App.2. Pg. 18, no.62)

During attention autism he seemed really excited and happy, but suddenly he began pinching Joshua, he was trying to communicate something, did he feel encased, he wanted to touch

the items and in attention autism 'children are not meant to touch' just look. Xavier is quite a tactile child, he likes to explore toys enthusiastically, therefore was he frustrated that he couldn't touch them. He pinched Joshua instead, but was this communicative or pure frustration? (Reflection field notes October 2024. Appendix 3. Pg. 6, no.119)

Metaphorical interpretation

When Xavier is shown the symbol for 'bucket time' and moves to the enclosed space, it is similar to Alice stepping into another strange and highly regulated corner of Wonderland. The enclosed space becomes the Rabbit's house or the Queen's croquet ground, a setting governed by mysterious protocols that Xavier must navigate. The 'press-on nails' and 'squishy snake toy' are like the fantastical objects Alice encounters, each carrying its own allure and mystery. Joshua's attentive watching and participation evoke Alice's cautious observation of Wonderland's curious inhabitants, while Xavier's instinctive reach for the snake mirrors her impulsive attempts to engage with the strange world around her. When the squishy snake is moved out of Xavier's grasp, it reflects Wonderland's arbitrary and sometimes frustrating rules, Alice's experience of wanting something but being denied it, like the shrinking cake being out of reach or the maddening conversations with the Cheshire Cat. Xavier's pinch, unacknowledged by Joshua, could represent Alice's moments of unintended disruption, such as spilling the tea or knocking over the Queen's soldiers. It is a small act of rebellion or frustration in response to a world that doesn't seem to accommodate his desires or needs for exploration.

As Xavier is removed from the table, it parallels Alice being banished or redirected when she inadvertently breaks a rule. Much like Alice's journey through Wonderland, where her actions are met with unpredictable consequences, Xavier's behaviour reflects his effort to navigate a world that feels all at once fascinating and confining. His tactile nature is his way of exploring Wonderland, but it clashes with the unspoken expectations of how he should engage. In this metaphor, Xavier's experience is one of trying to make sense of school (wonderland) a place full of captivating objects and interactions but where the rules remain elusive, leaving him to

react instinctively, sometimes leading to misunderstandings or consequences he cannot yet anticipate.

During my observations, Xavier's emotional responses were often immediate and situational. While he transitioned between states of happiness and mild frustration, such as laughing during sensory play or briefly protesting when redirected he did not appear to carry residual emotional distress. For example, after moments of frustration (e.g., being told 'no' to posting toys), he would express his feelings openly through vocalisations, gestures, or brief resistance, but quickly re-engage with the environment or a new activity.

Xavier arrived happily in school. He was a lot more echolalic today, repeating what the TA said, e.g. 'purple circle' in reference to where he should be sitting. He appeared to enjoy the routine of circle time, often when the other children responded to something with joy, he looked around at them smiling. When he became what I perceive to be 'bored' he reached for the books that were next to him on the floor. He was told to put the book down, which he responded to and then engaged in a game of touching the book and looking at the TA.

Next it was time to transition to his year one class, he responded to the buzz of the timer and went to the door more readily that usually- on the way to class however he began trying to hit the TA on the arm, and jump up to hit her face. He was still smiling when this happened. It was difficult to understand if the transition was correlated with this sudden change of behaviour- the TA reported that often these incidents did happen during transition times but not solely.

In class he sat in his usual chair and complied with the activity. Part of the activity was speaking the words on cards that he posted. Sometimes he would say the word and sometimes he wouldn't or couldn't. He appeared to not really be enjoying the activity or rushing it. When finished he went to the book corner which was part of his routine. He initially chose the 'large family books' like the previous weeks and flicked through them at a fast pace. He then picked

up the 'room on a broom' and with this book he spent much longer on each page. (Field notes June 2024 App 2. Pg. 3, no.39)

Metaphorical interpretation

Xavier's echolalic behaviour mirrors Alice's attempt to make sense of the nonsensical Wonderland by mimicking or questioning what she hears. His repetition of 'purple circle' is a way of anchoring himself in the structured chaos of the school environment, much as Alice repeats what she hears to process her surroundings. Like Alice's cautious exploration of new spaces, Xavier enjoys the familiarity of circle time, finding joy by observing the reactions of his peers, a method to decode the social 'rules' of this curious world. When Xavier reaches for the books during circle time, it seems to reflect an Alice-like curiosity, a desire to step outside the expected routine. The TA's intervention parallels the characters in Wonderland who often enforce static rules, leading Xavier to engage in playful subversion, touching the book and watching the TA's reaction. This is reminiscent of Alice's interactions with the Cheshire Cat, where boundaries and rules are bent in ambiguous, playful exchanges.

Transitions, similar to Alice's sudden shifts from one scene to another, can be jarring. Xavier's smiling yet physical behaviour during the transition mirrors the paradoxical and unpredictable energy of Wonderland. Is he expressing excitement, frustration, or something entirely unique to his internal experience? (Appendix 3, pg. 3. No.93) As with Alice, whose emotions and logic are often misinterpreted by Wonderland's inhabitants, Xavier's actions might not neatly align with adult expectations, highlighting the complex dynamic of emotions and sensory processing during transitional moments.

In the structured classroom setting, Xavier participates in the activity but appears to rush through it or disengage at times. This mirrors Alice's experience with the Queen's croquet game, where the rules are confusing. For Xavier, the activity may feel similarly rigid or unengaging, prompting him to complete it swiftly before retreating to the sanctuary of the book corner. When Xavier reaches the book corner, his choice of the 'large family books' aligns with

the comfort Alice finds in familiar routines or objects. However, his extended engagement with ‘Room on the Broom’ suggests a deeper connection, like Alice’s moments of wonder and reflection when she stumbles upon something particularly captivating. In this space, Xavier seems to slow down, finding a narrative that resonates.

Theme two: School is a place for joy and connection

There were times at school when Xavier embodied pure joy and contentment, often this was when he had the autonomy and agency to interact with materials in a ways that he wanted to and often when he was able to engage other people in sharing this joy. In keeping with the knowledge of Xavier’s love of Disney movies, reflecting on Xavier’s expressions of joy reminded me of ‘Remy the rat’ in Ratatouille, who when free to express his creativity and explore the world of cooking in his own way, demonstrated joy and fulfilment.

As it was a warm day, a forest area outside of the classroom was opened. Xavier seemed very happy at this and said, ‘want to go on the swing’ meaning he wanted to go on the swing. He said this also when I didn’t push him on the swing, to indicate he wanted my presence to push him on the swing. He also asked a child to help him and both delighted in their roles, the child pushing him, perhaps more roughly than I had, there were excited squeals! (Field notes June 2024. App 2. Pg. 5, no.43)

Metaphorical interpretation

The opening of the forest area outside the classroom parallels the wide open opportunities Remy experiences when he leaves the confines of his colony and enters the culinary world of Paris. This new environment offers Xavier a chance to explore and express his joy in a way that structured indoor spaces might not allow. The natural setting, like the bustling and vibrant kitchen in Ratatouille, becomes a backdrop for discovery and connection.

The swing represents Xavier’s ‘perfect ingredient’ for happiness in this moment, similar to Remy finding the ideal combination of flavours in his cooking. Just as Remy is excited to explore the textures, tastes, and sensations of ingredients, Xavier’s enthusiasm for the swing

reveals his sensory delight and the way this simple activity aligns with his needs and desires. Xavier's request for help, first from an adult and later from a peer, parallels Remy's need for collaboration to fully express his joy and creativity. Just as Remy finds fulfilment in guiding Linguini, Xavier's joy is amplified when he engages with others to make the swinging experience more dynamic and interactive. The child pushing Xavier, with their enthusiastic energy, mirrors Linguini taking Remy's guidance and improvising in their shared creative process.

The shared laughter and squeals reflect the magic of co-creation, much like the scenes in Ratatouille where Remy and Linguini work together in the kitchen, creating not just food but moments of joy and connection. Xavier and his peer engage in a shared activity that becomes more than just swinging, it's a moment of mutual delight and understanding, where each participant contributes to the happiness of the other.

Outside, in the playground, the whole school had arrived back from church. Xavier joined them outside on the big playground. He put his snack of chopped peppers on the table and ran around the periphery of the playground, clapping his hands and smiling. Occasionally coming back to eat a pepper before darting off again, smiling. Myself and Miss shared a 'knowing look' of delight at happy Xavier. (Field notes Oct, 2024. App 2. Pg. 17, no.60)

Metaphorical interpretation

Xavier running around the periphery of the playground, clapping his hands, mirrors Remy darting through Paris or the kitchen, exploring his surroundings with excitement and curiosity. Just as Remy delights in discovering new environments while staying attuned to his instincts, Xavier's movement reflects his sensory engagement and joy in the open space. His smiles echo Remy's thrill as he navigates the world on his terms. The chopped peppers serve as Xavier's version of the 'food moments' in Ratatouille, a source of comfort and sustenance amidst the excitement of playtime. Like Remy savouring a bite of cheese or fruit while on an adventure, Xavier punctuates his activity with brief returns to the familiar and grounding

pleasure of his snack. Much like Remy balances his culinary creativity with the structure of the kitchen, Xavier alternates between the freedom of running and the routine of eating his peppers. This rhythm reflects an innate ability to self-regulate, finding joy in both unstructured exploration and the grounding presence of something familiar. Xavier's smiles mirror Remy's moments of pure delight when everything aligns, his passion, environment, and the connections he makes. Though Xavier's interaction here is primarily with his environment and himself, his visible joy creates an atmosphere of connection, much like how Remy's enthusiasm uplifts and inspires those around him.

Theme three: School is a place of mutual understanding.

There were moments in the school day were Xavier and his TA operated with a shared, almost unspoken understanding of how school expectations function in practice. Xavier never really liked to fully engage in adult led structured tasks, but also demonstrated an understanding that if he didn't, he wouldn't be able to move onto the preferred part of his routine. On this day, his TA also seemingly understood Xavier's lack of wanting to engage in adult designed tasks, therefore she sits back, confident in the knowledge that he could actually achieve the outcomes if she persisted in going through the 'motions'. Xavier appears to understand this dynamic also, it is mutual, and he is appreciative of the 'choices' his TA made to give him the autonomy to choose his ways of interacting with the task.

The whistle blows and everyone freezes, not X he is approached with his now and next board and walks into the year 2 classroom. He has a table at the back of the room, it is a bigger room than last year. He sits down and there is a shape sorting activity on his table. He engages half-heartedly, putting the shapes in any tub rather than sorting them, even though he does know. sometimes he will do the task, sometimes he won't and sometimes it is attempted like today he seems dazed and distracted. He says 'm-m-m, looking at miss and smiling as she says it back to him' (Field notes Oct, 2024. App 2. Pg. 17)

Metaphorical interpretation

I chose to interpret this extract utilising the lens of 'Winnie the Pooh'. Interpreting this scene through a Winnie the Pooh lens brings to light the importance of calm, relaxed engagement, and the idea that sometimes, things don't need to be done perfectly to be meaningful. Just as Pooh and his friends often meander through their adventures with a gentle pace and a sense of mutual understanding, Xavier's behaviour reflects a similar spirit of contentment, connection, and the simple pleasure of being in the moment.

When the whistle blows, everyone freezes, but not Xavier. He walks into the Year 2 classroom at his own pace, guided by his now and next board. This moment reflects Pooh's relaxed, unhurried way of moving through the world. Pooh doesn't rush to get from one place to another, instead, he takes his time, often finding joy in the journey itself. Xavier's decision to move at his own pace, unaffected by the rest of the class, aligns with Pooh's gentle independence and self-assurance in navigating his world.

Xavier engages half-heartedly with the shape sorting activity, placing shapes in any tub instead of sorting them correctly. Sometimes he attempts the task, and sometimes he doesn't, much like how Pooh would approach a task. When asked to do something, whether it's helping Eeyore or organizing his honey pots, Pooh will often do it at his own pace, and it might not look like the 'right' way, but Pooh's version of doing things is always full of good intentions and effort, even if it's imperfect. Xavier's half-hearted engagement with the shapes suggests that he is content to follow his own rhythm, focusing more on the process than the outcome, just like Pooh with his simple, unhurried approach to life.

When Xavier says 'm-m-m' and smiles at the teacher, it's as if he's saying, 'I'm here, I'm content, and I appreciate this moment.' This moment of connection mirrors the calm and reassuring exchanges between Pooh and his friends. Pooh often communicates with simple words or actions, like his hums, or sharing a smile with Piglet that convey contentment and reassurance. Just as Pooh's interactions are full of warmth, Xavier's 'm-m-m' and the TA's

smile back express mutual understanding and quiet joy in each other's presence. Through the Winnie the Pooh lens, this scene reflects a shared moment of calm between Xavier and his TA, where the task at hand doesn't need to be perfect, and the joy is found in the relaxed, mutual understanding of one another. Xavier, like Pooh, finds comfort in his routine, moves at his own pace, and connects with others through simple gestures and words. In the world of Winnie the Pooh, it's the small, unhurried moments of engagement that matter the most, and this is exactly what Xavier's experience captures, contentment in being present, with no rush to meet expectations, just the simple joy of being together.

Chapter five: Discussion

Chapter overview

Within this chapter I will attempt to make sense of my interpretations of Xavier's and Joshua's lived experiences of school, contextualising the discussion through the frame of the 'inclusion debate'. I began this research primarily from my curiosity about what the children I worked with would say if asked about their school experience. I noticed that the narratives surrounding children were often dominated by the perspectives of parents and school staff, who presumed that a specialist setting would better meet a child's needs if they were not participating in the main classroom environment, interacting with their peers or 'accessing' the mainstream curriculum.

In this thesis, I attempted to explore, understand and explicate two children's experiences of their life at school. I wanted to essentially 'look through their eyes' to enable me to experience the world from their perspective. I utilised imaginative eidetic analysis to elicit the essences of their lived experiences. By focusing on observable behaviours, interactions and context and then systematically reflecting on these observations, I reached for and sought to understand essential structures belonging to their experiences (Finlay, 2008., Giorgio, 2009).

By taking a phenomenological stance to interpret and explicate the children's lived experiences through imagery and metaphor, I sought to help the reader 'see' them as they went about their days, without the constraints of dominant psychological paradigms such as developmental, behavioural, or cognitive models (Simmons & Watson, 2015). While such paradigms might have allowed for the creation of psychological formulations and the co-construction of shared narratives, I recognised that relying on my own experiential knowledge of children with SCLD risked epistemic misrepresentation. Reflecting on these choices, I tentatively embraced an approach that aimed to honour the authenticity of their daily lives, hoping that their lived realities might speak for themselves rather than being confined by preformed categories. I feel, this interpretive space invites us to consider the inherent meaning

in the nuances of their behaviour and reveals the transformative potential of empathy, where metaphor serves as an intersubjective bridge that reshapes our understanding and practices in educational and caregiving contexts.

Empathy

Anecdotally, I shared the findings of the research with members of the school research field to gain some understanding of how my interpretations 'read'. The feedback that I received highlighted that the members where struck by how much 'purpose' the interpretations gave to the children and how they evoked a real empathy for their experiences. Their stories reveal how the metaphorical interpretations serve not only as a communicative tool but as an epistemological bridge, hopefully allowing educators, caregivers, and researchers to step into perspectives often rendered inaccessible by conventional linguistic frameworks (Semino, 2010). By explicating their stories through metaphor, such as Joshua's navigating the stormy seas of the sensory classroom or Xavier's 'Alice in Wonderland' inspired expression, the research creates a powerful mechanism for inhabiting their different realities rather than merely observing them from an external perspective. In my view, the metaphors serve as hermeneutic tools, helping the reader become more attuned to the boys' lived experiences (Griffiths & Smith, 2016) and stepping beyond surface-level recognition into a profoundly shared intersubjective space, where the boys' perspectives and ways of interacting with the world are not merely acknowledged but truly comprehended.

This process aligns with Hoffman's (2000) theory of empathy, which emphasises the relationship between cognitive understanding (recognising needs and challenges) and affective resonance (feeling emotional states). However, within the context of CYP with SCLD lived experiences, the stakes of such empathetic engagement are even higher as it is not just about understanding, but about transforming relational dynamics and systemic structures that shape the boys' everyday lives. Through metaphor, the barriers between verbal and non-verbal communication begin to dissolve (Smith, 2012), granting educators and caregivers access to a sensory-rich, emotionally complex reality that other psychological paradigms often

fail to capture. This dual engagement, both intellectual and emotional is suggested to have the capacity to transform empathy (Cuff et al, 2016) from a static acknowledgment into an active process, where understanding could become a catalyst for the responsive reimagining of inclusive spaces as sites of attunement and advocacy (Tesfaye et al, 2019).

The use of metaphor in this study parallels methodologies like Dearing & Steadman's (2009) voice simulation research, where reflective journals helped nurses embody patients' auditory hallucinations, fostering intellectual empathy. Similarly, Semino's (2010) analysis of pain metaphors, such as 'burning' or 'stabbing', illustrates how sensory language triggers embodied simulation in listeners, enhancing empathic responses. Xavier's visit to the bucket time, (App 2, Pg. 18, no.62) 'Madhatter's tea party' and subsequent disorientation metaphor operates comparatively, inviting educators to viscerally grasp his dissent into emotional conflict. Smith's (2011) exploration of mental distress metaphors (e.g., a 'snowballing' crisis) further accentuates how figurative language enriches understanding by layering emotional and sensory nuance beyond literal description.

Therefore, the eliciting of empathy, in this context, potentially goes beyond individual connection and evolves into an inspired obligation to create environments where everyone is understood and valued. Integrating 'experts-by-experience' (Mazanderani et al., 2020) into educational frameworks ensures that theoretical knowledge is continually reshaped by lived experiences. For Joshua and Xavier, empathy humanises their behaviours, recasting shouts as distress signals or echolalia as communicative anchors, countering stigmatising narratives of deviance (Milton, 2012). This mirrors the advocacy of caregivers in Breibart et al (2024) research, whose humanising accounts reframed self-injurious behaviours as expressions requiring support, not personal failings. Ultimately, the eliciting of empathy reveals its transformative power, not only in fostering deeper understanding but in actively shaping more inclusive and supportive practices.

Reflecting on embodied identities: Listening to Children (Appendix 5, pg.8 no. 131)

It was through explicating Joshua's and Xavier's lived experiences, and the empathy these narratives elicited, that their embodied identities became more visible to me, inviting reflection on how their school identities are intricately woven into the rhythms of their day. Their actions, routines, and silences, emerged as quiet and persistent ways of navigating and understanding their worlds, demanding not just observation but attentive attunement to the unspoken narratives of selfhood.

For Joshua, the rhythm of his days, checking lights, gazing out the window, or immersing himself in a single object, seemed to function as both a grounding practice and a form of exploration. Framed within Al-Jadiri et al.'s (2021) understanding of resilience as adaptive coping, his routines might be seen as subtle strategies for managing uncertainty, creating islands of predictability within an often overwhelming environment. The shifts observed in October 2024, particularly his engagement with structured activities like music sessions and 'bucket time' (attention autism), suggest that environmental scaffolding (Mesibov & Shea, 2011) may have offered him a structured framework to express agency.

Xavier's experience, by contrast, illuminated the fragility of societal acceptance. His joyful, unreserved presence, celebrated often by staff as evidence of well-being seemed to coexist with an unspoken tension between his expressive ways of being and societal norms (Milton, 2012). His perceived 'success' as a 'happy child' seemed contingent on aligning with narrow definitions of contentment, yet moments of frustration hinted at a deeper dissonance. When 'official school' expectations took precedence, his vibrant identity risked being reinterpreted as problematic, illuminating how systems that prioritise compliance can inadvertently marginalise unconventional expressions of self (Ryan & Runswick-Cole, 2008).

These reflections, rooted in attentiveness to the children's embodied ways of knowing, resist conclusive claims. Instead, they embrace the tentativeness required when interpreting lived experience, a practice that involves listening not only to actions but to the silences and nuances surrounding them, (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). By framing identity as a dynamic, ongoing 'becoming' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), the research emphasises the need to hold space for

ambiguity, acknowledging that supporting each child's sense of self is less about definitive solutions and more about fostering environments where their voices, however quietly or vividly expressed, inform responsive ways of knowing (Biesta, 2013).

In this way, my study becomes an act of ethical listening. A commitment to witnessing Joshua's quiet determination and Xavier's exuberant joy as evolving stories of identity, each unfolding in dialogue with the world around them. Such listening, imperfect yet intentional, honours their humanity not by seeking to 'fix' but by striving to understand (Todres et al, 2009).

The impact of 'official' and 'informal' school structures on agency and well-being (Appendix 5, pg. 9. no. 132).

Throughout the fieldwork stage of the research, I was struck by this overwhelming recognition of school as an 'enactment'. Meaning there were times when routines and structures where operationalised because of unconscious and unquestionable understanding of what a day at school should 'look like'. This 'enacting' of school often was assumed to be in a child's best interests, for the greater good of their futures. I termed this 'enactment' of school as 'official school'.

The tension between official school, (which is also present in specialist schools, (Nind & Grace, 2024) structured around standardised practices, measurable outcomes and compliance (Smith et al, 2020) and informal school, characterised by autonomy, and child-led engagement, shaped profoundly different experiences for Xavier and Joshua. Their responses to these frameworks revealed how school priorities can either constrain or nurture wellbeing and identity, depending on alignment with individual needs.

For Xavier, official school often imposed rigid protocols that clashed with his sensory and communicative preferences. Interventions such as AA, (Davies, 2017) designed to cultivate joint attention through restrictive rules (e.g., prohibiting tactile engagement), led to frustration. His attempts to interact physically with materials, such as reaching for a squishy snake toy during sessions, were met with redirection, escalating into behaviours like pinching. These

actions, often misinterpreted as ‘challenging’, reflected communicative distress, a misalignment between neurotypical intervention goals and Xavier’s sensory-driven engagement (Milton, 2012). Similarly, his compliance with formal tasks, such as posting words and sorting exercises, masked a profound disengagement, highlighting the dissonance between school priorities for measurable progress and his need for meaningful, unmeasurable sensory-rich interaction (Biesta, 2013).

Joshua’s experiences, meanwhile, illuminated the dual-edged nature of structure. While he thrived within AA’s predictable routines, his simultaneous need for unstructured inquiry, in the free flowing reception classroom, such as dismantling peg towers and studying objects from multiple angles, revealed the limitations of official school as a universal model. His calm adaptation to structure and scaffolding (Mesibov & Shea, 2012) contrasted with moments of self-directed curiosity, illustrating how agency can flourish through environments that balance order with flexibility (Haydock, 2024).

Critical to this balance is staff well-being. Educators navigating official school demands, such as performance metrics or directed interventions, faced ethical dilemmas when these demands conflicted with relational attunement. Xavier’s distress during rigid tasks, juxtaposed with his calm in flexibly structured moments, such as song time, exemplified how educational pressures strain professional capacity to respond flexibly (Nind & Grace, 2024). Conversely, deviations from scripts, such as offering Xavier a post-box activity after demonstrating his desire for peg-posting, demonstrated the transformative potential of practices rooted in responsiveness rather than rigidity. These instances affirmed that agency emerges not in spite of structure, but through structures that adapt to honour individual needs (Gidden’s 1984).

In informal school spaces, which were often break times and sometimes a response to staffing dilemmas, Xavier’s agency flourished. His joyful engagement during playground sprints, swinging sessions with peers, and sensory exploration in outdoor areas exemplified how autonomy and relational trust transform learning into an affirming experience. Similarly, Joshua’s independent exploration of objects, tolerated during unstructured moments, enabled

him to experiment and problem-solve. I believe Xavier and Joshua's journey's emphasise the necessity of rebalancing official and informal school structures to universally accommodate all children learning needs (Sewell et al, 2022). For Joshua, predictability provides stability (Mesibov & Shea, 2012), enabling focused engagement, (Carpenter, 2015). For Xavier, autonomy in informal flexible spaces mitigates distress and fosters joy (Marsh, 2019). Both thrive when educators were empowered to remove rigid binaries, blending structure with flexibility, whether accommodating Joshua's methodical exploration or Xavier's tactile engagement.

Listening to Joshua and Xavier's experiences demands a shift from deficit-focused interventions to practices prioritising individual agency (Sen, 1999). As Marsh (2019) argues, approaches like AA must emphasise adaptability over protocol adherence, aligning with children's unique needs. Schools must resist homogenising metrics (Prøitz, 2015), instead fostering cultures where diverse pathways to learning are validated. By centring relational well-being, for pupils and staff alike, education can become a space where all children, can navigate their learning journeys with dignity, curiosity, and joy (Marsh, 2019).

The interdependence of agency, autonomy, and identity in educational experiences (Appendix 5, pg. 9. no. 133).

My reflections of the experiences of Joshua and Xavier highlighted the critical role of agency and autonomy in enabling school to be a happy place and affirming identity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Joshua's exploratory engagement with his environment, marked by activities such as playing with only red zorbs, checking light sensors and experimenting with boundary markings, demonstrated his capacity to construct meaning and adapt rules to align with his understanding, reflecting his intentionality as an active participant in his learning (Damon & Hart, 1991; Popora, 2015). These actions revealed a proactive drive to interact with his surroundings rather than passively observe them, fuelling deep engagement (Ephgrave, 2018). Joshua's curiosity thrives in environments that honour his agency, whether through independent exploration or structured activities like the drum session, where the teaching

assistant's supportive guidance scaffolded his participation (Imray et al, 2024; Carpenter, 2015).

For Xavier, agency manifested as moments of joy rooted in sensory and relational autonomy. His enthusiastic interactions on the playground swing, where he invited peers to push him, exemplify Kittay's (2003) conceptualisation of agency as the ability to 'shape one's world' and have one's contributions recognised. Xavier's delight in open spaces and sensory activities, such as running freely or directing his swinging experience, highlighted how autonomy intersects with environmental attunement (Imray et al, 2024). The forest area served as a space for co-creation, where collaborative play and shared laughter amplified his engagement. Even during play time, Xavier's rhythmic alternation between sprinting across the playground and returning to nibble his peppers demonstrated self-regulation, a balance between exploration and grounding familiarity (Bronson, 2000.; Alper & McGregor, 2015).

Critically, these experiences challenge reductive notions of agency as mere independence. Instead, they reveal agency as a relational and dynamic interplay between self-determination and scaffolded support. Joshua's drumming session, which blended guided instruction with active participation, and Xavier's collaborative swinging exemplify how autonomy thrives within attuned partnerships. Both boys relied on educators and peers to recognise and respond to their cues, transforming routine activities into opportunities for mutual growth (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In essence, Joshua and Xavier's stories advocate for educational spaces where agency is actively nurtured rather than passively permitted.

The Interdependence of pupil agency and staff well-being (Appendix 5, pg.9. no. 134).

Through my ethnographic reflections I began to notice that for Joshua, Xavier, and possibly indeed all children in school, agency, well-being, and autonomy, are profoundly enabled by the emotional well-being of the adults who support them (Appendix 4, pg.7,.no.127), particularly teachers and Teaching Assistants (TAs). Research emphasises that pupils' capacity to exercise choice and engage meaningfully is inseparable from the relational

environments co-created by staff (Pinkard, 2021; Black & Halstead, 2021). When TAs feel empowered, valued, and emotionally resourced, they are better equipped to attune to pupils' needs, fostering the trust and reciprocity that underpin agency (Khader, 2008). Alternatively, when staff well-being is compromised, by systemic undervaluation, inadequate training, or hierarchical structures, the scaffolding necessary for pupils to flourish erodes (Clarke & Visser, 2019).

Joshua's experience with the green cup exemplifies this interdependence. His refusal to drink from a blue cup, and his eventual vocalisation of 'water, water, water,' were not mere acts of preference but assertions of agency mediated by staff attunement. When a new TA initially misread his cues, Joshua's frustration and disengagement highlighted the fragility of agency in contexts of misattunement (Goleman, 1995). However, when staff recognised and honoured his need for a green cup a seemingly minor detail, they transformed a routine task into an opportunity for mutual trust. This attuned responsiveness, rooted in the TA's emotional availability and confidence, enabled Joshua to regulate his emotions and engage actively, aligning with Carpenter et al.'s (2015) belief that sustainable learning hinges on environments accessible on the child's terms.

Similarly, Xavier's half-hearted engagement in a shape-sorting activity revealed how staff well-being directly shapes pupil well-being. His TA's decision to 'sit back' allowed Xavier to engage at his own rhythm. This act of flexibility, which is likely more achievable when TAs feel professionally respected and emotionally secure, illustrates Kittay's (2003) perspective that flourishing emerges through relational knowing.

These examples align with Imray et al.'s (2024) contention that agency requires 'flourishing, freedom, and choice', conditions enabled by staff who are themselves supported to thrive. When TAs lack training, voice, or well-being safeguards, their capacity to sustain such practices diminishes, perpetuating cycles of disengagement (Bradwell & Bending, 2019). For pupils with SEND, whose agency is often mediated by lifelong dependencies (Khader, 2008), this dynamic is especially salient. Joshua's growing ability to vocalise needs and Xavier's

negotiated participation in routines reflect Vygotsky's (1987) zone of proximal development, progress achievable only through attuned, emotionally available partnerships (Dewey, 1938).

In essence, the well-being of pupils and staff is not merely parallel but intertwined. Schools must therefore reimagine staff support as foundational to an inclusive pedagogy (Pinkard, 2021; Nind & Hewitt, 2001).

Reframing the inclusion debate: A voice at the table.

Where I stand in relation to the inclusion debate

I firmly believe that every child has the fundamental right to attend their local mainstream school and to belong within their community. True inclusion must be universally accessible and not conditional on ability. However, I also recognise the important conceptual shift described by Carpenter et al. (2015) and Warnock (2005), which challenges traditional models of inclusion based solely on physical placement. As Warnock (2005, p. 39) stated, inclusion is not simply about being 'under the same roof,' but rather about participating in 'a common enterprise of learning.' This perspective moves beyond a binary view of inclusion and segregation, towards a non-binary understanding where the quality of the educational experience becomes central. Such an approach emphasises genuine belonging, acceptance, recognition of value, and student agency (Haegele & Maher, 2024).

Haegele and Maher's (2024) articulation of intersubjectivity further supports my positioning on inclusion, highlighting that exclusion is not defined solely by physical separation and that it can also occur within both mainstream and specialist settings. For example, CYP with SCLD may also experience profound exclusion in specialist settings through internalised ableism and psycho-emotional disablement, often manifesting as microaggressions, misinterpretation, or inaccessible curricula, all of which undermine their sense of belonging and well-being. Authentic inclusion, defined by genuine belonging, acceptance, and value, is therefore not tied to location alone. It can occur in any educational setting, provided that systemic barriers and ableist assumptions are actively addressed.

Reflections on the inclusion debate post research analysis. My interpretations of Joshuah and Xavier's perspective.

The inclusion debate, as traditionally framed within literature, centres on adult-driven discourses; parental advocacy, professional recommendations, and policy mandates, often marginalising the perspectives of children with SCLD themselves (Goodley & Runswick Cole, 2010; Ware et al, 2009). Yet my research uncovers a gap between these broader policy discussions and the everyday experiences of CYP like Joshua and Xavier. For them, inclusion wasn't just about where they were placed, it was about agency, how their surroundings responded to them, and the relationships they built along the way. Their experiences align with literature that views inclusion as a fluid, context-dependent process rather than a fixed outcome (Florian & Beaton, 2018; De Schauwer et al., 2018). I believe their narratives suggest that inclusion, when viewed through their lived realities, disrupts the specialist-mainstream binary, absolving the 'this isn't inclusion' statements, or 'they need a specialist school'.

What I feel is clear now, is that central to this process is the recognition that the right to be heard, as articulated in Article 12 of the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989), is not merely a procedural obligation but a foundational element of inclusion itself. My research emphasises that listening to children in their varied forms of expression, whether through words or behaviours, ensures that inclusion is not reduced to physical presence alone but encompasses meaningful participation shaped by the child's unique perspective (Lundy, 2007; Robinson & Taylor, 2013). In this sense, I believe, the right to be heard embodies the very essence of inclusion.

However, this emphasis on voice and agency highlights a critical tension. While inclusion as a relational practice aims to foster belonging, it is often overshadowed by systems that prioritise measurable compliance over lived experiences. Haegele and Maher (2023) address this issue by redefining inclusion as an intersubjective negotiation of identity and relational trust. Their conceptualisation challenges reductive frameworks that equate inclusion with observable metrics (Webster, 2022) such as time spent in mainstream classrooms or the

frequency of peer interactions. By critiquing compliance driven models (Slee, 2011), Haegele and Maher (2023) bring attention to the relational dimensions of inclusion, emphasising shared understanding, empathetic engagement (Kunc, 1992; Richardson & Moti, 2019), and the affective safety of being valued on one's own terms (Kittay, 2003).

For Joshua, inclusion was rooted not in passive proximity to peers but in the embodied autonomy cultivated through structured routines that nurtured his curiosity, allowing him to interact with cause-and-effect toys or engage in sessions with increasing agency. Conversely, for Xavier, inclusion materialised in fleeting yet profound moments where his unrestrained joy, laughter, and spontaneity were met with reciprocal responsiveness, even as institutional norms framed aspects of his expressivity as problematic (Nind, 2014). Ultimately, authentic inclusion demands attunement to children's multifaceted voices, verbal, behavioural, or emotional, in ways that validate their agency and identity (Lundy, 2007).

So with the above in mind, in answer to the question that prompted this original research idea, 'what would the children say if asked regarding their educational placement?' I believe the question would be answered differently at any given moment, but overall, they would say, 'this is my school, and this is what I know, I like the swings, I like the toys, I don't always like or understand the rules, the school work is a bit boring, but the books are good. I love the songs and music. The other adults and children are a bit strange at times, but they make me smile sometimes.' Overall, what the children in my research expressed the most to me, is that they are busy, very busy being children, living in the moment and generally not getting too weighed down by semantics of who or where they should be. I do recognise that as the children get older, their thoughts and feelings could change around this, but for now, their school, is 'their school', the place where they belong.

Chapter Six- Implications for practice.

Evidence based practice/interventions

One of the key reflections from the research, that has definitely influenced how I will practice as an educational psychologist, is the often unchecked recommending of 'evidenced based provision'. Watching Xavier in the 'bucket time' session and then learning from the TA that she was following the prescribed rules of the intervention, really opened my eyes to the damage we can do as EP's when giving suggestions, and how loud our voices may be, without really understanding how our suggestions then impact upon the lived experiences of children like Joshua and Xavier (Appendix 4, pg. 8. No.128).

Exploration of reflection

The prevalence of evidence-based practice in educational psychology is frequently presented as an objective assurance of effectiveness (Gambrill, 2006). I believe this risks perpetuating harm when uncritically applied to CYP with SCLD. Evidence-based practice, while appearing to prioritise effective interventions, is fundamentally influenced by normative and ableist assumptions regarding development, behaviour, and communication (Goodley, 2014; Shakespeare, 2013). For children with SCLD, interventions and approaches like Attention Autism, Social Stories, and TEACCH, professionally understood as evidence based, often prioritise compliance with neurotypical expectations over the child's autonomy, sensory needs, or communicative agency (Milton, 2012). This raises urgent ethical questions: whose evidence counts, who defines success, and at what cost to the child's dignity?

A key reflection within my research was around observing a structured Attention Autism session (AA), A key design element of AA is to cultivate joint attention through highly structured, adult directed activities (Marsh, 2019). While proponents argue it aligns with developmental theories linking joint attention to social communication (Mundy & Newell, 2011), its evidence base relies disproportionately on anecdotal reports and small scale studies (Marsh, 2019). For children like Xavier, whose tactile curiosity led him to reach for a squishy

snake during a session, AA's rigid protocols framed his exploration as disruptive rather than communicative. His subsequent distress, met with redirection instead of attunement, illuminate a systemic inequity in which neurodivergent ways of understanding the world are dismissed. This dynamic reflects how structures often pathologize natural curiosity, prioritising compliance over meaningful connection and communication. Similarly, Social Stories (Gray, 1994), while useful for some, often impose neurotypical social scripts, pathologizing autistic modes of relating (Begon & Billington, 2019). These interventions, though branded as universally applicable, embed ableist ideologies that equate divergence with deficit (Campbell, 2009).

The exclusion of children with SCLD from research further entrenches these harms. Dominant approaches, such as AA's focus on compliance or TEACCH's structured environments, are often developed for neurodivergent children not with them (Fricker, 2007). This epistemic erasure sustains a cycle where interventions are designed to fix children into predefined norms, rather than adapting to their strengths and needs (Shakespeare, 2013). For instance, SCERTS' emphasis on individualised goals (Prizant & Wetherby, 2001) still operates within a linear, neurotypical developmental framework, sidelining different ways of being (Begon & Billington, 2019).

This critique however, is not a wholesale rejection of structure or support. Visual timetables, sensory scaffolding, and predictable routines, as seen in Joshua's increased participation or Xavier's embodied enjoyment of the morning routine, can empower agency when flexibly applied. I believe the harm arises when interventions are mechanistically deployed as best practice, divorcing methodology from context and reducing children to problems to be solved (Conn, 2017). Educational psychologists must therefore adopt epistemic humility by interrogating the origins of evidence, questioning whose interests it serves, and centring the child's embodied voice and lived experience as the ultimate metric of validity (Priestley & Philippou, 2018).

Utilising imaginative eidetic analysis as part of the educational psychologists tool kit

One of the occurring thoughts I had through reflecting on the research process, was how I could utilise eidetic analysis as a tool to help school staff and parents understand what is known as challenging behaviour or 'behaviour that challenges'. When I worked as a teacher in a specialist school, I appeared to have an intuitive understanding of a child's behaviour, which worked whilst the child was in my class or care, however when they moved classes, their 'behaviours' would reappear and I realised I was doing the children a disservice if I couldn't enable others to understand them like I did. To do this I employed a positive behaviour support (PBS, 2015) approach in the school, as at the time, this way of thinking made sense to me and I liked the emphasis on being proactive, (which I assume was my natural way of working). The approach when deployed by others had varying degrees of success, predominantly by people who 'got it'. I always, however when promoting the approach felt that it was too simplistic, but couldn't really express why. Until now. Reflecting on the children's lived experiences through eidetic analysis has opened my eyes not only to my understanding of the simplicity of the PBS approach, but also how reductive it is in enabling the understanding of a person as a whole.

Exploration of reflection

Xavier's behaviour, when understood through eidetic analysis and phenomenology, reflects a complex interplay of curiosity, frustration, and communication. His actions, such as dropping pegs on the floor and posting them behind the easel, appear to be driven by a desire for interaction, exploration, and sensory engagement. When he is unable to engage in these actions, or when he stopped from exploring materials in a sensory way, we see him respond with frustration and express distress. He gets removed from the classroom to sit in 'timeout' as a consequence for expressing his frustration negatively (Appendix, 3, pg.3. no.111). Timeout, while often employed as a behaviour management strategy, is often ineffective, with results varying (Taylor & Miller, 1997). Research indicates that timeout may fail to address the underlying needs driving the behaviour and can exacerbate feelings of isolation or distress

(Connolly, 2017). In Xavier's case, timeout not only failed to reduce his challenging behaviour but also represented a repeated act of misattunement (Golman, 1995).

EP's are frequently called upon to support school staff in managing challenging behaviours, and many practitioners turn to frameworks like Functional Behavioural Assessment (FBA) and Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) to design interventions (Martens & Andreen, 2013). FBA, a behaviourist methodology, systematically identifies the antecedents (triggers), behaviours, and consequences (ABCs) of actions to determine their perceived 'function', typically categorised as gaining access to a desired item/activity (tangible), avoiding a demand (escape), gaining attention (interaction) or seeking sensory stimulation (Iwata et al., 1994). The PBS framework then uses this analysis to design individualised behaviour support plans aimed at modifying environmental triggers and teaching alternative responses (Merlo et al, 2018). While FBA has been widely adopted in educational settings (PBS Academy, 2015), anecdotal critiques highlight its tendency to reduce complex behaviours to mechanistic 'get/escape' dichotomies, often neglecting the sensory, emotional, and embodied realities of children and adults with SCLD (Quality Care Commission, 2020).

In Xavier's situation, his hitting during the AA activity triggered when he was denied the opportunity for tactile exploration, could be simplistically interpreted through a FBA framework as serving a 'get' function (e.g., gaining access to toys) or an 'escape' function (e.g., avoiding demands). However, this interpretation risks overlooking the way Xavier feels when his innate needs are ignored within a neurotypical teaching lens (Milton, 2012).

While FBA offers structured tools for behaviour management, its reductionist approach can pathologize behaviours that are, in essence, acts of resilience or communication (Ryan et al, 2007). This is where I believe eidetic analysis, could prove more valuable in supporting students with 'behaviours that challenge.' Unlike surface level interpretations, eidetic analysis seeks to uncover the universal essences of lived experience (Finlay, 2012; Giorgi, 2009), offering a meaningful alternative. By prioritising the child's subjective reality, this approach enables practitioners to move beyond superficial understandings of behaviour and instead

explore the deeper meanings and unmet needs that drive actions. This idea resonates with critiques of PBS's evidence base, which often overlooks the lived experiences of neurodivergent children (Hassiotis et al, 2018).

Reflecting on the research process and subsequent findings enabled me to reflect on how we as EP's could Integrate eidetic analysis with collaborative person centred tools such as the Circle of Adults (CoA) framework (Wilson & Newton, 2006), which could offer an innovative and alternative pathway for understanding challenging behaviour. CoA emphasises collaborative meaning-making among educators, psychologists, and families, creating a shared space to interpret behaviours through the child's subjective reality rather than projected assumptions. For instance, in Xavier's case, eidetic analysis could reframe his hitting not as a 'challenging behaviour' to be managed but as an embodied attempt to communicate overwhelm or assert agency through tactile exploration. This shift, when collaboratively explored in CoA sessions, might replace punitive timeout practices with empathetic co-regulation strategies (e.g., 'sensory time-in'), acknowledging bidirectional misattunement (Milton, 2012), fostering relational repair and enhancing intuition.

Such integration could reshape educational psychology assessment practice across these three domains;

1. **Consultation**: During consultation, practitioners could use eidetic analysis to deconstruct functional labels like 'escape' or 'get,' instead exploring how Xavier's actions reflect normal human responses (e.g., his desire to touch the squishy snake leading to frustration when prevented). This collaborative interpretation challenges the top-down dynamics of FBA, prioritising the child's voice over communicative compliance.

2. **Observation**: Phenomenological observation shifts focus from tallying antecedents (e.g., 'trigger: denied access to toys') to documenting embodied cues, for example

Xavier's 'whimper' when made to do an unmotivating activity. This attunes practitioners to the affective and sensory dimensions obscured by FBA's ABC charts.

3. **Intervention Design**: Rather than PBS plans targeting 'replacement behaviours,' interventions might co-create environmental adaptations, such as structured exploratory breaks aligned with Xavier's need for tactile engagement. These adaptations emerge from participatory sense-making (De Jaegher, 2013), where stakeholders collectively reinterpret behaviours as acts of self-advocacy (Broderick & Ne'eman, 2008).

This integration of eidetic analysis critiques FBA's reliance on measurable outcomes (Hassiotis et al., 2018), proposing instead a framework where hermeneutical understanding precedes intervention. By grounding support in eidetic insights, practitioners move beyond 'managing' behaviours to fostering intuitive environments where different ways of being, like Joshua's methodical routines or Xavier's exuberant curiosity reshape school norms. Such an approach aligns with a 'paradigm of acceptance' (Begon & Billington, 2019), framing behaviours not as deficits but as agentive expressions of identity. Ultimately, integrating eidetic analysis within EP assessment surpasses the limitations of PBS, offering a holistic, ethical practice that centres children's lived realities as the foundation for inclusive education.

This person centred ethic, rooted in the paradigm of acceptance echoes Aristotle's (1976) assertion that science must be guided by intuition, not just measurable outcomes (Billington et al., 2000). Aristotle emphasised the importance of intuitive understanding in scientific inquiry, arguing that true knowledge arises from a balance of empirical observation and deeper, intuitive insight. Eidetic analysis, embodies this principle by seeking to uncover the universal essences of lived experience (Wertz, 2010). It shifts the focus from quantifiable data and functional interpretations, such as viewing Xavier's hitting solely as a means to escape demands, to understanding the deeper, intrinsically human motivations behind his actions,

In summary, Xavier and Joshua's experiences challenge EP's to move beyond traditional behaviour support frameworks and embrace more reflective, empathetic practices. Eidetic analysis, when integrated within collaborative models like the CoA (Newton & Wilson, 2006), offers a pathway to understanding unmet needs in ways that honour agency and participatory sense-making. By adopting the paradigm of acceptance (Begon & Billington (2019), professionals can reframe behaviours not as problems to be 'managed' but as meaningful expressions of identity, resilience, and individual ways of being (Milton, 2012). Such a shift does not reject FBA or PBS but urges EP's to critically reflect on its application, ensuring advocacy for the child's voice.

Reimagining 'inclusion spaces'.

A growing demand for specialist school placements has led to an increase in children with SCLD attending mainstream settings (Hirschmann, 2017). In my role as a TEP, I've witnessed the emergence of improvised 'ad hoc inclusion spaces' designed to accommodate these learners. However, debates about how such spaces function, and whether they genuinely constitute inclusion, often fixate on rigid benchmarks. For instance, a recent proposal within my EPS argued that children using these spaces must spend at least 50% of their time in mainstream classrooms to qualify as 'inclusive.' This metric appears rooted not in critically explored and examined pedagogical evidence, but in a response to implicit anxieties over Ofsted inspections and a desire for Local Authority (LA) advisory teams to standardise definitions of inclusion for schools to reference during scrutiny. While my research may not resolve such complexities, it emphasises a need for schools to prioritise consulting with children who use these spaces and adapting flexibly to their needs. These ad hoc spaces *are* reactions to systemic pressures, however treating them as such without critical reflection risks perpetuating a neoliberal status quo, rather than taking an opportunity to transform an understanding of inclusion into a purposeful commitment to children's belonging in their communities

I believe reducing inclusion to a simplistic calculation of time spent near peers overlooks the nuanced realities of children like Xavier and Joshua, whose experiences reveal the limitations of compliance-driven frameworks. Consider Joshua, who flourished in a reception classroom that prioritised autonomy and sensory exploration. His teacher noted his enthusiasm for the environment's freedom and material variety. In contrast, Xavier found his Year 2 classroom overwhelming, preferring a nurture space where he engaged in sensory play, outdoor activities, and stories. While Joshua's positive experience may shift as he ages and faces pressures to conform to mainstream expectations, Xavier's current engagement suggests he might enjoy more peer interaction if systemic flexibility existed. These cases highlight how blanket metrics fail to account for individual needs, instead privileging physical proximity over agency.

Being around, and having 'access' to mainstream peers is often considered one of the benefits of attending a mainstream school, so that a child can develop normative social skills (Broomhead, 2019). However, an incident I observed exposed, to me, how detrimental this socially constructed view point is. For example, a moment (written about in the methodology section) when Xavier, was seated at the nurture room snack table, joyfully vocalising until a peer instructed him to be quiet. Unlike previous instances where adult requests to quieten were seemingly ignored, Xavier immediately silenced himself. I reflected on this moment and wondered what had quietened him. My initial assumption, that such a scenario 'wouldn't occur in a specialist setting' (because there potentially wouldn't be social 'role models'), revealed a normative bias of mine, where i initially framed neurotypical social norms as inherently desirable. Drawing on Milton's (2012) double empathy theory, I instead considered how Xavier might navigate a future punctuated by such disorienting demands to suppress his voice, and have his autonomy eroded by systems that privilege conformity over communicative diversity.

Simmon's (2021) Lefebvrian examination of social spaces for children with PMLD illuminates how formal school representations of space, including inflexible schedules, and policy mandates for physical proximity to peers, overshadow SCLD children's lived experience of

that space, and as such diminishes their agency in influencing social environments. Utilising Lefebvre's 1991 concept of 'spatiology' reconceptualises space as a dynamic and contested process wherein ableist ideologies prevail over the embodied practices of CYP with SCLD. The values of inclusion that encourage closeness to mainstream classmates may, ironically, exacerbate Xavier's exclusion, as his non-verbal communication thrives in sensory-affirming environments. Conversely, Joshua exhibited curiosity and ease in quietly observing his mainstream peers, not solely due to a need for interaction, but rather because their movements and play captivated his interest. This implies that a sense of belonging arises from environments that accommodate personal rhythms rather than artificial standards such as duration of interaction with peers (Simmons, 2021). I do recognise that our school system is not wholly conducive to enabling flexibly accommodating personal rhythms, due to resourcing and funding concerns, our prescriptive and rigid measurements of children and a wide range of societal attitudes and influences (Colley, 2021; Gabel & Danforth, 2008) and in general an imbalance between neoliberalism and disability politics (Goodley & Billington, 2017).

Therefore, in addressing the development of ‘ad hoc inclusion spaces’, we need to understand how neoliberal schooling, permeates design by perpetuating a status quo by prioritising compliance over acceptance and understanding (Slee, 1997). Creating inclusive educational spaces means dismantling these power imbalances. Metric-driven checklists, which sustain normative ideals of belonging, must be reimagined through Lefebvre’s (1991) idea of a differential space, a concept requiring us to engage relationally with both children’s actions and their unspoken, unquantifiable intricacies . As EP’s, and definitely as a starting point, I believe we must advocate for inclusion as a lived practice, guiding the development of ‘ad hoc spaces’ into accepting environments, where flexible structures celebrate diverse ways of being (Begon & Billington, 2019).

Hear what I am doing, see what I am saying.

A final implication of this research is the need to critically examine the concept of a child's voice, particularly for those whose communication methods do not follow standard

expectations. My research idea originated from the differences between a schools interpretation of inclusion and the lived experiences of children such as Joshua and Xavier. (Todres et al 2009).

Ashby (2011) noted that non-normative voices are often overlooked, dismissed, or discounted as valid. In my work as a TEP, I have observed and at times contributed to this marginalisation. For example, when writing EHCNA's, I have sometimes reduced a child's perspective to a brief summary of observed interests or challenges and subsequently deferred to parental accounts. This approach, that I have taken, directly contravenes the SEND COP (2015), which mandates local authorities to engage directly with children instead of depending exclusively on parental reports. Such practices illustrates what Lundy (2007) characterises as a dual denial of voice, wherein children with SCLD are marginalised from decision-making both as children and as individuals with disabilities.

My research further demonstrates that the problem extends beyond exclusion from decision-making, to include persistent assumptions regarding the developmental needs and 'appropriate' curriculum of these children (Colley, 2020). For instance, Xavier's pre EHCP assessment might have recorded that he needed, as part of his provision, daily sessions utilising AA without considering how he might actually respond to such interventions, simply because his own voice is not directly heard or understood. This is reminiscent of the assumptions made about my sister, who was expected to spend her day developing 'work skills' in an older person's home. In her case, those around her made decisions based on assumptions about what she needed to lead a 'fulfilling life', rather than understanding her lived experience perspective.

When children or adults with SCLD resist performing according to these imposed expectations, their voices are further silenced, deepening the oppression they experience. This is evident in Xavier's increasing conflict when he was forced to adhere to a rigid 'bucket time' structure, as well as in my sister's experience, where her verbal expressions of not wanting to work in the shop were disregarded under the assumption that her voice lacked

meaning or truth. These microaggressions occur to some extent, because of ableism and a conscious or unconscious belief that they lacked competency to understand what was in their best interests, despite attempts to communicate their unhappiness with that belief and assumption.

My research will hopefully challenge the tendency to disregard non-normative expressions, as emphasised by Ashby (2011), and attempts to ameliorate the concerns Kittay & Carlson (2010) regarding epistemic injustice in which CYP and adults with SCLD are frequently denied the opportunity to shape their own narratives. This research demonstrates that collecting the voice of the child is both a methodological challenge and an ethical imperative. EP's must develop innovative and attuned methods such as participatory observation, ethnography, and eidetic analysis that go beyond predetermined symbols, binary choices or stating that a child is not able to communicate their thoughts (Murphy, 1998; Brewster, 2004; Parsons, 2021). I believe that recognising and wholeheartedly committing to the fundamental right of children (Article 12) who do not communicate in conventional ways to have their voices acknowledged and their experiences listened to is essential for the very essence of the word 'inclusion' to be actioned and realised.

Research limitations and future implications

I recognise that the interpretative nature of my study reflects my positionality and life experiences, therefore making it very difficult for any other researcher to replicate it. Decades of experience as a teacher, advocate, psychologist, ally, friend, and most importantly, a triplet sister have moulded my perspectives. From this perspective, my work is not a 'view from nowhere' (Davy, 2019) and what might be considered a limitation is also a strength.

Although the method of my study produced insightful results, I feel I neglected to embrace the co-design ideas that could be considered vital to ethical disability research by not significantly including school personnel, families, and children as active partners (Nind, 2017; Blomkamp, 2018) rather than recipients (Tomlinson, 207). Reflecting on the study's limitations, including

my own inexperience as a researcher, time constraints, and the solo nature of my study, I recognise how these factors shaped its scope. However, these reflections also illuminate possibilities for more inclusive methodologies. A bolder research design, co-created with participants from the outset, could foster richer dialogue marked by critique, nuance, and collective reflection. While my findings revealed children's embodied experiences, the absence of collaborative meaning making represented a crucial missed opportunity. Centring the perspectives of all stakeholders could have both enriched and challenged my interpretations, aligning with the ethos of the 'nothing about us without us' movement (Charlton, 2000) and framing inclusion as an embodied, shared endeavour (Ashby, 2011).

Having reflected on these challenges, I now feel more prepared to design studies that are both inclusive and participatory. I believe that expanding reflective conversations to include parents, educators, and children with SCLD will lead to richer insights and a more nuanced understanding of the research process. For example, co-analysing eidetic ethnographic data with families and professionals could help democratise interpretation and reduce researcher bias (Rieger, 2020). I imagine then, I would have an ethical and robust research design that could be applied to many school settings to explore children's lived experiences in more depth, with the amount of insight revealing many more stories, voices and learning opportunities.

Research dissemination

The findings of the research have been shared with the various members of the research school community and wider within the school's local authority. Participants were invited to feedback upon the findings and give feedback around what it felt like to read the research findings. All of the individuals who read the findings commented on the empathetic humanising aspect of the interpretations, with one member reporting that she loved how the explicated research gave purpose to the boys daily lives, something perhaps which is difficult to recognise against the backdrop of neoliberal education.

Already, I am utilising the research in my placement local authority to help inform and coproduce a shared understanding of the definition of inclusion in our borough amongst parents, schools and children and it is also being used to inform the LA's developing policy around 'ad hoc' inclusion spaces.

I fully intend to try and develop the research into an accessible paper that can be shared amongst psychology, educational, social care and health professionals in an attempt to stimulate discussions and further research ideas. I have applied to present my research at the International School Psychology Association 2025, and I will apply to present at local AEP and DECP conferences when applicable.

Most of all, I believe I will be disseminating the research as part of my daily work as a practising educational psychologist, already I feel I am often saying in discussions, 'the children in my research demonstrated…'

Reflections on writing a thesis

When reflecting on the process of writing a thesis, I am drawn back to my original aspirations as outlined in the introduction. The research started with a simple question observed in my professional practice. Through the process of exploring the concept of inclusion, working out how to find a methodology that 'felt right' for me and the CYP, to analysing and developing the research findings, I feel that I am indebted to the process and all it has given me. In particular the insights I have developed from the findings. The research process has also given me a voice and a way to articulate what inclusion means to me personally and professionally. I feel much more equipped now to explore implicit statements regarding various aspects of inclusion.

Concluding thoughts

Joshua and Xavier's stories enable me to articulate a definition of inclusion that surpasses policy ambiguities and professional debates. I believe 'inclusion' emerges through relational practices and being understood; fostering agency, attuning to individual needs, and upholding

every person's right to exist unapologetically. For Joshua, inclusion manifested in structured routines that scaffolded his curiosity, allowing him to engage with learning opportunities on his own terms. For Xavier, it emerged in fleeting moments of reciprocal engagement, where his spontaneity and ways of learning were met with responsiveness rather than correction. Their narratives, interpreted through phenomenological inquiry, reframe inclusion as being accepted for who one is, being heard and understood and being responded to on those terms.

As EP's, I believe our role is not to 'fix' inclusion as a static concept, but to interrogate the systems that distort it. This begins with humility and reckoning with our profession's historical complicity in pathologizing difference, and amplifying the expertise of those subjected to ableism daily. Joshua and Xavier's lived experiences prompt us to ask, 'Whose inclusion?' A question that challenges us to prioritise relationships over tokenistic enactments. Ethical practice demands that we truly listen, to voices expressed through embodied rhythms, silenced by normative frameworks, yet vital to understanding human experience.

From my perspective, this is not idealism but urgency. For children who will navigate lifelong dependency in an ableist society, inclusion is survival. Children with SCLD were once excluded and determined as 'uneducable', and while policies like the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and the Warnock report (1978) promised equality, today's inclusion remains contingent on neoliberal logics that equate success with normative outcomes. We cannot dismantle these systems overnight, but we can refuse complicity. I believe, actioning Inclusion, in its purest form, is the radical act of seeing CYP with SCLD not as problems to be solved but as whole beings, demanding nothing more, and nothing less, than the right to shape their own worlds in their own way.

The end

References

Agran, M., Jackson, L., Kurth, J. A., Ryndak, D., Burnette, K., Jameson, M., Zagona, A., Fitzpatrick, H., & Wehmeyer, M. (2020). Why aren't students with severe disabilities being placed in general education classrooms? Examining the relations among classroom placement, learner outcomes, and other factors. *Research and Practice for PersonswithSevereDisabilities,45*(1),4–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796919878134

Ainscow, M. (2005). Developing inclusive education systems: What are the levers for change? *JournalofEducationalChange,6*(2), 109-124. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-005-1298-4

Ainscow, M. (2006). *From special education to effective schools for all: A review of progress so far*. In L. Florian (Ed.), The handbook of special education (pp. 146–159). London: Sage.

Al-Jadiri, A., Tybor, D. J., Mulé, C., & Sakai, C. (2021). Factors associated with resilience in families of children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Developmental & Behavioural Pediatrics, 42*(1), 16–22.

Alper, R. M., & McGregor, K. K. (2015). Agency as a construct for guiding the establishment of communication-friendly classrooms. Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 31(3), 337-346. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265659015589120

Alvesson, M., & Sköldberg, K. (2009**).** *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications

Anderson, J. R. (2005). *Cognitive psychology and its implications* (6th ed.). Worth Publishers.

Artiles, A. J., Kozleski, E. B., Dorn, S., & Christensen, C. (2006). Learning in inclusive education research: Re-mediating theory and methods with a transformative agenda. *Review of Research in Education, 30*(1), 65–108. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X030001065

Ashby, C. (2011) ‘Whose "Voice" is it Anyway?: Giving Voice and Qualitative Research Involving Individuals that Type to Communicate’, *Disability studies quarterly*, 31(4). doi: 10.18061/dsq.v31i4.1723.

Ashworth, P. (2016). The lifeworld–enriching qualitative evidence. *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* 13(1), 20-32.

Avramidis, E., & Norwich, B. (2002). Teachers' attitudes towards integration/inclusion: A review of the literature. *EuropeanJournalofSpecialNeedsEducation,17*(2),129-147. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856250210129056

Baglieri, S., Valle, J. W., Connor, D. J., & Gallager, D. J. (2010). Disability studies in education: The need for a plurality of perspectives on disability. Remedial and Special Education, 32(4), 167–278.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). University of Texas Press.

Baumeister, R.F., & Leary, M.R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117, 497-529.

Beacham, N., & Rouse, M. (2012). Student teachers' attitudes and beliefs about inclusion and inclusive practice. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 12*(1), 3-11. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-3802.2010.01194.x

Begon, R. & Billington, T. (2019) Between category and experience: constructing autism, constructing critical practice, *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 35:2, 184-196,

Bennett Woodhouse, B. (2003) Enhancing children's participation in policy formulation, *Arizona Law Review*, 45, 750-763.

Berg, B. L**.** (1990). Teaching qualitative research methods: A syllabus. *Teaching Sociology, 18*(4), 547–552.

Bhaskar, R. (1975). *A realist theory of science*. Leeds: Leeds Books.

Biesta, G.J.J. (2013). Beautiful Risk of Education (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315635866

Billington, T., McNally, B., & McNally, C. (2000). Autism: Working with parents, and discourses in experience, expertise, and learning. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 16*(1), 59-68.

Black, N., and E. Halstead. 2021. “Mental Health and Subjective Well-Being of Staff in a Secondary School for Adolescents with Severe and Profound Multiple Learning Difficulties.” *British Journal of Special Education* 48 (4): 477–496. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8578.12389.

Blomkamp, E. (2018), The Promise of Co-Design for Public Policy. Australian Journal of Public Administration, 77: 729-743. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12310

Bloom, S., Critten, S., Johnson, H., & Wood, C. (2020a). A critical review of methods for eliciting voice from children with speech, language and communication needs. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 20(4), 308–320. https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12491

Boggis, A. (2011). Deafening silences: Researching with inarticulate children. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 31(4), 13–17.

Bradwell, M., & Bending, H. (2021). "I'm just a TA"; From mixing paints to managing safeguarding and class teaching: An exploration of teaching assistant's perceptions and roles in school. *Management in Education*, *38*(2), 1-5

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, *11*(4), 589–597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and be(com)ing a *knowing* researcher. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, *24*(1), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597

Breitbart, S., Yan, H., Mithani, K., Gorodetsky, C., & Ibrahim, G. M. (2024). Experiences of caregivers of children with severe self-injurious behaviour: An interpretive, descriptive study. *Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology*. Advance online publication.

Brewster, S. 2004. “Putting Words into Their Mouths? Interviewing People with Learning Disabilities and Little/no Speech.” *British Journal of Learning Disabilities* 32 (4): 166–169. doi:10.1111/j.1468-3156.2004.00319.x.

Broderick, A. A., & Ne’eman, A. (2008). Autism as metaphor: narrative and counter-narrative. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *12*(5–6), 459–476. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110802377490

Bronson, M. B. (2000). *Self-regulation in early childhood: Nature and nurture.* Guilford Press.

Broomhead, K. E. (2019) ‘The influence of the nature of children's disabilities on societal reactions experienced by their parents’, *Journal of research in special educational needs*, 19(2), pp. 126–134. doi: 10.1111/1471-3802.12435.

Burr, V. (2015). *Social Constructionism* (3rd ed.). Routledge

Byers, R., and H. Lawson. 2015. *Priorities, Products and Process– Developments in Providing a Curriculum for Learners With SLD/PMLD.* In The Routledge Companion to Severe Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties, edited by P. Lacey, R. Ashdown, P. Jones, H. Lawson, and M. Pipe, 38–47. London: Routledge.

Cameron, L. & Murphy, J. (2002) ‘Enabling young people with a learning disability to make choices at a time of transition.’ *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 30 (3), pp. 105–112.

Campbell, F. (2009). The contours of ableism: The production of disability and ableness. Palgrave.

Carpenter, B., Egerton, J., & Cockbill, B. (2015). *Engaging learners with complex learning difficulties and disabilities*. London: Routledge.

Cascio, M., Weiss, A. & Racine, E. (2021). Making autism research inclusive by attending to intersectionality: A review of the research ethics literature. *Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 8, 22–36.

Charlton, J. I. (2000). *Nothing about us, without us: Disability oppression and empowerment*. University of California Press.

Cigman, R. (2007). A question of universality: Inclusive education and the principle of respect. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 41*(4), 775-793. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9752.2007.00577.x

Clark, A. (2007) 'Views from inside the shed: young children's perspectives of the outdoor environment', *Education 3-13*, 35(4), pp. 349–363. doi: 10.1080/03004270701602483

Clark, A., & Moss, P. (2001). *Listening to young children: The Mosaic approach*. National Children's Bureau for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Clarke, E., & Visser, J. (2019). Is a good Teaching Assistant one who 'knows their place'? *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, *24*(4), 308–322. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2019.1625207

Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2016). Thematic analysis. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *12*(3), 297–298. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613

Cole, B. (2004). *Mother-Teachers: Insights on Inclusion* (1st ed.). David Fulton Publishers. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203063958

Colley, A. (2020). To what extent have learners with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties been excluded from the policy and practice of inclusive education? *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 24*(7), 721–738. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1483437

Cologon, K. (2022). Is inclusive education really for everyone? Family stories of children and young people labelled with 'severe and multiple' or 'profound' 'disabilities'. *Research Papers in Education, 37*(3), 395–417.

Conn, C. (2017). Pedagogical intersubjectivity, autism and education: can teachers teach so that autistic pupils learn? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *22*(6), 594–605. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1390003

Connolly, J. F. (2017). Seclusion of Students with Disabilities: An Analysis of Due Process Hearings. Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 42(4), 243-258. https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796917725710

Corcoran, T., & Vassallo, S. (2023). Critical psychology & education: Opportunities outside silos. School Psychology International, 45(3), 319-333. https://doi.org/10.1177/01430343231187064 (Original work published 2024)

Corlett, S., & Mavin, S. (2018**).** Reflexivity and researcher positionality. In C. Cassell, A. Cunliffe, & G. Grandy (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods* (Vol. 1, pp. 377–389). Sage

Crotty, M. (1998**).** *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. SAGE Publications

Cuff, B. M. P., Brown, S. J., Taylor, L., & Howat, D. (2016). Empathy: A review of the concept. *Emotion Review, 8*(2), 144–153

Damon, W., & Hart, D. (1988). *Self-understanding in childhood and adolescence*. Cambridge University Press.

Danermark, B., Ekström, M., Jakobsen, L., & Karlsson, J. C. (2002). *Explaining society: Critical realism in the social sciences*. Routledge.

Danforth, S. L. and Gabel, S. (2008). Introduction. In S. L. Danforth and S. Gabel (Eds.), Disability & The Politics of Education: An International Reader. New York[lc1]: Peter Lang.

Davies, G (2017) Inspiring Shared Attention and Communication (Workshop) March, Guildford: St. Saviours Church

Davy, I. 2019. “Between an ethic of care and an ethic of autonomy: Negotiating Relational autonomy, Disability, and Dependency.” Angelaki 24 (3): 101–114. https://doi.org/10.108 0/0969725X.2019.1620461.

De Boer, A., Pijl, S. J., & Minnaert, A. (2010). Regular primary schoolteachers' attitudes towards inclusive education: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 15*(3), 331-353. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110903030089

De Haas, C., Grace, J., Hope, J., & Nind, M. (2024). Doing research inclusively: Understanding what it means to do research with and alongside people with profound intellectual disabilities. *Social Sciences, 13*(1), 37. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13010037

De Jaegher, H. (2013). Embodiment and sense-making in autism. *Frontiers in Integrative Neuroscience, 7*, 15.

De Schauwer, E., Van de Putte, I., Blockmans, I. G. E., & Davies, B. (2016). The intra-active production of normativity and difference. *Gender and Education*, *30*(5), 607–622. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1259463

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* (B. Massumi, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press

Dell'Anna, S., Pellegrini, M., & Ianes, D. (2022). Learning, social, and psychological outcomes of students with moderate, severe, and complex disabilities in inclusive education: A systematic review. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 69*(3), 1022-1039.

Department for Education (DfE) & Department of Health. (2015). *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years*. UK Government. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25

Department of Education and Science. (1978). *Special educational needs: Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People* (The Warnock Report). Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Devlin, R., & Pothier, D. (Eds.). (2006). *Critical Disability Theory: Essays in Philosophy, Politics, Policy, and Law*. University of British Columbia Press.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. New York: Macmillan Company.

Doak, L. (2018). 'But I'd rather have raisins!': Exploring a hybridized approach to multimodal interaction in the case of a minimally verbal child with autism. Qualitative Research, 19(1), 30-54. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794117752115 (Original work published 2019)

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ephgrave, A. (2018). *Planning in the moment with young children: A practical guide for early years practitioners and parents*. Routledge

Facca, D., Gladstone, B., & Teachman, G. (2020). Working the Limits of "Giving Voice" to Children: A Critical Conceptual Review. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 19. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920933391

Fielding, M. (2006). Leadership, radical student engagement and the necessity of person-centred education. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 9(4), 299–313

Finlay, L. (2002). "Outing" the researcher: The provenance, process, and practice of reflexivity. *Qualitative Health Research*, *12*(4), 531–545. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973202129120052

Finlay, L. (2008). A dance between the reduction and reflexivity: Explicating the "phenomenological psychological attitude." Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 39, 1-32.

Finlay, L. (2012). Unfolding the phenomenological research process: Iterative stages of "seeing afresh." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 53*(2), 172–201. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167812453877

Fisher, M., & Meyer, L. H. (2002). Development and Social Competence after Two Years for Students Enrolled in Inclusive and Self-Contained Educational Programs. Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 27(3), 165-174. https://doi.org/10.2511/rpsd.27.3.165

Florian, L. (2015). Inclusive pedagogy: A transformative approach to individual differences but can it help reduce educational inequalities? *Scottish Educational Review, 47*(1), 5–14.

Florian, L., & Beaton, M. (2017). Inclusive pedagogy in action: getting it right for every child. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *22*(8), 870–884. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1412513

Folkes, L. (2022). Moving beyond 'shopping list' positionality: Using kitchen table reflexivity and in/visible tools to develop reflexive qualitative research. Qualitative Research, 23(5), 1301-1318. https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941221098922 (Original work published 2023)

Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford University Press.

Furrer, C., & Skinner, E. (2003). Sense of relatedness as a factor in children's academic engagement and performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95, 148-163.

Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 20*(9), 1408–1416

Gergen, K. J. (2009). *An Invitation to Social Construction* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications

Gibb, K., Tunbridge, D., Chua, A., & Frederickson, N. (2007). Pathways to inclusion: Moving from special school to mainstream. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 23*(2), 109–127. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667360701320770

Gibbs, R. W. (1994). *The Poetics of Mind-Figurative Thought, Language, and Understanding.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. University of California Press.

Gillham B (2005) *Research Interviewing: The Range of Techniques*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Giorgi, A. (2009). The descriptive phenomenological method in psychology: A modified Husserlian approach. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Giorgi, A. P., & Giorgi, B. M. (2003). The descriptive phenomenological psychological method. In P. M. Camic, J. E. Rhodes, & L. Yardley (Eds.), *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design* (pp. 243–273). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/10595-013

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence.* Bantam Books, Inc.

Goodall, C. (2018b) Inclusion is a feeling, not a place: a qualitative study exploring autistic young people's conceptualisations of inclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, online first, https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1523475

Goodley, D. (2014). *Dis/ability Studies: Theorising disablism and ableism* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203366974

Goodley, D. 2011. Social Psychoanalytic Disability Studies. *Disability & Society* 26 (6): 715–728.

Goodley, D., & Billington, T. (2017). *Critical educational psychology and disability studies.* In A. Williams, T. Billington, D. Goodley, & T. Corcoran (Eds.), Critical educational psychology (pp. 63–78). John Wiley & Sons.

Goodley, D., & Runswick-Cole, K. (2010). Emancipating play: dis/abled children, development and deconstruction. *Disability & Society*, *25*(4), 499–512. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687591003755914

Goodley, D., Lawthom, R., Liddiard, K., & Runswick-Cole, K. (2019). Provocations for Critical Disability Studies. *Disability & Society*, *34*(6), 972–997. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2019.1566889

Goodley, D., Liddiard, K., & Runswick-Cole, K. (2018). Feeling disability: Theories of affect and critical disability studies. *Disability & Society, 33*(2), 197–217. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2017.1402752

Göransson, K., & Nilholm, C. (2014). Conceptual diversities and empirical shortcomings: A critical analysis of research on inclusive education. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 29*(3), 265–280. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2014.933545

Graham, L. J., & Slee, R. (2008). An illusory interiority: Interrogating the discourse/s of inclusion. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 40*(2), 277–293. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2007.00331

Gray, C.A. (1994) The New Social Story Book. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons.

Great Britain. (1981). *Education Act 1981*. Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Griffiths, C., & Smith, M. (2016). Attuning: A communication process between people with severe and profound intellectual disability and their interaction partners. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities, 29*(2), 124–138

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105–117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Guillemin, M., & Gillam, L. (2004). Ethics, Reflexivity, and "Ethically Important Moments" in Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10(2), 261-280. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403262360

Haegele, J. A., & Maher, A. J. (2023). Toward a Conceptual Understanding of Inclusion as Intersubjective Experiences. Educational Researcher, 52(6), 385-393. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X231176287

Hall, S. (1997). Chapter 1: The work of representation. *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, 13-74.

Harrison, J., MacGibbon, L., & Morton, M. (2001). Regimes of trustworthiness in qualitative research: The rigors of reciprocity. *Qualitative Inquiry, 7*(3), 323–345.

Hart, S. (2021). Agentic ethnography: Inclusive interviews of young adults with significant disabilities on the transition from school. International Journal of Research and Method in Education, 45(1), 3–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2021.1881057.

Hassiotis, A., Poppe, M., Strydom, A., Vickerstaff, V., Hall, I. S., Crabtree, J., Omar, R. Z., King, M., Hunter, R., Biswas, A., Cooper, V., Howie, W., & Crawford, M. J. (2018). Clinical outcomes of staff training in positive behaviour support to reduce challenging behaviour in adults with intellectual disability: Cluster randomised controlled trial. *The British Journal of Psychiatry, 212*(3), 161-168

Haydock, A., Harrison, L., Baldwin, K., & Leadbitter, K. (2024). Embracing gestalt language development as a fundamental neurodiversity-affirmative practice. *Autism, 28*(5), 1055–1059.

Halling, S. (2008). *Intimacy, Transcendence, and Psychology: Closeness and Openness in Everyday Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper.

Hill, C. E., Knox, S., Thompson, B. J., Williams, E. N., Hess, S. A., & Ladany, N. (2005). Consensual qualitative research: An update. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(2), 196–205

Hill, V., Croydon, A., Greathead, S., Kenny ,L., Yates, D. & Pellicano, E. Research methods for children with multiple needs: Developing techniques to facilitate all children and young people to have 'a voice'. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 33 (3) (2016), pp. 26-43

Hill, V., Croydon, A., Greathead, S., Kenny ,L., Yates, D. & Pellicano, E. Research methods for children with multiple needs: Developing techniques to facilitate all children and young people to have 'a voice'. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 33 (3) (2016), pp. 26-43

Hirschmann, J. (2023) JH-The-Nationwide-Shortage-of-Specialist-Schools-Remedies-by-3PB-Barristers-1.pdf

Hoffman, M. L. (2000). *Empathy and moral development: Implications for caring and justice.* Cambridge University Press.

Honer, A., & Hitzler, R. (2015). Life-World-Analytical Ethnography: A Phenomenology-Based Research Approach. Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 44(5), 544-562. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241615588589

Husserl, E. (1970b). The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology: An introduction to phenomenological philosophy: Northwestern University Press.

Imray, P., and A. Colley. 2017. Inclusion is Dead. Long Live Inclusion. London: Routledge.

Imray, P., Kossyvaki, L., & Sissons, M. (Eds.). (2024). *A different view of curriculum and assessment: For profound and multiple, complex and severe learning disabilities*. Routledge.

Iwata, B. A., Dorsey, M. F., Slifer, K. J., Bauman, K. E., & Richman, G. S. (1994). Toward a functional analysis of self-injury. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 27*(2), 197-209

Johnson, K. (2009). No longer researching about us without us: A researcher's reflection on rights and inclusive research in Ireland. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 37(4), 250–256. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-3156.2009.00579.x

Kauffman, J., Travers, J. & Badar, J. (2020) 'Why Some Students with Severe Disabilities Are Not Placed in General Education', *Research and practice for persons with severe disabilities*, 45(1), pp. 28–33. doi: 10.1177/1540796919893053.

Khader, S. (2008). Cognitive disability, capabilities, and justice. *Essays in Philosophy*, *9*(1), 93–112

King, G., Phoenix, M., VanderKaay, S., & Pinto, M**.** (2024). Seeing the light versus being in the dark: parent, child, and service providers' use of metaphors to express system complexity, therapy engagement, and personal experiences of adaptation. *Disability and Rehabilitation, 46*(18), 4176–4186.

Kittay, E. and Carlson, L. (2010) *Cognitive disability and its challenge to moral philosophy*. Chichester, West Sussex, UK ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Kittay, E. F. (2003). Disability, equal dignity, and care. *Concilium: International Journal for Theology*, *2*, 105–115.

Klinke, M. E., & Fernandez, A. V. (2023). Taking phenomenology beyond the first-person perspective: Conceptual grounding in the collection and analysis of observational evidence. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences, 22*(1), 171–191. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-021-09796-1

Koch, T. (1999). An interpretive research process: Revisiting phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches. *Nurse Researcher* (through 2013), 6(3), 20.

Kossyvaki L and Papoudi D (2016) A review of play interventions for children with autism at school. International Journal of Disability, Development and Education 63: 45–63.

Koutsouris, G. (2014). Inclusion and homophily: an argument about participatory decision-making and democratic school management. British Journal of Educational Studies 62 (4):413-430.

Kövecses, Z**.** (2010). *Metaphor: A practical introduction* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Krämer, S., Möller, J., & Zimmermann, F. (2021). Inclusive education of students with general learning difficulties: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research, 91*(3), 432–478. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654321998072

Krischler, M., Powell, J. J., & Pit-ten Cate, I. M. (2019). What is meant by inclusion? On the effects of different definitions on attitudes toward inclusive education. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 34*(5), 632-648. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2019.1580837

Kunc, N. (1992). The need to belong: Rediscovering Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Retrieved from http://www.broadreachtraining.com/articles/armaslow.htm

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Langdridge, D. (2007). *Phenomenological Psychology: Theory, Research and Method*. Pearson Education.

Lansdown, G. (2005). *Can you hear me? The right of young children to participate in decisions affecting them*. Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Lewis-Dagnell, S., Parsons, S. and Kovshoff, H. (2023) 'Creative methods developed to facilitate the voices of children and young people with complex needs about their education: A systematic review and conceptual analysis of voice', *Educational research review*, 39, p. 100529. doi: 10.1016/j.edurev.2023.100529.

Lewis-Dagnell, S., Parsons, S. and Kovshoff, H. (2023) 'Creative methods developed to facilitate the voices of children and young people with complex needs about their education: A systematic review and conceptual analysis of voice', *Educational research review*, 39, p. 100529. doi: 10.1016/j.edurev.2023.100529.

Lopez, K. A., & Willis, D. G. (2004). Descriptive versus interpretive phenomenology: Their contributions to nursing knowledge. *Qualitative Health Research*, 14(5), 726-735.

Loreman, T., J. Deppeler, and D. Harvey. 2013. Inclusive Education: Supporting Diversity in the Classroom. Abingdon: Routledge.

Lundy, L. 2007. "'Voice 'is not Enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child." *British Educational Research Journal* 33 (6): 927–942.

Marsh, F. (2019, March). *Attention Autism for children and young people on the autistic spectrum: A critique of the current evidence-base.* University of Southamptom

Martens, K., & Andreen, K. (2018). School Counselors' Involvement with a School-Wide Positive Behavior Support Intervention: Addressing Student Behavior Issues in a Proactive and Positive Manner. Professional School Counseling, 16(5). https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X1201600504

Maslow, A. (1962). *Toward psychology of being*. Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand.

Mazanderani, F., Noorani, T., Dudhwala, F., & Kamwendo, Z. T. (2020). Knowledge, evidence, expertise? The epistemics of experience in contemporary healthcare. *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice, 16*(2), 213–229.

McCoy, M. S., Liu, E. Y., Lutz, A. S. et al. (2020). Ethical Advocacy Across the Autism Spectrum: Beyond partial representation. *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 20: 13–24.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). Phenomenology of perception (C. Smith, Trans.). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. (Original work published 1945).

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2002*). Phenomenology of Perception* . London: Routledge.

Merlo, G., Chiazzese, G., Taibi, D., & Chifari, A. (2018). Development and validation of a functional behavioural assessment ontology to support behavioural health interventions. *JMIR Medical Informatics, 6*(2), e37.

Mesibov, G. B., & Shea, V. (2011). Evidence-based practices and autism. *Autism, 15*(1), 114–133.

Messiou, K. (2019). The missing voices: Students as a catalyst for promoting inclusive education**.** *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 23(7–8), 768–781

Milton, D. (2017). *A Mismatch of Salience: Explorations of the Nature of Autism from Theory to Practice* (2017 ed.). Pavilion

Milton, D. (2012) On the ontological status of autism: the 'double empathy problem', *Disability & Society*, 27:6, 883-887,

Minich, J.A. (2016). *Enabling Whom? Critical Disability Studies Now.* Lateral 5(1) https://doi.org/10.25158/L5.1.9 Mishler, E. (1986). Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press

Ministry of Education and Science (Spain), & United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (1994). *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. Adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality (Salamanca, Spain, June 7-10, 1994)*. UNESCO. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED377665

Mittler, P. (2000). *Working Towards Inclusive Education: Social Contexts* (1st ed.). David Fulton Publishers. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203386149

Moloney, M., &McCarthy, E.(2018).*Intentional leadership for effective inclusion in early childhood education and care: Exploring core themes and strategies*. Routledge.

Moore, M., & Slee, R. (2020). *Inclusive education and exclusion***.** In N. Watson & S. Vehmas (Eds.), Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies (2nd ed., pp. 346–358). Routledge

Moran, D. (2000). *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Routledge.

Morris J. 2001. *That Kind of Life? Social Exclusion and Young Disabled People with High Levels of Support Needs*. Scope: London.

Morris, J. (2003). *Including all children: Finding out about the experiences of children with communication and/or cognitive impairments*. *Children & Society, 17*(5), 337–348. https://doi.org/10.1002/chi.754

Mundy, P., & Newell, L. (2007). Attention, joint attention, and social cognition. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 16*(5), 269–274.

Murphy, J. (1997) Talking Mats; a low-tech framework to help people with severe communication difficulties express their views. Stirling, University of Sterling.

Newman, H. (2014) One mum's tough decision - Mainstream or Special School for her daughter with Down's - Special Needs Jungle

Nind, M. & Hewett, D. (2001) *A practical guide to intensive interaction* , Birmingham, GB. British Institute of Learning Disabilities

Nind, M. (2008). Conducting qualitative research with people with learning, communication and other disabilities. In *Methodological challenges* (pp. 1–24).

Nind, M. (2017). The practical wisdom of inclusive research. Qualitative Research, 17(3), 278-288.

Nind, M., & Grace, J. (2024). The emotional wellbeing of students with profound intellectual disabilities and those who work with them: a relational reading. *Disability & Society*, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2024.2407819

Nkoma, E., & Hay, J. (2018). Educational psychologists' support roles regarding the implementation of inclusive education in Zimbabwe. *Psychology in the Schools, 55*(7), 850-864. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22147

Noble, H., & Mitchell, G**.** (2016). What is grounded theory? *Evidence Based Nursing, 19*(2), 34–35.

O'Leary, S., & Moloney, M. (2020). Understanding the Experiences of Young Children on the Autism Spectrum as They Navigate the Irish Early Years' Education System: Valuing Voices in Child-Centred Narratives. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920914696

O'Reilly, K. (2012). Ethnographic methods. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Oliver, M., & Barnes, C. (1993). Disability: A Sociological Phenomenon Ignored by Sociologists. University of Leeds.

Parsons, S., Ivil, K., Kovshoff, H., & Karakosta, E. (2021). 'Seeing is believing': Exploring the perspectives of young autistic children through digital stories. *Journal of Early Childhood Research, 19*(2), 161–178. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X20951235

Pascal C and Bertram T (2009) Listening to young citizens: The struggle to make real a participatory paradigm in research with young children. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 17: 249–262.

PBS Academy, 2015 The PBS Academy UK | UK Positive Behavioural Support (PBS) Competence Framework

Pesonen, H. (2016). *Sense of belonging for students with intensive special education needs: An exploration of students' belonging and teachers' role in implementing support* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Helsinki, Faculty of Behavioural Sciences.

Pinkard, H. (2021) The perspectives and experiences of children with special educational needs in mainstream primary schools regarding their individual teaching assistant support. *European Journal of Special Educational Needs, 36*(2), 248-264. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2021.1901375

Pinsky, D. (2013). The sustained snapshot: Incidental ethnographic encounters in qualitative interview studies. *Qualitative Research*, 15(3), 281-295. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112473493 (Original work published 2015)

Porpora, D. V. (2015). *Reconstructing sociology: The critical realist approach*. Cambridge University Press.

Priestley, M., & Philippou, S. (2018). Curriculum making as social practice: Complex webs of enactment. *The Curriculum Journal, 29*(2), 151-158.

Prizant, B. M., Wetherby, A. M., Rubin, E., Laurent, A. C., & Rydell, P. J. (2006). *The SCERTS Model: A comprehensive educational approach for children with autism spectrum disorders* (Vol. 1). Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Prøitz, T. S. (2015). Learning outcomes as a key concept in policy documents throughout policy changes. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, *59*(3), 275–296.

Quality Care Commission, 2020 Out of sight – who cares?

Recchia, S. L., & McDevitt, S. E. (2023). A place for Miguel: Discovering the power of belonging within an inclusive toddler community. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 31*(1), 51–63.

Redmore, Ned (2021). Day Service Culture From The Perspective Of Autistic Adults With Profound Learning Disabilities: A Methodological Development And Empirical Study In The Space Of Autism And Profound Learning Disability. PhD thesis *The Open University*

Reich, W. (2010). Three problems of intersubjectivity—And one solution. *Sociological Theory*, 28(1), 41–63.

Richardson E. V., Motl R. (2019). A narrative exploration of an adapted physical activity space and its impact on persons with physical impairments. *Disability and Society*, 35(1), 89–110. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2019.1617111

Ridout, S., Guldberg, K. & Macleod, A. (2011). *Hear Me Out! Supporting young people (16-18) on the Autism Spectrum living in Warwickshire: an evaluation of the adult model.* Birmingham, Autism Centre for Education and Research (ACER), University of Birmingham.

Robinson, C., & Taylor, C. (2013). Student voice as a contested practice: Power and participation in two student voice projects. Improving Schools, 16(1), 32-46. https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480212469713

Rouvali, A., & Riga, V. (2021). Listening to the voice of a pupil with autism spectrum condition in the educational design of a mainstream early years setting. *Education*, 49(4), 464–480. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2020.1734042, 3-13.

Runswick-Cole, K. (2008) 'Between a rock and a hard place: Parents' attitudes to the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream and special schools', *British journal of special education*, 35(3), pp. 173–180. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8578.2008.00390.

Rutakumwa, R., Mugisha, J. O., Bernays, S., Kabunga, E., Tumwekwase, G., Mbonye, M., & Seeley, J. (2020). Conducting in-depth interviews with and without voice recorders: A comparative analysis. *Qualitative Research, 20*(5), 565–581.

Ryan, J. B., Sanders, S., Katsiyannis, A., & Yell, M. L. (2007). Using Time-Out Effectively in the Classroom. TEACHING Exceptional Children, 39(4), 60-67. https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990703900407

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 68–78. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68

Ryan, S. 2021. *Love, Learning Disabilities and Pockets of Brilliance: How Practitioners Can Make a Difference to the Lives of Children, Families and Adults*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Ryan, S., & Runswick-Cole, K. (2008). Repositioning mothers: Mothers, disabled children and disability studies. *Disability & Society, 23*(3), 199–210

Salend, S. J. 2011. Creating Inclusive Classroom. Effective and Reflective Practice. New Jersey: Pearson Education.

Salmon, N. (2013). “We just stick together”: How disabled teens negotiate stigma to create lasting friendship. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 57(4), 347–358.

Sayer, A. (2000). *Realism and social science*. SAGE Publications.

Schulze J., Winter L. A., Woods K., Tyldesley K. (2017) Investigating the significance of social justice in educational psychology practice: A systemic literature review. *Educational & Child Psychology* 34(3): 57–73.

Semino, E., Demjén, Z., & Demmen, J. (2018). An integrated approach to metaphor and framing in cognition, discourse, and practice, with an application to metaphors for cancer. *Applied Linguistics, 39*(5), 625–645.

Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.

Sewell, A., Kennett, A., & Pugh, V. (2022). Universal Design for Learning as a theory of inclusive practice for use by educational psychologists. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 38*(4), 364–378.

Shakespeare, T. (2013). Disability Rights and Wrongs Revisited (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315887456

Shier, H. (2001) ‘Pathways to participation: openings, opportunities and obligations’, *Children & society*, 15(2), pp. 107–117. doi: 10.1002/chi.617.

Shuttleworth, M. A. (2013). Inclusion is...: Musing and conversations about the meaning of inclusion. In A. Azzopardi (Ed.), *Youth: Responding to lives* (pp. 109-121). Sense Publishers.

Simmons, B. & Watson, D. (2015) 'From individualism to co-construction and back again: rethinking research methodology for children with profound and multiple learning disabilities', *Child Care in Practice*, 21 (1), 50–66.

Simmons, B. (2021). The production of social spaces for children with profound and multiple learning difficulties: a Lefebvrian analysis. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *42*(5–6), 828–844. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2021.1922269

Skarsaune, S., Hanisch, H. & Gjermestad, A. (2021) 'Self-determination: What can we learn from persons with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities?', *Scandinavian journal of disability research : SJDR*, 23(1), pp. 317–327. doi: 10.16993/SJDR.830.

Slee, R. (2001) The Inclusive School. London: Falmer Press.

Slee, R. (2001). Social justice and the changing directions in educational research: The case of inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 5*(2-3), 167-177. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110010035832

Slee, R. (2018). *Inclusion isn't dead, it just smells funny*. Routledge.

Smith, E., Critten, V., & Vardill, R. (2020). Assessing progress in children with severe/profound intellectual disabilities: What are the issues? *Disability & Society, 35*(10), 1688–1692.

Smith, J. A. (2011). Evaluating the Contribution of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. *Health Psychology Review*, 5, 9-27.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*. SAGE Publications.

Smith, M. (2011). Metaphors for mental distress as an aid to empathy: looking through *The Bell Jar* . *Journal of Social Work Practice*, *26*(3), 355–366. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2011.637158

Stalker, K. (1998). Some ethical and methodological issues in research with people with learning difficulties. *Disability & Society*, 13(1), 5–19

Stewart, K., Bradshaw, J., & Beadle-Brown, J. (2018). Evaluating service users' experiences using Talking Mats®. *Tizard Learning Disability Review*, 23(2), 78-86. doi: 10.1108/TLDR-05-2017-0023

Swain, J., & King, B. (2022). Using Informal Conversations in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221085056

Taylor J, Miller M. When timeout works some of the time: The importance of treatment integrity and functional assessment. School Psychology Quarterly. 1997

Teachman, G., & Gibson, B. E. (2018). Integrating Visual Methods With Dialogical Interviews in Research With Youth Who Use Augmentative and Alternative Communication. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917750945

Tedlock, B. (2000). *Ethnography and ethnographic representation*. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (2nd ed.,pp.455–484).Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Terzi, L. (2014). Reframing inclusive education: Educational equality as capability equality. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *44*(4), 479-493. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2014.960911

Tesfaye, R., Courchesne, V., Yusuf, A., Savion-Lemieux, T., Singh, I., Shikako-Thomas, K., Mirenda, P., Waddell, C., Smith, I. M., Nicholas, D., Szatmari, P., Bennett, T., Duku, E., Georgiades, S., Kerns, C., Vaillancourt, T., Zaidman-Zait, A., Zwaigenbaum, L., & Elsabbagh, M. (2019). Assuming ability of youth with autism: Synthesis of methods capturing the first-person perspectives of children and youth with disabilities. *Autism*, 23(8), 1882–1896. https://doi.org/10.1177/ 1362361319831487

Thomas, N. (2012**).** Love, Rights and Solidarity: Studying Children's Participation Using Honneth's Theory of Recognition. *Childhood*, 19(4), 453–466.

Todres, L., Galvin, K. T., & Holloway, I. (2009). The humanization of healthcare: A value framework for qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being, 4*(2), 68–77.

Tomlinson, S. (2017*). A sociology of special and inclusive education: Exploring the manufacture of inability.* Taylor and Francis.

Tryfon, M., Anastasia, A., & Eleni, R. (2019). Parental perspectives on inclusive education for children with intellectual disabilities in Greece. *International Journal of Developmental Disabilities, 67*(6), 420–428. https://doi.org/10.1080/20473869.2019.1675429

UNITED NATIONS (1989). Conventions on the Rights of the Child. London: UNICEF.

Van Manen, M. (1990) *Researching lived experience : human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. 1st ed. Albany, N.Y.]: State University of New York Press.

Van Manen, M. (2011). Language Itself Is a Source of Meaning. Phenomenology Online. http://www.phenomenologyonline.com/inquiry/sources-of-meaning/language-sources/

Vygotsky, L. S. (1987). *The collected works of L. S. Vygotsky, Vol. 1. Problems of general psychology.* (R. W. Rieber & A. S. Carton, Eds.). Plenum Press.

Ware, H. (2020). Experiences of self and belonging among young people identified as having learning difficulties in English schools [Apollo - University of Cambridge Repository]. https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.59295

Ware, J., T. Balfe, C. Butler, T. Day, M. Dupont, C. Harten, A. M. Farrell, et al. 2009. Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland. Trim: NCSE.

Wearmouth, J. (2011). *Special Educational Needs: The Basics* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203155189

Webster, R. (2022). *The inclusion illusion*. UCL press

Wedell, K. (2008). Confusion about inclusion: Patching up or system change? *British Journal of Special Education*, 35(3), 127 135.

Wehmeyer, M. L., & Smith, S. J. (2016). *Inclusive education for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities: The role of the school psychologist*. In S. L. Christenson (Ed.), *Handbook of school psychology* (4th ed., pp. 787–804). Wiley.

Wellington, J. (2000). *Educational research: Contemporary issues and practical approaches*. Continuum.

Wertz, F.J. (2010). The method of eidetic analysis for psychology. In T.F. Cloonan & C. Thiboutot(Eds.), The redirection of psychology: Essays in honour of Amedeo P. Giorgi, pp.26l-278.

Willig, C. (2013) *Introducing qualitative research in psychology* Open University press

Willms, J.D. (2000). Monitoring school performance for 'standards-based reform'. *Evaluation & Research in Education*, 14, 237–253.

Wilson, D. and Newton, C. (2006). *Circles of Adults; A team approach to problem-solving around challenging behaviour and emotional needs*. Inclusive Solutions.

Winter, S. (2017). *Work to be done? Exploring the current contribution of educational psychologists to special schools which cater for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD)* University of Southampton.

Women and Equalities Committee. (2024). *Inequalities in healthcare and employment for people with a learning disability and autistic people* (Sixth Report of Session 2023–24). House of Commons.

Appendix 1. Joshua eidetic analyses

Observation/reflection	Eidetic imagination
1. Joshua arrived in the 'nurture base' and immediately began checking the sensors in the room, where they on, he moved or open the door to check they were functioning. He picked up a little ball marble run to watch the balls go down. Every few seconds – minutes he moved to check the sensor was still working and he would glance at what was happening on the white board.	Imagining Joshua's world, he steps into the nurture base with a sense of purpose. The sensors, his silent sentinels, must be checked to ensure his environment is just right. Each sensor, a beacon of predictability, offers him comfort in its consistent operation. The marble run, with its rhythmic clatter of balls, captivates him, providing a soothing visual and auditory experience. His periodic checks on the sensors are like a ritual, grounding him in the present. The whiteboard, a distant but acknowledged presence, hints at the broader world he is aware of but not fully engaged with.
2. When it was time to go to his year one class (he knew this by the TA showing him a visual now and next board – stating class now. On the way to class he was told that he would be 'painting' and then ? However, when he got to the classroom, it wasn't painting that was on offer but colouring. Joshua collected 3 pens but ran away from the table. He checked the sensors were working in the classroom. When painting was produced he did sit down and 'paint' he liked mixing the colours within their paint pallet. The TA had a bag of 'exciting' objects to distract Joshua when he wanted to be checking the sensors and the lights situation around the school. Sometimes he liked the lights on and sometimes he liked them to be off. Unfortunately, he couldn't reach the lights but would try each time, stretching his arm up high.	Imagining Joshua's world, he steps into his year one class with a sense of routine, guided by the visual 'now and next' board. He is told that painting is on the agenda, which sets his expectation. However, upon arrival, he finds colouring instead, which disrupts his anticipated activity. He collects three pens but feels unsettled and runs away from the table. His need for reassurance leads him to check the classroom sensors, ensuring his environment is as it should be. When painting materials are finally produced, he sits down and engages in mixing the colours on his palette, finding a familiar and comforting activity. The TA, understanding his needs, uses a bag of exciting objects to distract Joshua when he feels the urge to check the sensors and lights. Joshua's fascination with the lights, sometimes preferring them on and other times off, shows his desire for control over his environment. Despite not being able to reach the switches, he stretches his arm high each time, determined to interact with his surroundings.

3. In the classroom, Joshua developed a routine of grabbing paper towels from the sink area, checking the sensors, kicking the door, checking the sensors, opening the cupboard, checking the sensors. Reliably the sensor light moved on and off continually, however other children were moving in the classroom and I wondered if Joshua knew that they were also partly responsible for the sensor lights also. The class teacher mentioned that at the start of the year, they were unable to use the class whiteboard as Joshua wanted to control the on/off swich and watch for the red light that came on. This was problematic for them as lots of the lessons for the other children was planned on the whiteboard, however through persistence of explaining to Joshua that the whiteboard had to stay on, he now doesn't try and turn it on/off. I watched him watch the maths lesson about tangrams and shapes, at the same time he completed the maths inset puzzle that the TA pulled out of her bag. He did this a few times, and said the numbers as he placed them into the puzzle.	Imagining Joshua's world, he steps into the classroom with a sense of routine, immediately drawn to the familiar sequence of actions that bring him comfort. He grabs paper towels from the sink area, feeling the texture and weight in his hands, then checks the sensors, watching the light flicker on and off. He kicks the door, feeling the solid resistance under his foot, and checks the sensors again, ensuring everything is as it should be. Opening the cupboard, he peers inside, perhaps looking for something specific or just enjoying the act of exploration, before checking the sensors once more. The sensor light's reliable pattern is a constant in his day, though he might not fully grasp that his classmates' movements also influence it. At the start of the year, the whiteboard was a source of fascination for Joshua, with its on/off switch and the red light that came on. This caused challenges for the teacher, as many lessons relied on the whiteboard. However, through patient and persistent explanations, Joshua learned that the whiteboard needed to stay on, and he no longer tries to control it. During a maths lesson about tangrams and shapes, Joshua watches the lesson with interest while simultaneously completing a maths inset puzzle provided by the TA. He repeats this activity several times, saying the numbers aloud as he places them into the puzzle, finding satisfaction in the tactile and visual engagement.
4. Occasionally Joshua would say no, in a distressed tone, especially when he was thwarted from going somewhere. On one occasion, this rose to tears and crying, especially when he was asked to wait with the class at the end of playtime. He ran from the area to the hall and the TA said she was 'braced' for a meltdown as the lights were on, and normally they make sure they were off as he sometimes had become unconsolably upset when the were left on. However, this day, he ran paused,	Imagining Joshua's world, The familiar comfort of playtime ending is replaced by the unexpected demand to wait with the class. His distress is palpable, his voice rising in a distressed 'no' as tears begin to flow. He runs from the area, seeking solace in the hall, a space where he can regain control. The TA, aware of his sensitivities, braces for a meltdown, knowing the lights being on could exacerbate his distress. But today is different. Joshua pauses, his eyes scanning the room. He takes a deep breath, his gaze settling on the sensors. A smile spreads across his face as he checks them, finding reassurance in their predictable operation. His body visibly relaxes, the tension melting away. With a newfound calm, he returns to the TA, ready to go back to class.

looked around and smiled. He checked the sensors, looked visibly calm and was then happy to go with the TA back to class, where he resumed his 'checking the sensors routine'.	
5. As I was leaving the school at lunchtime, Joshua was standing at the hall doors whilst the other children were eating their lunch. He stood just outside of the doors. The teacher explained that when he first started the school, he would run off out of the hall. Somehow over the year, they had managed to explain to him various boundaries within the school grounds. Always he would hover just outside of the boundary but didn't run away. He looked relaxed standing on the boundary edge, looking towards the room sensor and waiting for the time he could go back to class.	Imagining Joshua's world, he stands at the hall doors, a quiet observer while the other children eat their lunch. He positions himself just outside the doors, a place that has become familiar and safe. The teacher recalls how, at the beginning of the year, Joshua would run off out of the hall, unable to understand the boundaries. Over time, Joshua has learned the limits within the school grounds. Now, he hovers just outside the boundary, a testament to his understanding and acceptance of these limits. He looks relaxed, standing on the boundary edge, his eyes fixed on the room sensor. The sensor's light, a beacon of predictability, offers him reassurance. He waits patiently, knowing that soon it will be time to return to class. In this moment, Joshua's actions reflect his growth and adaptation, finding comfort in the routines and boundaries that help him navigate his day.
6. Key thoughts *Joshua had an understanding of some of the school rules – he complied with them albeit on the edge of a boundary – Adults were the enforcers of boundaries, he would look to check that an adult was maintaining a boundary* *Joshua 'went along' with some of the curriculum based activities on offer even though they weren't chosen by him, or seemingly that interesting to him* 7. *The classroom was a busy place, and Joshua had a busy job to do in checking the movement sensor was working. In the nurture base, Joshua had the same job to do, however because the base wasn't as 'busy' Joshua's checking wasn't as busy, therefore he had more*	

time to 'test' other equipment such as the marble run.	
8. Joshua was waiting in reception when I went to see his Mum. He was shouting in distress and his mum said that he didn't like the amount of people. The staff in class said it was because he could see the lights on in class 1 – however both could be correct and causal in this situation.	Imagine Joshua, he has arrived at school a few minutes earlier than usual, maybe he is bracing himself on the way to entering the acute sensory environment and he is unable to enter. He has to wait, this is unusual. He can see the school open like it normally is, he can see the lights on as usual, more people are coming into the space, making noise and asking questions.
9. Joshua started the morning calmly and relaxed in his face and the way he moved around the nurture going from the marble run, construction and whiteboard. Periodically he checked the movement sensor. When the door opened for a child in crisis to go outside he ran to the door but remained composed when he couldn't go outside.	Joshua's morning can be envisioned as a series of deliberate, measured interactions with his environment. He moved with ease and intention, his relaxed demeanour suggesting a sense of safety and familiarity within the nurture room. His transitions between the marble run, construction toys, and the whiteboard painted a picture of quiet exploration, as though each activity offered him a way to orient himself and connect with the rhythm of his day. The periodic checks of the movement sensor seemed almost like a grounding ritual, an act of ensuring that the predictable elements of his world remained intact. When the door opened to accommodate a child in crisis, the scene shifted subtly. One might imagine Joshua's attention narrowing, his sudden run to the door embodying a moment of curiosity or a need to engage with the unexpected change. Yet, faced with the boundary of not being able to step outside, he held himself steady. In this moment, it is possible to imagine the quiet tension within him, balancing his desire to explore with an awareness of the constraints placed upon him. The room, with its structured space and predictable cues, seemed to hold him within its order, allowing him to adapt and re-centre. Joshua's experience here reflects the interplay between his inner impulses and the external frameworks that guide his actions.
10. Outside play- Joshua was watching the door and wanted it closed, but he looked at an adult and paused and stopped, 'he knows the rule', and ran off to the climbing area and then ran back to check the door. Sat at the snack table outside but didn't eat anything, almost waiting there. When the whistle was	During outdoor play, Jacob's attention is immediately drawn to the door, which is open. He seems to want it closed, but a glance at an adult reminds him of the rules, and he refrains from acting. Instead, he redirects himself by running to the climbing area, though he returns periodically to check the door. This pattern highlights his internal struggle between impulse and learned boundaries.

blown, he was straight to the front, wanting to go in immediately. There was a bottleneck of children entering the school, Joshua appeared very focused on the lights being on/off. Seemed to get very upset and ran to the hall, 'to check the lights were on' Miss mentioned how he seems to have an idea of what the lights needed to be doing to make the 'world' ok. The lights were actually off, and he seemed happy then and was happy to go back to class. Miss was surprised and confused 'as last time he wanted them on' 'can't keep up'. In the reception class, Joshua did an inset puzzle of numbers and said the numbers out loud to himself whilst the other children watched the whiteboard, 'he used to be obsessed with wanting to turn the whiteboard on and off but now is ok and doesn't touch it'.	He sits at the snack table, not eating but appearing to wait, perhaps observing or anticipating the next phase of the routine. When the whistle signals the end of outdoor play, Jacob positions himself promptly at the front of the line, eager to transition back inside. As the children re-enter the building, a bottleneck forms, but Jacob's focus shifts to the lights. His intense fixation on whether the lights are on or off becomes evident when he appears distressed and runs to the hall to "check" the lights. Miss notes that Jacob seems to have an internal understanding of how the lights "should" be to maintain a sense of order in his world. Curiously, the lights are off, and to Miss's surprise, Jacob is content with this, showing that his preferences or expectations can shift unpredictably. Back in the reception class, Jacob engages with a numbers puzzle, naming the numbers aloud as he works. His independent engagement contrasts with the other children, who are watching the whiteboard. Once obsessed with controlling the whiteboard's on/off state,
11. In his classroom, he played outside for 15 minutes chasing a ball – throwing it just beyond the boundary and delighted when Miss went to get it. Later on in nurture whilst the rest were having snack, miss got him a drink, which he sat down and drank- miss said he didn't drink for ages but then they realised he wanted a green cup.	imagine Joshua outside, the open space around him a canvas for his movement and energy. The ball becomes more than just a toy, it's a way to interact with the world, to test its boundaries, and to engage with those around him. He throws the ball just beyond the limits of where he's allowed to go, his delight peaking when Miss retrieves it, perhaps sensing the interplay between their roles in this small, shared moment. Later, in the quieter nurture space, the transition to drinking is less about thirst and more about the rituals that make him feel safe. The green cup becomes a key, a small yet essential detail in Joshua's structured world. Sitting down with his drink, he finds comfort not only in the liquid but in the act of having things 'just right.'
12. During playtime, Joshua ran into one of the open classrooms and stood in the middle looking visibly relaxed and happy, however he soon became distressed when asked to move on- he ran to another empty classroom and again looked visibly relaxed only becoming distressed when asked to move. Back in class he played outside,	Joshua steps into the open, empty classroom, he is controlling the movement sensors, his eyes scanning the room with curiosity and a sense of ease. The space seems to invite him in, its openness aligning with his natural rhythm. His posture softens, and a faint smile plays across his face. For a moment, he feels secure in this space, unburdened by any expectations or pressures. The room represents a concert goers feeling of joy when the music hits the 'spot'

this time leaving the boundary but not going too far. Due to staffing – he needed to be within the boundary, in which he began to object to. Briefly he played with the sand pit and pourer and the letters on the whiteboard. In the classroom he reached up to turn the lights off and became distressed because he couldn't reach. Suddenly when the routine started for lunch, he began to relax, watched the others wash their hands and joined in with the counting song and seemed calmer.	However, when the call to move on comes, the shift is immediate. Joshua's tranquillity falters. His body tenses as he's asked to leave the room, and his smile falters, replaced by a visible strain. The request to move doesn't just disrupt his moment of peace, it challenges the quiet order he's found within the room's boundaries. Distress begins to creep in, and with it, a surge of movement. He runs, a sudden burst of motion that contrasts sharply with his earlier stillness, heading for another empty classroom. The cycle repeats: again, he stands in the middle of the room, calmness returning for a brief moment, only to be jolted once more when the external world intrudes, asking him to leave yet again. Back in the familiar classroom, the sense of control begins to shift again, as Joshua explores his boundaries within the playground. This time, he ventures just beyond the perimeter, drawn to the thrill of space yet keeping himself within reach. He lingers, not too far out, testing the limits of freedom and structure. The friction between his desire for autonomy and the requirement to stay within set limits surfaces. His objections become clear, his movements become more rigid, his gestures more pronounced. There is a tension between the external demands and his internal desire for exploration. The sand pit calls to him next, a brief reprieve from the confines of the classroom. He touches the sand, his fingers sinking into its grainy texture, before moving to the whiteboard with the letters, his focus shifting again to something more structured but equally absorbing. Yet, when he reaches up to turn off the lights—his fingers brushing against the switch but unable to make contact, his frustration spikes. The boundary between what he wants and what he can do becomes painfully clear. The inability to control the environment around him, something as simple as the lights, spins him into a brief moment of distress. But then, as if the very structure of the day is a balm for his unrest, the routine shifts into the familiar rhythm of lunch. The shift in focus from challenge to routine helps Joshua centre himself. He watches as the others wash their hands, the quiet action settling his mind, and soon, he joins in. The counting song starts, and Joshua's participation is smooth and natural, a sign of his return to a grounded sense of self. The comfort of the routine has a calming effect on him, as if the predictable flow of the day offers him the structure he craves, a bridge between the emotional peaks and valleys of his experience.

13. For a time I was able to engage Joshua in a game, copying his movements, he noticed that I was watching him- he made a peculiar facial expression and seemed to enjoy me making the same face back to him. Outside we engaged in a game of throwing the ball, we ran together to get the ball and Joshua seemed to enjoy the thrill of the chase, giggling as we approached. However as this game was outside of the boundary, we couldn't continue.	in the calm of the room, Joshua's movements are fluid, a quiet dance of exploration and self-expression. As I mirror his gestures, his attention shifts towards me, and for a fleeting moment, our worlds connect. His eyes catch mine, and with a sudden pause, he observes, eyes narrowing slightly, a slight tilt of the head. There's a flicker of recognition, a subtle shift in his awareness that I'm not just an observer, but a participant. Then, a peculiar facial expression forms on his face, playful, almost mischievous. His lips twitch, and his brow furrows just enough to communicate a moment of delight. As I echo his expression, something changes in him. His eyes brighten, and a giggle escapes him. A shared look, a shared moment, like a secret only the two of us understand. Outside, the air shifts. The ball is tossed in the air, and Joshua's reaction is instantaneous. His body springs into motion, quick as lightning. There's a joy in his movements, a pure excitement as he dashes after the ball, his face lit with a childlike glee. The chase becomes a rhythm, each step bringing him closer to the prize, his laughter ringing in the air, a sound of pure happiness. The ball feels like an extension of himself, and in that fleeting moment, he is both free and in control, running, laughing, existing fully in the present. His giggles rise and fall, like a melody, each burst of laughter a reflection of the joy of the chase. But then, as quickly as it began, there's a shift. The boundary calls. It's an invisible line, a barrier that Joshua feels as much as sees, and with it comes a pause. He slows, and the game ends abruptly. There's a flicker of confusion, perhaps a sense of disappointment, but it's fleeting. He's aware of the constraint, the external force that stops the momentum.
14. Key reflections *15. Joshua seeks out quieter less stimulating spaces when there are lots of children the same age as him = but they are also spaces which bring him comfort such as being outside of a boundary or being in a space with movement sensors/light switches when <u>no other children are there</u>* *Joshua recognises people's faces and appreciates familiarity*	In the rhythm of his day, Joshua moves through the school like a quiet observer, seeking spaces where the noise of others fades into the background. When the playground fills with the hustle of children, their laughter and voices intertwining, Joshua instinctively gravitates toward the edges, the places where sound softens, and the chaos of play is tempered. It's not simply a preference for solitude, but an intuitive pull towards a quieter sanctuary. These quieter corners of the world—like areas outside the boundary, or rooms with movement sensors and light switches, offer him something more than just calm. In these spaces, he feels a sense

Joshua really likes routines that make sense to him	of control, a gentle predictability that steadies his world when the sensory storm of a bustling classroom or playground overwhelms him. The sensors, the switches, they are not just objects to interact with but small, comforting rituals that help him make sense of his surroundings. In these moments, Joshua is not isolated, but connected—connected to a world that makes sense on his terms. He checks the sensors with a sense of reassurance, grounding himself in their predictable presence. When the lights flicker on or off, it's a cue, a gentle confirmation that things are in place, that the space is as he expects it to be. It's a soft sense of agency, an ability to shape his environment in a way that feels manageable, that feels safe. Joshua's recognition of people's faces speaks volumes of his need for familiarity. When a face appears, whether it's a teacher, a friend, or someone he's seen many times before, there's an immediate shift in his expression—a quiet acknowledgment. It's not loud or overt, but it's there. A glimmer of recognition, a subtle shift that shows he feels safe in the known. These familiar faces offer him a silent sense of reassurance, grounding him in a world that can sometimes feel too unpredictable.
16. *I had to turn away when they physically removed him from spaces where he shouldn't have been – I couldn't be complicit – also as a researcher, what could I change?* *Did this deny Joshua his voice?* *I left my notebook behind so that I could focus on the 'here and now' with Joshua and 'be with'*	
17. Joshua appeared a lot calmer in the classroom- still as flitty, moving continually . I decided to be less participatory as the week before he had ended up in locations that perhaps were part of our interaction. I noticed when I stood near the boundary, he tried to engage me in a game of moving outside of the boundary like the week before but didn't participate. This led him to running around and wrestling with peers outside. He loved	Joshua's presence in the classroom was like a quiet hum, his movements incessant but measured. He was always in motion, his body a blur of fidgeting energy, yet his calmness had settled into the space. It was as if he was both here and not here at once—present, yet lost in his own world of perpetual motion. I decided to take a step back, giving him room to explore, knowing from previous experiences that my proximity had sometimes led him to wander into spaces, both physical and emotional, that were perhaps more challenging for him to navigate. the boundary became a place of pure joy for Joshua. The cones—those simple, brightly

loved loved when cones were put on the field to mark the boundary and occasionally he would move them ever so slightly. He was so happy he joyfully wrestled other children to the ground – this was reciprocated with equal pleasure – this was the first time, I had seen him interact with another child.	coloured markers—were transformed into a playground of possibility. He adored them, seemingly so much so that the world outside them seemed secondary. Joshua would carefully nudge the cones, sometimes with the gentlest of touches, moving them ever so slightly, as though testing the limits of the space around him. Each small shift was a declaration of his control, a subtle but definite negotiation with the space he occupied. The next moment was a burst of wild energy. The boundary, now clearly marked and unyielding, became a source of exhilarating freedom. Joshua, so rarely engaged with others, found himself joyfully wrestling with peers, running with the same reckless abandon that he had previously reserved for chasing after the cones. A mutual exchange of exhilaration
18. He appeared to be soaking up all of the stimulations that was on offer. He would look at staff occasionally. He picked up paper from the scrap paper – always red pieces and scrunching them up. There was extended number blocks on which he appeared to watch whilst moving, saying numbers 1-10 occasionally. When he moved out of a boundary he was simply picked up and moved back into the boundary.	Joshua's movements through the space felt like a dance with his environment, his energy attuned to the rhythm of the stimuli around him. He seemed to absorb every detail, every sound, every colour, as though drawing the world inward to make sense of it on his own terms. His gaze would occasionally flicker toward the staff, brief moments of connection that hinted at his awareness of the adults who held the framework of his day. These looks were not frequent, but they carried a quiet weight, as if he were checking for permission, reassurance, or simply grounding himself in the presence of others. The red paper held a particular fascination for Joshua. From the scrap pile, he sought it out with precision, selecting only the red pieces and scrunching them tightly in his hands. Each movement was deliberate, purposeful, as though the act of crumpling the paper satisfied a sensory need or a symbolic act known only to him. The colour red may have held some unspoken significance, a sensory comfort, a visual anchor in a world of shifting stimuli. The number blocks on the screen drew his attention, yet they did not hold him captive. He moved as he watched, his body in constant motion, and the numbers spilled from his lips sporadically, 1 to 10, like echoes of the pattern he was taking in. It was not a full engagement but a weaving together of movement, sound, and sight, as if the numbers were part of the rhythm he was creating for himself in the space. When Joshua stepped beyond the boundary, it was not with defiance but with curiosity, as though the boundaries themselves were invisible to him, a concept rather than a barrier. Being

	gently returned to the boundary seemed not to disrupt him- he adapted seamlessly, his energy undeterred, and returned to his exploration. For Joshua, the boundaries of the space were less about restriction and more about structure, a framework in which he could move and explore while soaking in the stimuli that fed his curious, searching mind.
19. Joshua trusts the staff – when they took his hand he willingly went with them, however when they reached the nurture base, he began to cry as I don't think he was expecting to go there?	Joshua's trust in the staff was clear as soon as they gently took his hand. His body language was open and accepting, following them without hesitation. There was an unspoken understanding between him and the staff, a familiarity that allowed him to feel secure in their presence. His pace was calm, a soft assurance in his steps, as they guided him through the hallway toward the nurture base. However, as they approached the door to the nurture base, something shifted. Joshua's steps slowed, and his face reflected a quiet confusion. His gaze flickered toward the entrance, the door that symbolised a space he knew but wasn't expecting. There was a moment's pause, a subtle hesitation, before a quiet wave of distress began to rise within him. He didn't resist physically, but his eyes grew wide, and a soft cry escaped him. It was as though the routine, so familiar up until this point, had been gently disrupted, and the unexpected transition to the nurture base caused a small rupture in the sense of predictability he had come to rely on. Joshua's cry wasn't frantic; rather, it was a simple expression of surprise and uncertainty, a response to the sudden shift in his environment.
20. Joshua is watching the whiteboard, singing hands are playing 'coconut tree', 'he likes this one now' at the beginning of the week he didn't but usually by Friday he likes them. He says 'more' to the ones that he does like.	Joshua stood still in front of the whiteboard, his attention fixed on the brightly coloured images and moving shapes. The familiar song '*coconut Tree,'* began to play, and Joshua's expression shifted, softening into one of quiet recognition. At the beginning of the week, he had been distant, almost indifferent to the song, perhaps not yet attuned to the rhythm or melody. But today, something had changed. His small fingers twitched slightly as he began to sway gently to the music, his eyes following the animation on the screen with increasing interest. He was no longer just observing; he was participating in his own subtle way. The vibrant visuals on the board and the upbeat rhythm of the song seemed to draw him in, offering something

	both familiar and comforting. As the song progressed, Joshua's smile grew wider, and without hesitation, he said, "more," his voice clear and insistent, like a simple request for the things he now enjoyed. It was a shift, a sign of how the week had unfolded for him, how each experience had layered upon the next. The music, which had been just a background noise on Monday, had become something he looked forward to now, something that gave him pleasure, something he could recognize and call his own. As he said "more," it wasn't just a request for another round of the song—it was a declaration of his connection to the moment, to the routine, and to the understanding that these activities, though new, were becoming part of his world in a way that felt right to him. His body shifted gently in rhythm, the smallest of movements, as though the song had reached something deep inside him. He didn't need to be prompted; he already knew what was coming next. The sense of progression throughout the week had allowed him to grow into these new experiences, turning something unfamiliar into a moment of joy and comfort.
21. The marble run is out, the structure is quite simple, it usually stays in the position it is, occasionally being fixed if it breaks. Joshua plays with the marble run intermittently whilst walking fast around the room. in between he is watching the white board. Checking out of the window, looking at the movement sensor. He made something out of the plastic construction materials and occasionally uses it to look through before placing it down. He is stacking the circular construction toy whilst looking out of the window.	Joshua's experience with the marble run seems to unfold as a fluid interplay between purposeful engagement and the allure of the surrounding environment. The marble run, a familiar and steadfast structure, provides him with a stable point of interaction, an activity he returns to like a rhythmic refrain amidst his movements. His walking around the room suggests not aimlessness, but a dynamic scanning of his space, a need to observe, confirm, and connect with the elements that anchor his world. The whiteboard, the window, the movement sensor, all seem to call to him as nodes of interest, drawing his gaze and steps like a silent dialogue. The construction materials he briefly crafts into a viewing tool transform into a portal of sorts, offering him a momentary lens through which to perceive his surroundings before being set aside for his next task. The circular stacking toys, manipulated with precision while his eyes drift outward, mirror his multifaceted attention, a blend of physical interaction and external observation. In this scene, Joshua's engagement appears layered. He is not merely playing with objects or walking about but orchestrating his environment into a coherent whole, integrating sensory, spatial, and tactile inputs into an active, ongoing

	experience. The interplay between his actions and his observations reveals a mind attuned to both the here-and-now and the endless possibilities of what lies just beyond the immediate frame of his attention.
22. J seemed to notice me when I walked into the classroom, he looked at me and was busy walking around, he went to get a cup from the sink but placed it back down again. TA went to fill up the cup but I noticed that it was a blue cup. The TA was new so I mentioned that the previous week, he only drank from a green cup, which miss had said that he only drinks from a green cup. New TA changed cup and Joshua sat down to have a drink. All the other children on the carpet. Number blocks was on the whiteboard, Joshua was walking through the children sat on the carpet, whilst watching the screen. He didn't stand on them. 'Joshua sitting' sat for 3 seconds then moving around glancing at the screen.	Joshua entered the classroom and immediately scanned the space. His eyes briefly caught mine as I walked in, and then he continued with his purposeful movements, walking around the room. His gaze shifted toward the sink, and he reached for a cup, only to pause and place it back down. The moment was a silent negotiation between his needs and the environment around him. Noticing his routine, I observed that the Teaching Assistant (TA) went to fill the cup, and I remarked that Joshua had only ever used a green cup in the past week. This simple, yet essential piece of information was shared with the new TA, who, understanding Joshua's preference, quickly switched the cup to green. With the small change in his routine now honoured, Joshua sat down contentedly to have his drink. Meanwhile, the other children were gathered on the carpet, watching Numberblocks on the whiteboard. Joshua, however, was not fully part of the group. He moved through them, not disturbing anyone, his attention fixed on the screen. His actions suggested a subtle balance - a need to observe while keeping his distance. As he moved past the children, there was no sense of intrusion, his movement was quiet and deliberate. After a brief moment of sitting, only a few seconds, Joshua stood again and continued to move, glancing at the screen intermittently. His experience in the classroom seemed both observant and active, with brief moments of connection, like when the cup was changed, offering reassurance, but also maintaining his own space as he moved through the activity.
23. The new TA observing, supervising Joshua, briefly hugged him whilst walking around, washing his hands x two and throwing the paper towels in the bin. Crawling the the window to look at the quad. Washing	Joshua moved through the classroom with a quiet purpose, his actions deliberate yet fluid, grounded in his routines. The new TA was observing closely, ensuring Joshua's needs were met. As the TA gently hugged him while they walked around, Joshua engaged in a series of repetitive actions, starting with washing his

hands again, rubbing soap on, wiped them on the table. 'paper towel' responded and dried hands on there. Glancing back at the whiteboard, smiled, had a calm expression. Walking around – looking out of the window, picked some scrap paper, seemed calm with the whiteboard on. Standing on the step to look out of the window, looking out of the window, children playing football outside, laughing at the window. Touching face, resting elbows, jumping up, walking through children on the carpet. Got a flashing ball out of the transition bag, threw the ball, and threw again further, 'no' said new TA. Stopped throwing the ball. New TA left, looked at the door as it opened. Picked up new red paper to crush, threw ball briefly, squatting and balancing. Looking at other children washing their hands. Looking at photos on the wall. CHANGE – emergency assembly due to euro's football and channel 4. 'he has to go back into nurture'. Back in nurture, crying, shouting, cross and then exploring. Door open to outside and Joshua ran to watch through the window of the staffroom 'checking lights' he seemed calmer outside.	hands twice, each time taking care to dry them with paper towels before tossing them into the bin. The repetitive nature of this routine seemed to offer him comfort, a sense of control over his environment. After washing his hands, Joshua crawled to the window, curious about the quad outside. His gaze fixed on the children playing football, their laughter reaching him through the glass. He continued his exploration, rubbing soap on his hands and wiping them on the table, repeating the actions as if the ritual itself grounded him in the present moment. As he glanced back at the whiteboard, he smiled, his calm expression reflecting his comfort in the space. Joshua continued walking around the room, his eyes flickering between the children on the carpet and the outside world through the window. He climbed onto a step to look more closely at the children outside, laughing as they played. There was a sense of observation in his actions, a quiet engagement with the world around him without fully entering it. He touched his face and rested his elbows, squatting and balancing, taking in the sensory information of his environment. When he retrieved a flashing ball from the transition bag, Joshua's movements became more purposeful. He threw the ball twice, but when the TA intervened with a firm "no," he stopped and shifted his attention. The change in activity did not seem to disturb him; instead, Joshua observed the children washing their hands and glanced at photos on the wall, continuing his exploration with a calm demeanour. The mood shifted as the emergency assembly announcement was made due to the Euro's football coverage on Channel 4. Joshua's routine was disrupted, and he had to return to the nurture room. His emotional state shifted with the change, and he became distressed, crying and shouting, his frustration visible. Yet, as he returned to the nurture base, the door opened to the outside, and Joshua's behaviour shifted once again. He ran to the window of the staffroom, checking the lights, a familiar ritual that seemed to soothe him. The outdoor space provided him with the calm he needed, allowing him to reset in his own way.
24. Taken back to class – who were all playing on the field. Joshua was lying on the field watching the ball. Walked away, chewing his hair, looking into the	Joshua's movements on the field were slow and deliberate, his actions revealing a quiet curiosity and a need for comfort in his environment. As he lay on the grass, watching the ball roll by, his attention was split between the world around him

classroom, jumping, looked at me, checked my feet, hugged the tree, stretching his feet out and looking at me to see if I was following him like last week. I needed to look away, as last week we ended up in a space that was 'out of bounds' 'can't really do that because you are not here all the time.'	and his internal world, seeking moments of connection and reassurance. He walked away from the group, his fingers grazing his hair as he chewed, a sign of self-soothing. His eyes flickered toward the classroom, then back to his surroundings, always in motion yet deeply observant of the space he occupied. Joshua's gaze then met mine, and he paused, his attention focused on my feet, a subtle form of checking or connection. His actions were part of a careful pattern, looking, observing, and understanding the space in relation to his own sense of safety. Then, with a purposeful stride, he moved toward a tree, hugging it gently before stretching his feet out in a quiet moment of calm. As he looked back at me, I could sense that he was checking to see if I would follow him, as I had done the previous week. There was a quiet expectation in his gaze, a reminder of the comfort and connection he had found the week before in that same space. However, I had to look away, remembering that last week's exploration had taken us into a space that was deemed "out of bounds." Joshua's longing for that familiar connection was palpable, yet I was reminded of the limitations of my role in that moment. I thought, understanding the balance I needed to maintain between supporting his exploration and ensuring his safety.
25. Joshua was shown a bag which indicated that it was time to go to his reception classroom. 'he has an clock and knows when it is time, very routine oriented' He walks runs to the classroom, on the way miss is telling him what is happening , doing some painting' ' he likes to be prepared' 'we found if we told him what he was doing he would be better'. In the class, there was no painting available, it was colouring, Joshua wouldn't sit down or do the colouring, 'this was because he was expecting painting'. Miss knew this was the case, she changed the activity and got some paints out. He did sit down and had a very quick go of mixing the paints with a cotton bud.	Joshua carries an inner clock—not just of minutes and hours, but of expectations, of certainties laid like stepping stones through his day. The bag is not just a signal; it is a contract, a silent agreement that something familiar will follow. The reception classroom. The rhythm. The world as it should unfold. He moves—half walk, half run—his momentum powered by prediction. Miss's voice trails beside him, a gentle narrator confirming what he already senses. "Painting," she says. The word is a spell, activating a visual world already alive in his mind: brushes, pigment, sensation. Joshua doesn't just hear the plan; he sees it. Feels it. Prepares for it. Because preparation is peace. But inside the room, something fractures. No paint. Crayons lie in wait instead—too quiet, too still. The world has tilted. He stands, suspended, the promise unfulfilled. It is not refusal—it is disorientation. The thread of certainty has frayed. Miss watches, and she knows. This isn't stubbornness. This is a betrayal of the narrative. So she rewrites it—quickly, fluidly—summons the paints like a magician producing a rabbit from a hat. Not as an accommodation, but as a reparation.

	Joshua sits. Briefly. Not to create a masterpiece, but to touch the reality he had envisioned. The cotton bud swirls pigment in gentle orbits. It is not the artwork that matters. It is the resettling of his inner compass. A quick mix, a symbolic gesture: Yes. The world is making sense again. Then he can move on.
26. Staff are happier with Joshua? Joshua is calmer and enjoying being part of the class. He appeared a lot more focused on activities, likes the routine, giving more eye contact, showing enjoyment in his face (almost like how he looked with the movement sensor). Singing during the group whiteboard and saying the colours in a song. Counting lots to himself. In the reception classroom I noticed him noticing the other children more, wanting to do things that they did but not initiating, like he doesn't know how to, but knows not to take or grab. What else is he thinking but not expressing. Still very self -sufficient, it doesn't make him unhappy.	Joshua's world within the classroom seems to be shifting, revealing subtle but meaningful changes in his engagement and demeanour. The calmness that envelops him suggests a growing comfort with the structured environment, where routines offer him a framework that feels safe and predictable. His newfound focus on activities and his increased eye contact reflect a tentative yet deliberate opening toward connection, with the tasks at hand, the rhythm of the classroom, and perhaps the people within it. The joy on his face, reminiscent of his fascination with the movement sensor, speaks to moments of alignment between his inner world and the environment around him. Singing during group activities, softly counting to himself, and responding to the cues of a shared song show Joshua's capacity for participation—ways he joins the collective flow of the classroom without fully stepping into its social dynamics. In the reception classroom, the glimmers of his noticing, the quiet watching of his peers and the restrained longing to join their activities, hint at an internal complexity. He seems to observe the unwritten rules of interaction, understanding not to grab or disrupt, but unsure of how to bridge the gap between observation and action. What might be swirling in his thoughts as he watches and waits? Is he crafting an unspoken strategy for connection, or simply content in the role of the quiet observer, learning by osmosis?
27. Joshua bounces into the room looking very happy and bunny hopping around. He looks at Miss leaving the room and makes a low noise. He walked over to where I was and looked at me directly in the eye, I gave a smile. He went over to the table with a peg board on top and started putting pegs in, starting with all of the red colours. He moved to his spot on the carpet and settled sitting on a TA's knee. He sat down for singing hands. 'sit on the red	

spot' Joshua is told. He is watching the whiteboard intently, someone opens the door and he looks to see who it is. He is saying bbbb b, smiling at the song, 'bbb-bbb' . Miss tickled his body to the beat of the music, he giggled, he then closed his eyes in a squint. He laughed again when the TA moved her arms over him. As soon as the song is finished, Joshua gets up and moves to the peg board, it sounds like he is saying some words. On the whiteboard there is now a colour song and Joshua shouts out the colours as they come onto the screen. When an adult moves he gets distracted, he then moves back shouting out the colours. Joshua moved away again and was asked to move back, he made the noise lalalala, wiggle and ddd. Joshua seems to enjoy the physical movement of hand over hand. Joshua gets up to leave the group area, he returns when requested, but lies on the floor rather than sitting on his spot.	
28. Joshua is shown the symbol, 'bucket time'. He moves to the enclosed space and sits at the table. The first item is a 'press on nails' Joshua looks attentively swinging his legs and smiling. Miss says 'ready, steady, …' Joshua says 'go' so that miss presses the nails in again to make a shape. 'patterns finished'. The next object in the box was a squishy snake toy, Joshua sat on his hands and watched the toy, watching Xavier reach out to grab it. Joshua gets pinched by Xavier but he doesn't seem to feel or notice the pinch. As Xavier gets removed from the table, Joshua is given the bucket item, 'blower', he appears delighted and begins trying to blow it, something he appeared to	Joshua's experience of bucket time as a blend of sensory engagement, structured interaction, and moments of quiet perseverance. His focused gaze on the 'press-on nails' toy captures the joy of simplicity, his small body alive with movement as his legs swing and his smile flickers with anticipation. The rhythmic build-up of "ready, steady..." and his triumphant shout of "go" reveals a connection to the ritual of interaction, a space where he can contribute and feel the satisfaction of cause and effect. The repeated pressing of the nails, forming a shape, seems to create a moment of shared success between Joshua and Miss, grounding him in the familiar rhythm of the activity. When the squishy snake toy emerges, Joshua's demeanour shifts slightly; he becomes an observer, sitting on his hands, seemingly regulating his own impulses. The dynamic between him and Xavier introduces complexity, Joshua watches Xavier's reach and remains passive even when pinched. This moment reflects a curious duality in Joshua's world: his

struggle with. 'bucket time finished'	capacity to exist within a shared space while seeming untouched by its potential discomforts. His lack of reaction to the pinch might suggest a deeper focus on the unfolding activity or an innate ability to filter sensations selectively. The transition to the 'blower' marks a moment of pure delight. Joshua's joy radiates as he eagerly tries to master the art of blowing, a task that challenges him but does not deter his enthusiasm. The attempt reveals a willingness to engage and a desire to conquer small challenges within this structured, supported environment.
29. Joshua is playing with the Zorbs, he put them on a shelf and looked at them from different angles. He was asked to put the Zorbs away and he said, 'no, no, no' but then started to put them away. He then walked over to play with the peg board. Joshua was shown the symbol, 'table task' and moved towards the table. It was a rice activity with filling and pouring objects. Miss demonstrated what he could do and he copied, Miss commented with words, 'filling, full, pouring'. He started singing 'twinkle twinkle little star', when miss joined in he stopped singing it. The bottle was full and miss said, 'its full to the top'.	Joshua's interaction with the Zorbs unfolds like a quiet exploration of perspective and control. Placing them on the shelf, he inspects them from different angles, as though seeking to understand how they exist in the space or how their positioning might shift their appearance. This moment reflects his innate curiosity and the delight he finds in observing objects on his own terms. When asked to put the Zorbs away, his initial resistance—marked by his firm "no, no, no", suggests a desire to assert his autonomy in the situation. Yet, his eventual compliance shows an underlying awareness of the expectations placed upon him, a balance between his internal world and the external requests he navigates. Shifting to the peg board, Joshua seems to channel his focus into a new activity, transitioning seamlessly and showing a capacity for adaptability. The structured environment seems to offer him the reassurance to move from one task to another with calm intent. When shown the symbol for 'table task,' Joshua moves willingly, as though the predictability of the visual cue provides a sense of direction. The rice activity becomes a sensory journey for him, each filling and pouring action inviting tactile engagement and quiet concentration. As Miss demonstrates the task and provides commentary, filling, full, pouring", Joshua mirrors her actions, immersing himself in the activity. The shared language offers a connection, grounding him in the here and now. His spontaneous singing of 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' introduces a layer of expression, a brief moment where his internal rhythm surfaces. When Miss joins in, he stops, a delicate negotiation of space, as though he retreats from the shared interaction to preserve his own. The moment when the bottle is full, marked by Miss's words 'it's full to the top,' brings a sense of

	completion to his task, tying together the physical and linguistic cues that guide his engagement.
30. When Xavier was playing with the post box, Joshua joined in looking at the back of the posted objects. There were some ben and holly characters and he started playing with them, moving them around. He also put ben onto garcon (Ladybird) 'must watch this at home' said miss.	
31. After toast which Joshua didn't join in with, singing hands was on the screen. Joshua sat on his spot alone! Joshua said, 'rat' after the singing hands lady said it. Vincent said, well done Joshua.	
32. Joshua is in the new reception class as the other children from last year have now moved into year 1. The teacher said that this new class was already a lot calmer than last year. She feels that Joshua is a lot more settled this year and the routine in nurture is facilitating this. He doesn't seem to mind that the children are different. Joshua was playing with metal hooks on a green ledge. He was looking at them from different angles. On occasion he glanced at the whiteboard which had the school logo on it in standby mode. He moved to play with the peg board, then went outside. Outside he was running up and down along the fence, occasionally looking up at the sky. A child threw a ball onto him, which he let bounce off him. He was holding a yellow ball, a child tried to take it, he made a crying noise but then left it. Continued to run up and down and through the extended outdoor play area. Back inside he looked out of the window. Inside he noticed a child who	In the new reception class, Joshua's day unfolds with a quiet sense of exploration, engagement, and adaptability. The calmer environment and the new group of children seem to provide him with a stable backdrop, allowing him to navigate his activities with ease and curiosity. Joshua's play with the metal hooks on the green ledge reveals his intrinsic fascination with objects, as he inspects them from different angles, his glances toward the whiteboard a subtle tether to the classroom space. The school logo, frozen in standby mode, offers a predictable, comforting visual anchor. Shifting to the peg board and then outside, Joshua transitions fluidly, guided by his own rhythm. Outside, his running along the fence and occasional upward gaze suggests an immersion in sensory freedom, the feel of movement, the vastness of the sky. When a ball bounces off him, his lack of reaction contrasts with his audible cry when a yellow ball is taken from him, a small yet poignant expression of his connection to the object. Still, his ability to let it go and return to running reflects a remarkable resilience. Inside, Joshua's attention flickers between the room's dynamics. His curiosity is piqued by the child with the lolly stick airplane, and moments later, he transforms the sticks in his own hands, mimicking the flight motion. This act is both a gesture of imitation and an exploration of

had made an aeroplane out of lolly sticks and was moving across the classroom making a flying motion. A few minutes later, I noticed Joshua walking around holding the lolly sticks, I made a gesture for him to sit down next to me, and I made them into the same aeroplane shape, he then went off holding the sticks in the air, looking at them from different angles, occasionally looking out of the window. A child that was playing with a large peg tower moved, and Joshua swooped in to take the tower apart and put the pegs away. On the carpet a small group activity was starting with drums and beaters, Joshua walked over and miss gave him a drum, 'do you want to sit down?' and he did, miss did hand over hand to make a beat to the song, which Joshua smiles to, the beat was cat, cat, monkey, cat. He looked around at the others whilst tapping the drum. Nearby another group of children were pretending to be the teacher, with one holding out the flashcards.	perspective, as he holds the sticks at varying angles, balancing internal curiosity with external observation. When he dismantles the large peg tower and puts the pieces away, Joshua demonstrates a moment of purposeful focus, showing his penchant for order amid the bustling classroom. His participation in the group drum activity showcases his growing engagement with structured interactions. The beat—"cat, cat, monkey, cat"—offers a rhythmic framework he smiles at, his tapping synchronised with the song. Glancing around at the other children, Joshua's connection to the group activity emerges subtly but meaningfully, his smile and movements signalling enjoyment and presence.
33. On the playground, all of the children have arrived back from church. He stands in the middle of the playground, he looks at me looking at him. He is smiling, he running fast around the playground. He looks at a boy who is crying. He runs again ,zooming up and down. Standing, looking, runs away, up and down, smiling. Looking at the sky. Standing looking at a group of boys who are arm in arm singing 'we are cool'. Running around, trying to chew corner of his coat. Stopping, then charging, smiling. Whistle is blown, 'just reception line up' Joshua goes to the front of the line into reception. In	The playground hums with activity as the children return from church, their voices weaving together in bursts of chatter and song. Joshua stands at the centre of it all, a small figure in constant motion, the energy of the playground seemingly channelling through him. He pauses, his gaze locking onto mine, a glint of recognition and mischief lighting up his eyes. A smile spreads across his face, and then he is off, running fast and free, his feet barely touching the ground as he zooms around. He halts suddenly, catching sight of a boy who is crying, his expression momentarily curious, but he moves on, as if pulled by the rhythm of his own world. He runs again, his legs pumping, his face turned upward, eyes scanning the sky as though it might hold the answers to unspoken questions. A group of boys nearby link arms, their voices rising in a chant of 'we are cool,' and Joshua stops to observe, his head tilting slightly as if to absorb the cadence of their play.

reception, the usual TA is off. Joshua saw me and stood by the door, I think he thought I was from nurture to take him back to class, he is confused? He goes outside, he looks at me and runs up and down the fence of the reception play area. He looks down the metal tube rail and he puts his eye on to look through and I do the same at the other side, he laughed when he saw my eye. He pushed the wheelbarrow up and down and then back to the rail looking through it, didn't seem that bothered if I looked through as well.	The moment doesn't last long. He's on the move again, chewing the corner of his coat absentmindedly before bursting forward in a sprint, a smile spreading wide across his face. When the whistle blows, calling only the reception children to line up, Joshua doesn't hesitate. He moves purposefully to the front of the line, his response almost instinctive, drawn to the structure the whistle provides. In the reception area, there's a subtle shift. The absence of his usual TA seems to disorient him briefly. He spots me and moves toward the door, lingering as though waiting for me to guide him. Does he think I'm here to take him back to nurture? Confusion flickers across his face, but it is fleeting. He steps outside, his focus shifting once again. The play area becomes his domain. He runs up and down the fence, a blur of movement punctuated by the occasional pause. His attention catches on the metal tube rail, and he peers through it, pressing his eye close to one end. I mimic him from the other side, and the sound of his laughter rings out, a moment of shared connection, brief but bright. The wheelbarrow catches his interest next. He pushes it with determination, its wheels squeaking softly as he navigates up and down the space. Eventually, he returns to the rail, his gaze narrowing as he peers through once more. This time, my presence seems less significant- his focus is entirely on the world framed by the rail's narrow confines.
34. Joshua was waiting at the enclosed area making some shouting noises, he then enters the area, miss says, 'I'll get you a drink' 'Water, water, water'	

Appendix 2. Xavier eidetic analyses

Field notes	Eidetic imagination
35. Xavier arrived in school on the playground with mum, he had walked to school and appeared happy to come in. He knew where he was going. He liked the books and quickly sat, flicking through the 'hairy mclairy series' he didn't like anyone to read the words of the book and if they did, he wondered away.	Xavier arrives on the playground, his hand brushing against his mum's for just a moment before he lets go, standing tall in the morning air. The walk to school still lingers in his legs—a steady rhythm of steps he's come to associate with arriving here. There's a buzz in the air, the noise of children's laughter, the slap of rubber soles on pavement, and he feels at ease. He knows this place. He knows where he's headed. His face brightens as the familiarity washes over him. Xavier's steps quicken as he moves into the familiar classroom, his eyes scanning the room. The book corner calls to him, and he beelines toward the shelf where he knows the *Hairy Maclary* books wait. His hand moves deliberately, skimming past unrelated covers, until he finds one of the books in the series. He pulls it out with a careful reverence, as though reuniting with an old friend. Sitting, he flips through the pages, but this isn't just about one story. For Xavier, *Hairy Maclary* isn't a collection of standalone tales—it's a single, sprawling world, each book another doorway into a universe of scrappy dogs, mischief, and delightful illustrations. The characters—Hairy Maclary, Bottomley Potts, Hercules Morse—are like companions to him, their traits and movements etched into his memory from repeated visits to these pages. The rhythm of the images captivates him; the series has a flow, a visual continuity that speaks to his love of pattern and consistency. The gentle curves of the lines, the colours of the dogs, and the predictable chaos of their adventures soothe him, like a familiar melody replayed over and over. He holds the books up side by side, as though confirming their sameness. A voice intrudes, offering to read the text aloud. Xavier glances up sharply, his focus disrupted. The words in the books, he's decided, aren't what matters. The voice jars the silent narrative he's constructed, a story woven from images rather than lines of text. He sets the book aside, the connection momentarily broken, and stands, his body pulling him away to reset his inner rhythm. Later, as he finds another *Hairy Maclary* book in the series, he opens it with the same attention. He recognizes the recurring characters, the way they move through this world. To anyone else, it's just a picture book, but to Xavier, it's an unfolding map of a world he knows intimately—one he controls, reimagines, and inhabits on his terms.
36. He had a spot on the carpet that he sat at and occasionally he would get up and move from it, especially when a song came on the whiteboard that he wanted a better view of.	Xavier's purple spot on the carpet is a designated space, chosen not by him, but by the teacher. As he lowers himself onto it, there's a sense of quiet compliance. The carpet's texture brushes against his fingers, a small sensory detail he seems to acknowledge before sitting cross-legged. This spot is his assigned starting point in the shared classroom choreography, a place that subtly cues him into the group dynamic.

	Yet Xavier's relationship with the purple spot isn't fixed—it's a tether rather than a boundary. The classroom hums around him, but his attention drifts, always attuned to the subtle changes in sound and light that ripple through the space. A familiar tune begins to play on the whiteboard, the bright screen drawing his gaze. The melody resonates, and his body instinctively responds. He stands, the pull of the song stronger than the pull of the purple spot. Moving toward the whiteboard, his steps are purposeful, almost reverent. Here, closer to the screen, the song feels alive—its colours, shapes, and rhythms filling his senses. His head tilts slightly as he absorbs the interplay of sound and light, a quiet intensity visible in his posture. The purple spot, for now, is forgotten; this is where he needs to be. The song ends, its echoes lingering in the room, and Xavier's focus softens. He turns back toward the carpet, tracing his way through the invisible path he's carved into the space. Back at the purple spot, he sinks down, reconnecting with the place marked for him, as if reestablishing his role in the classroom's rhythm. The teacher glances at him and nods, satisfied that he's returned.
37. When it was time to go to his year 2 classroom, he didn't demonstrate any awareness or anticipation, however after a few verbal prompts he followed the group and went into class. He was told, 'posting' then books. In the classroom, all of the other children were doing a circle time on the carpet. Xavier sat at a table near to them and complied with his posting activity. He demonstrated some frustration and wanted to rush through the task. He knew that he had to say the words related to the pictures, sometimes he could manage this and sometimes he couldn't. I don't think he understood the point of the task, but he did understand the routine aspect. When he had finished he went to the book area, making some happy vocalisations along the way. When he got there he chose an Elmer book, his TA said he chose the same one every time.	In this moment, Xavier's experience unfolds like a quiet narrative, shaped by routine and a pull toward familiar comforts. As the time comes to transition to the Year 2 classroom, the air carries no ripple of anticipation from him. His expression remains neutral, his body still, as though the concept of 'next' holds no immediate significance. It is only after a series of gentle verbal prompts that he rises and moves, his steps following the group in a subdued echo of their collective motion. The Year 2 classroom greets him with its own rhythm: children seated on the carpet, engaging in the shared energy of circle time. But Xavier does not join them. Instead, his place is at a table nearby, separate but present. Here, the task of 'posting' awaits him—a routine he seems to grasp more in its predictability than its purpose. His hands move with efficiency, guided by habit rather than engagement. The task feels like a sequence to be endured rather than explored. Frustration flickers in his movements as he attempts to match the pictures with their corresponding words. Sometimes, the sounds emerge—a tentative connection between image and voice. Other times, they falter, the link breaking before it can fully form. Yet, despite this, he continues, his compliance driven by an unspoken understanding- this is what comes next. When the task is complete, his energy shifts. A lightness returns to his frame, and he makes a series of happy vocalisations, soft and uncontained, as he crosses the room. The book area draws him in like a magnetic field, its familiarity a quiet beacon. His hand reaches instinctively for the Elmer book—a choice made not in haste but in certainty. The TA, observing from nearby, notes his unwavering preference for this story. For Xavier, the Elmer book isn't just a story; it is a constant, a source of comfort in a world that often shifts too quickly. Seated with the book in hand, Xavier's shoulders relax, and his gaze steadies. The task of posting is behind him, the circle time a distant hum. In this moment, his voice is not in words but in the quiet ritual of choosing Elmer—an unspoken articulation of what anchors him.

38. Back in the nurture room, where Xavier spent most of his day, this day, he explored the room. often he would throw and tip boxes onto the floor. He appeared to be looking for someone to notice his actions. He picked the pieces up when requested but only if an adult stayed near him. When an adult moved to answer the door, I saw him move to throw a peg board and pegs onto the floor, however as I moved forward he stopped himself.	In the nurture room, Xavier's movements carry a quiet deliberation, each action an unspoken question testing the boundaries of expectation and consequence. The boxes, scattered across the floor, are not simply objects in his exploration; they are symbols of his understanding of rules and his curiosity about the responses they provoke. His glance before tipping them over becomes a critical moment, a vivid expression of his awareness that what he's about to do breaks a rule. Yet, the act of tipping feels compelling, a way of seeing how the environment—and those within it—will react. When he picks the pieces up under the watchful eye of an adult, it is no longer merely compliance but part of a broader negotiation. He understands the structure of the interaction, the give and take between action and response. The proximity of the adult seems to matter not just for supervision but because their presence reaffirms the rules he is testing. The moment when an adult steps away adds further dimension. As he moves toward the peg board, his readiness to throw it shifts with the return of attention. The hesitation now speaks even louder—a reflection of his ability to weigh his actions against potential consequences. He stops, not from an intrinsic reluctance to act, but because he recognises the rules are still in effect when someone is watching. Further imagination: In the nurture room, Xavier approaches the boxes with an almost magnetic pull, his hands twitching in anticipation of the tipping motion. It isn't just about causing a disruption; it's the act itself that draws him in. As he tilts a box, the sound of the items tumbling out—a cascade of clatters and thuds—creates a symphony of sensory stimulation. The feeling of gravity taking over as the objects spill, the visual chaos of items scattering, and the unpredictable patterns they form on the floor captivate him. The act of tipping offers Xavier a kind of sensory richness—an opportunity to engage with textures, sounds, and movement all at once. It's an irresistible invitation to experience cause and effect in its purest form: *I do this, and the world responds in a fascinating way.* This moment of sensory immersion seems to offer him both excitement and a strange sense of control. Through tipping, he creates a micro-event in his environment, something dynamic and alive. Yet, as he looks around before tipping, there's another layer to his experience. He knows, on some level, that this act is forbidden or frowned upon. The glances he casts aren't just seeking attention—they're measuring risk, testing whether the rules still apply in this moment. It's as though Xavier is walking a tightrope between impulse and self-awareness, balancing the thrill of the act with the knowledge that someone might intervene. When someone does notice, and he pauses, a subtle tension builds. In that moment of hesitation, he feels the pull of both the rule and the act itself. The tipping becomes more than a sensory experience—it's a decision point, a fleeting inner dialogue between what he desires and what he knows is expected

	of him. The moment someone reasserts the boundary, asking him to pick up the pieces, Xavier complies, but perhaps with a lingering sense of curiosity- *What if they hadn't stopped me?*
39. Xavier arrived happily in school. He was a lot more echolaic today, repeating what the TA said, ie 'purple circle' in reference to where he should be sitting. He appeared to enjoy the routine of circle time, often when the other children responded to something with joy, he looked around at them smiling. When he became what I perceive to be 'bored' he reached for the books that were next to him on the floor. He was told to put the book down, which he responded to and then engaged in a game of touching the book and looking at the TA.	Xavier arrives at school, his steps light and his energy bubbling just beneath the surface. The familiar rhythm of the morning greets him like a well-loved song, and he echoes the words spoken to him—'*purple circle'*—repeating them with an almost musical quality. It's not just mimicry- it feels like Xavier is grounding himself in the predictability of routine, weaving the phrase into his understanding of where he belongs. Settling onto the purple circle, Xavier takes in the atmosphere of circle time. The collective joy of the other children ripples through the room like sunlight, and Xavier catches these rays, his smile blooming as he looks around. Their reactions fascinate him—not the content of their responses, but the energy, the shared delight that seems to hum in the air. For Xavier, this shared moment is a window into connection, even if he isn't fully participating in the same way. As the novelty of the activity wanes, Xavier's attention shifts. His gaze falls to the books on the floor, their presence a quiet invitation. His fingers reach out, drawn to the familiar texture and promise of discovery within the pages. The act of reaching feels like an anchor—a way to engage his hands and mind in something tactile and absorbing. When the TA tells him to put the book down, Xavier complies, but not without a spark of playful curiosity. He begins a subtle game, brushing the book with his fingers and glancing at the TA as if testing the boundary. *What happens if I do this? Will you notice? What will you say?* His gaze flickers with a hint of mischief, a dance of challenge and connection. The book becomes more than an object; it's now a medium of interaction, a silent conversation between him and the adult.
40. Next it was time to transition to his year one class, he responded to the buzz of the timer and went to the door more readily that usually- on the way to class however he began trying to hit the TA on the arm, and jump up to the face. He was still smiling when this happened. It was difficult to understand if the transition was correlated with this sudden change of behaviour- the TA reported that often these incidents did happen during transition times but not solely. 41. In class he sat in his usual chair and complied with the activity. Part of the activity was speaking the words on cards that he posted. Sometimes he would say the word and sometimes he wouldn't or couldn't. He appeared to not really be enjoying the activity or rushing it. When finished he went to the book corner which was part of his routine. He initially chose the 'large family books' like the previous weeks and flicked through them at a fast pace.	The buzz of the timer signals the end of one phase and the beginning of another, and Xavier responds with surprising promptness today. He moves toward the door with a slight eagerness, his steps steady but not rushed, as though the rhythm of the transition has become more familiar. Yet, as they move down the corridor toward his Year 1 classroom, something shifts—Xavier's hands start to twitch with energy, reaching for the TA's arm, attempting to hit it lightly, then jumping up toward her face, his smile unwavering. There's no immediate tension in his expression, no frustration, just a playful unpredictability. His actions are quick, almost reflexive, like little bursts of sensory energy seeking release. It's unclear whether this behaviour is linked to the transition itself. The TA reports that transitions are sometimes a trigger, but not always. Xavier's playful gestures feel more like an internal impulse than a reaction to change. It's as if his body is expressing something beyond words—a need to process the shift, perhaps, or a way of engaging with the situation while maintaining a connection to the familiar adult beside him. His smile suggests that whatever he is doing is driven more by a desire for connection than disruption. Upon entering the classroom, Xavier settles into his usual chair, a place that feels secure. The routine of the class seems to ground him, and he complies with the task at hand—posting cards and saying the words. But there's a distinct lack of enthusiasm in his participation. When he speaks the words, it's often a mechanical action, and when he doesn't, it's as if he's trying to hurry through the task, his focus darting

He then picked up the ‘room on a broom’ and with this book he spent much longer on each page.	away quickly. His body language seems to suggest a disconnect, as though the activity doesn’t hold his interest, or perhaps he’s simply rushing to reach the part of the day that brings him more comfort—the book corner. The moment Xavier steps into the book area, there’s a noticeable shift in his engagement. The fast pace of his flipping through the "large family books" speaks to his need for movement, for the fleeting, sensory pleasure of the images without lingering too long. But then, as if by instinct or a deeper connection to the material, Xavier picks up *Room on the Broom*. This time, his approach is slower, more deliberate. Each page captures his attention a bit longer, his fingers tracing the illustrations, his eyes lingering on the pictures. The book transforms into a space where Xavier can settle—where he can experience a quiet, predictable world that allows him to control the pace. Here, Xavier’s behaviour speaks volumes: the transition, though marked by a brief eruption of energy, gives way to a moment of stillness, where he immerses himself in the routine of the books. His movements, from the unprompted bursts of energy during the transition to the focused engagement with the book, seem to echo his internal rhythms—always moving, but also seeking those pockets of time and space that allow him to slow down and process the world around him at his own pace.
42. In the nurture room he liked taking all of the books relating to the same series and stacking them up before going through each one individually. Another child was tidying the books and they had to negotiate the space around each other silently.	In the nurture room, the atmosphere is calm and methodical, with Xavier moving with a quiet sense of purpose. He picks out all the books from the same series, each one familiar, and begins to stack them in front of him with meticulous care. As the pile grows, he seems immersed in the ritual of the task, a gentle consistency to his movements. His small hands turn each book with an almost reverent slowness, examining the pages carefully, taking in the pictures and the familiar words. There’s no urgency to his actions—just the steady, focused rhythm of someone who knows exactly what they want and how they want it. The act of stacking the books and flicking through them individually gives him a sense of control and organization, an order to the space around him that feels comforting and secure. Nearby, another child starts to tidy the books. They both navigate the space around each other, not speaking, but understanding each other’s movements in a silent dance. Xavier, unbothered, continues with his task, making room when needed, yet still carefully tending to the books as if they were his own small, quiet world. The room is filled with the soft rustling of pages and the stillness of their shared space, a gentle interaction of two children whose attention is not pulled by the usual noise, but focused on the task at hand, their silent negotiation of space a calm agreement without words.
43. As it was a warm day, a forest area outside of the classroom was opened. Xavier seemed very happy at this and said, ‘want to go on the swing’ meaning he wanted to go on the swing. He said this also when I didn’t push him on the swing, to indicate he wanted my presence to push him on the swing. He also asked a child to help him and both delighted in their roles, the child pushing him,	The warm sun filters through the trees, dappled light dancing on the forest floor. The air hums with the energy of children exploring the newly opened forest area. Xavier’s face lights up as he sees the swing, his excitement clear in his beaming smile. ‘Want to go on the swing,’ he says, his voice carrying his intent without the need for gestures. He moves toward the swing with purpose, climbing onto the seat with practiced familiarity. Seated and ready, Xavier waits, his body language expressing anticipation. When I pause and don’t push right away, he repeats, ‘Want to go on the swing,’ his words steady and unembellished, ensuring I

perhaps more roughly than I had, there were excited squeals!	understand that my presence and action are what he seeks. With each push, his laughter begins softly and then builds, an authentic expression of his delight. After some time, Xavier looks toward another child nearby, saying softly, 'Want to go on the swing, this time inviting their involvement. The child steps closer, curious but hesitant, before tentatively placing their hands on the ropes. With a slight pull, the swing moves, less evenly than before. The motion is jarring yet thrilling, and Xavier's laughter transforms into high-pitched squeals of excitement. The child laughs too, gaining confidence, their pushes becoming more vigorous. Together, their actions create an unspoken rhythm—a shared joy in the moment. Xavier leans into the movement, his whole being immersed in the swinging sensation. His laughter blends with the sounds of the forest, a testament to the connection formed through shared play, even without pointing or elaborate gestures. In this space, Xavier's words and reactions articulate his needs and enjoyment, his actions speaking in their own language. The joy of swinging, the exhilaration of the motion, and the bond forged in this moment with another child, all unfold naturally in the quiet magic of the forest.
44. Counting game – Xavier liked sorting the cakes, didn't understand the intended purpose but made up his own game from how he perceived the task.	n the quiet of the nurture base, Xavier thrived in the solitude of the moment. The counting activity on the interactive whiteboard, designed to match numbers with cakes, became a canvas for his personal exploration rather than a mathematical exercise. As the colourful cakes appeared on the screen, Xavier's attention honed in—not on the numbers, but on the cakes themselves, their shapes, and their decorative details. His fingers danced across the screen, gently dragging the cakes, but instead of grouping them according to the given numbers, he began sorting them by their designs—round cakes in one row, those with sprinkles in another. There was a deliberate precision in his movements, a quiet focus as he created order that made sense to him. The intended learning intention—to associate quantities with numerals—slipped away as Xavier found his own rhythm within the task. His enjoyment was palpable, expressed in the careful way he moved each cake into place. His immersion spoke to a deeper engagement with the sensory aspects of the task: the visual delight of patterns, the tactile satisfaction of interacting with the screen, and the personal fulfilment of arranging the cakes "just right." For Xavier, the task was not about external expectations but about creating a world where the elements fit together in a way that felt meaningful to him. His silent joy and concentrated demeanour reflected a moment of independent exploration—a rare opportunity to engage with the activity on his terms, unhindered by prompts or redirection. Even in missing the learning intention, Xavier demonstrated his capacity for focus, pattern recognition, and self-directed engagement. His unique way of interacting with the task served as a reminder of the importance of observing and valuing how he learns and expresses himself, even when it diverges from the expected path.
45. <u>My reflections</u>	

Child experience is interpreted through social constructionist thinking, Xavier can no longer 'play' with two children because he has hit them and laughed when they became upset—it is assumed that 'he knows what he is doing' meaning he is aware of the emotional impact of his actions, there is no leniency of acknowledgment of his disability. He turned over the mud kitchen that a child was playing with, he had to go into 'time out' for that, because he can't be seen to be getting away with it. All week he has been targeting Mrs M. and has had to have a time out every time. He knows what he is doing. When I curiously asked, 'was it possible he liked the cause and effect' of the reactions, it was equally pondered that he did. However they cannot be seen to be tolerating that behaviour. Other parents have told their children to not be near him, in case he hits them again. One of them was one of the only children he demonstrated consistent initiation of interaction with. I wondered about the possibility he hit more the people he liked, in attempts to interact with them. 'it is so nice they have this space outside' – is what I said to mum 'it is so nice that they have adapted things for him' 'when another child told him to be quiet, he did' what I said during the meeting with mum.. GESTALT LANGUAGE PROCESSING 'THAT IS EXCITING'..	
46. X sat at the group toast table waiting for his toast, 'now will have butter on his toast, because one day we sang a song about spreading butter, X let them do it and now he will eat butter'.	At the group toast table, Xavier sat patiently, his small hands resting lightly on the edge of the table as he waited for his turn. The lively hum of chatter and movement around him didn't seem to distract him; his eyes followed the toast as it was prepared. The once-unfamiliar notion of butter on his toast now seemed routine, though it hadn't always been this way. A few weeks ago, the breakthrough had come in the form of a simple song. The cheerful melody about "spreading butter" had filled the room, its rhythmic lyrics accompanied by exaggerated, sweeping motions. Xavier, initially hesitant, had watched intently as the butter was spread onto the toast.

	Something about the song—the predictability, the repetition, the joyful tone—seemed to unlock his curiosity and lower his resistance. That day, for the first time, he had allowed the butter to be added. Now, it was an accepted part of his routine. When his toast arrived, the golden surface glistening with a light layer of butter, he didn't hesitate. He picked it up, examining it briefly before taking a bite. His face softened, a quiet acknowledgment of the familiar taste and texture. The song had been a bridge, transforming what was once a source of hesitation into something comfortable. It was a small but profound moment, showing how rhythm, repetition, and positive associations could pave the way for change in Xavier's world. Sitting at the table now, his engagement with the group and the toast-making process spoke volumes about his capacity for adaptation when the right support was in place.
47. Greeted by staff – 'a difficult week' X has been hitting and biting all week laughing'. Now X cannot be in close proximity with two children as their parents have requested that. Little girl when told she cannot be near X was quite clear that it hasn't come from her or her parents and that SHE is allowed. Miss asked her not to just in case. X's mum trying to explain behaviour through, 'things going on at home'. Miss said that I could look at the behaviour log, other miss concerned I might talk to mum about it, I reassured her I wouldn't. 48.	
49. In the classroom 50. X was completing a caterpillar jigsaw at a table, the rest of the class was on golden time, it was quite noisy and busy. X was making the jigsaw, humming to himself, looking out of the window. He appeared blank faced but would open his mouth in what appeared to be a 'stim' I wondered if he was thinking about going home, and looking out of the window or if it was too noisy. He finished his jigsaw and took another basket which had prepared items in that X likes. He chose the stacking frogs, again the same facial expression present. Miss wondered if it was him trying to process all of the noise, wasn't hurting himself or anyone though. Back to nurture and he was alone in the room, miss was getting on with tidying. He had an idea of wanting to post a toy behind a mirror but he was prevented from doing so, he became unhappy and made whimpering	In the classroom, Xavier was seated at a table, quietly completing a caterpillar jigsaw. The room around him was filled with noise and activity, as the rest of the class engaged in their golden time. Despite the bustling environment, X seemed absorbed in his task, humming to himself intermittently as he worked, occasionally glancing out of the window. His expression remained blank, yet there was an almost rhythmic motion to his actions, and at times, he opened his mouth, which seemed to be a form of self-soothing or stimming. I wondered if the act of looking out the window was his way of retreating into his thoughts, perhaps longing for the quiet of home, or if it was simply a response to the overwhelming noise in the room. His face remained still, but the slight movement of his mouth suggested he was processing something internally, though it wasn't clear what that might be. When X finished his jigsaw, he took another basket from the table, one filled with items that he particularly liked. He selected the stacking frogs, and again, his facial expression didn't change. It was the same blank yet focused look, perhaps a reflection of his attempt to engage with the environment despite the sensory input around him. Miss, observing him, wondered if the noise in the room was simply too much for him to handle, and whether his silence and stillness were his way of managing the overwhelming

noises. Miss showed him where he could post- they had made him a large easily accessible post box but he wasn't happy with that.	atmosphere. She noted that he wasn't harming himself or others, but his detachment seemed to signal that he was struggling with the sensory overload. Later, in the quieter environment of the nurture room, X was left alone while Miss continued tidying up. In this space, he seemed more in control, and a sense of calm returned as he explored the area. He had an idea to post a toy behind a mirror, a small ritual of sorts, but when he was stopped from doing so, his frustration became apparent. He made soft, whimpering noises, a clear sign of displeasure. Miss, seeing his distress, gently redirected him, showing him where he could post instead. They had made a large, easily accessible post box for him, but X wasn't happy with this solution. He seemed to want the freedom to follow his own idea, and the change in plan didn't sit well with him. There was a quiet tension in the room as X continued to express his dissatisfaction, the whimpers punctuating the stillness. Though Miss had provided an alternative, it was clear that the need for control over his environment and actions was important to X. He wanted things to unfold according to his own way, and the imposed limits felt like a disruption to his internal rhythm.
51. Xavier was shown his work bag and he went to stand by the door, very quickly. On walking through the hall, he began to pinch misses arms. 'he often does this' his facial expression seemed happy, he was smiling. In the classroom, he sat at his table and began the posting exercise, he wanted to post them fast, but miss held his hand back to prompt him to say the word. Sometimes he would and sometimes he wouldn't/couldn't. 52. The teacher in the class said to Xavier, 'hello sweetpea' as he moved to the book area.	Xavier's reaction to seeing his work bag was swift and purposeful. He moved to the door almost immediately, his face a picture of calm determination. There was no hesitation—he was used to the routine and knew exactly what to do. As he walked through the hall, however, his mood shifted slightly. Without warning, his hand reached up and pinched Miss's arm. His expression remained oddly content, a smile on his face, but there was something about the transition that unsettled him. The action didn't seem driven by frustration or aggression but rather by a need for sensory input or perhaps a way to regulate his emotions in response to the changing environment. Once in the classroom, Xavier quickly settled into his seat at the table, though his focus was on the task at hand, not the people around him. He was presented with a posting activity, but his approach to the task was swift and mechanical. He didn't linger on the words or the instructions—his hands moved rapidly, placing each card into its slot as though completing a race. When Miss gently held his hand to prompt him to say the word before posting, Xavier would sometimes comply, but it wasn't out of engagement with the learning. The task wasn't about the words—it was about finishing, about achieving something in a world that felt fast-paced. However, when he moved to the book area, there was a notable shift. His movements slowed, and his expression softened. Xavier approached the books with a sense of purpose, and although he started with his usual sorting routine—arranging them by type or size—there was a sense of satisfaction that radiated from him. His face remained relaxed, and as he handled the books, flipping through them, stacking them, and aligning them just so, it was clear that this was where Xavier found comfort and joy. The books weren't simply objects in the room; they were part of the structure he relied on. Each book, each category, each small action was a source of reassurance. It was as if this was where he felt in control, able to create his own order in a world that often felt too noisy and unpredictable. He was deeply focused on the sorting, not simply moving through the task but engaging with it. There was an ease to his actions as he worked through the books, organizing them into groups, perhaps based

	on memory or personal preference. This was a familiar and safe activity, one he could engage with fully, without the confusion that sometimes came with the rest of the day's transitions. Though Xavier didn't seem to respond to the teacher's casual greeting, "hello sweetpea," his body language and focus on the books indicated that he was much more engaged in his own world. The noise and busyness of the classroom, the transitions, and the people around him weren't as important to him as the quiet, methodical rhythm of his sorting. This was where Xavier found joy—through the repetition, the structure, and the comforting familiarity of the books. Once finished with the books, Xavier didn't rush away, as he did with some tasks. He lingered for a moment, perhaps taking in the satisfaction of the task completed. He seemed content, as if the environment around him had settled into a state of calm. Xavier's behaviour wasn't about avoiding or rejecting the rest of the classroom experience—it was about seeking comfort and structure in ways that made sense to him. The books and sorting activities brought him a sense of calm, a feeling of accomplishment and joy that was grounded in routine, predictability, and his ability to control the task at hand. The noise and unpredictability of the day's other activities didn't seem to overwhelm him as much during these moments of focus.
53. A damp autumnal day. The TA puts the music on and waits for the children's arrival. There is a new area in the classroom designed for 1:1 work and 'intensive interaction' A child walks into the nurture class and is greeted with, 'it's fish and chips day' . X walks into the room, looks at me and smiles. The TA says, 'purple spot' and X wanders over the whiteboard area to sit down on the 'purple spot'. The children are discussing what is for lunch. There are 4 colours on the board and the children sing a song and choose a colour. Xavier is calm watching the other children. He is tapping his legs to the tune. Another child tells another child to stop making a noise. X begins rocking on his knees. X looks in the direction of J bouncing. The song finishes and the TA says, 'do you want colour pop dance?' X says dance. 'everyone stand up' X had a second prompt. X is moving from side to side, he has his hands in his pockets. The other children are doing the actions to the song, X rocks from side to side. He moves to the middle of the group clapping. An adult rocks with him side to side and he appears to enjoy this, smiling and laughing. 'take your hands out of your pocket' he doesn't. X continues to move from side to side with his hands In his pocket. He then puts his hand over his mouth and	The classroom is filled with the soft glow of the autumn day, the damp air outside adding a quiet freshness to the space. The gentle hum of the music fills the room, setting the tone for the morning. The TA, standing by the whiteboard, waits patiently for the children's arrival. There's a new area in the room, designed for 1:1 work and 'intensive interaction,' the space calm and purposeful, waiting to be used when needed. Xavier enters the room, his face lighting up as he spots me. There's a flicker of recognition, and then, a broad smile spreads across his face as if the familiar space and routine bring him comfort. The TA greets him with a light remark, 'It's fish and chips day,' and there's a sense of ease in the air, like the day is gently unfolding around him. "Purple spot," the TA says, and Xavier, without hesitation, begins to move toward the designated area, the familiar rhythm of the classroom routine guiding his actions. His pace is steady, without urgency, as he steps to the whiteboard area and sits on the purple spot. His movements are calm, purposeful, yet there is an element of curiosity as he observes the other children. Xavier watches, his focus steady as he taps his legs in time with the music. It's as if the rhythm of the song and the familiar chatter ground him. There's a slight shifting of his gaze when another child tells someone to stop making a noise, but Xavier doesn't react outwardly. Instead, he begins to rock gently on his knees, his gaze lingering on J as J bounces around. As the song comes to an end, the TA prompts, 'Do you want colour pop dance? and Xavier responds, a quiet 'dance' escaping his lips. The TA gives a second prompt, 'Everyone stand up,' and the group moves together, the energy shifting as the song leads into action. Xavier, however, remains at his own pace. He stands up but doesn't engage with the movements in the same way as the others. His hands settle in his pockets, his body moving from side to side in a rhythmic motion, the action simple and repetitive. There's a sense of calmness in his movement, as if he is

mumbles a phrase? It is difficult to hear. He puts his hands back in his pocket and moves again side to side. At the end of the song, he is clapping, then sits back down.	processing the environment in his own way. He observes the others, perhaps aware of their actions but not compelled to mirror them exactly. Instead, he rocks back and forth, his focus internal, his movements a comfort. As the adults around him engage in the dance, one adult moves in sync with Xavier's rocking motion. The small interaction seems to delight him, a shared rhythm that connects them. A smile spreads across his face as he laughs softly, the pleasure of the moment evident in his expression. The TA prompts him again, "Take your hands out of your pockets," but Xavier doesn't respond in the way expected. His hands remain in his pockets, as though holding onto a small piece of security in the midst of the group activity. For a brief moment, Xavier puts his hand over his mouth, mumbling a phrase—perhaps an expression of thought, a fragment of something only he fully understands. The words are unclear, but the moment feels intimate, as if Xavier is processing the interaction in his own way. After this, he pulls his hands back into his pockets, continuing to sway from side to side. At the end of the song, Xavier's movements shift to clapping, the rhythmic sound joining the energy of the group, and he sits back down, calm again. His body settles back into the familiar rhythm of routine, the energy of the moment lingering briefly before he returns to his quiet observation of the world around him.
54. Xavier was out of the class, when he came back in, 'he has hit and bit himself out there, not happy'. He came back in and went to where J was playing in the large tough tray. Next to the tough tray was a cabinet of boxes, labelled with various toys in. this was part of the new design, last year the children had more free access to toys. X tried to put the box back into its space. It was assumed that he wanted to get something else out. He was told 'no' so he ran to hit miss, he was removed from the room again for 'timeout' with a timer. Miss said 'it doesn't really work, because he likes to go to the quiet room'. when he came back, he kept trying to put the zorbs away. He appeared to find being made to keep them out stressful, 'he's got to learn that J is playing with them' eventually he moves towards the peg board and puts the pegs in.	The classroom is buzzing with activity, but Xavier's entrance signals something different today. He has been out of the room and returns with a certain weight—his mood is heavy. The TA has already filled the team in= *"He has hit and bitten himself out there, not happy."* As Xavier steps into the classroom, his eyes scan the space, his body tense but still. The other children are busy with various activities, and Xavier walks straight towards the large tough tray where J is playing, seemingly seeking some quiet connection but also drawn to something else—something new in the room. To the side, there's a cabinet with boxes labelled for different toys—an addition to the classroom design that has made access more structured. In the past, the children could freely explore and pick any toy they liked, but now, only one box at a time can be opened. At this moment, the zorbs are the selected toys. Xavier approaches the cabinet and picks up a box, trying to slide it into place on the shelf. He's methodical, as though he knows that things need to be in their right place. But this is not the toy he wants, and as he's told 'no' by the adult, his body shifts into a familiar frustration. A loud, impulsive movement follows as he rushes toward Miss, and, in a burst of energy, hits her. His facial expression is blank, not angry, not upset—it's as if he's acting on an urge he can't control. The adults respond swiftly, escorting Xavier out of the room for a timeout. But as Miss reflects, *"It doesn't really work, because he likes to go to the quiet room,"* The quiet room gives him space, a chance to be alone without expectations. After a brief period, Xavier returns to the classroom, but there's a noticeable shift in his movements. His eyes again dart to the zorbs. He's focused on them, trying to place them back into the box. He's not trying to take them away from J—he's simply acting on what feels like an internal order, seeking to put the zorbs back where he thinks they belong. He's fixated on the task, moving quickly but purposefully.

	However, the structure is clear: only one box can be open at a time, and right now, the zorbs are the focus. The adults are firm, reinforcing that J is playing with them, and that's the rule for the moment. Xavier's attempts to 'close' the box or manipulate the toys feel stressful to him. The rules around the toys aren't his, and he doesn't understand why he can't return the zorbs to their place, or why he is being stopped from accessing other toys. The tension builds as he struggles to understand why he's being told no—his reaction is less about the toys themselves and more about the dissonance between his need for control and the imposed limits. Eventually, the frustration subsides enough for Xavier to redirect his focus. He moves away from the zorbs and shifts towards the pegboard, a place where the rules are more predictable, where the task at hand is clearer. The pegs click into place, one by one, each motion a small triumph in his need for order. The repetitive task, the tactile satisfaction of the pegs fitting into their holes, seems to calm him. Xavier's face softens as he continues the activity, his body no longer tight with frustration. In this scene, Xavier's behaviour stems not from a lack of understanding but from a mismatch between his internal world and the external structure of the classroom. The restrictions around the toys—only one box open at a time—trigger his need for control, and his outbursts are a reaction to this limitation.
55. Other children leave the room to go to classes, the room goes quiet. X walks over to miss and hugs her. Told 'tidy up time' he started putting the pegs onto the floor. 'table task', he put his hand to his head, he started asking for specific things, he was told 'work first' sitting down, biting his hand, screaming, lying on the floor. He said, 'rice' told 'rice later' (writing this up- I have just noticed that J's table task was rice, I am now wondering that X was expecting the rice as his task- (pouring and filling activity)) He was kicking his legs. He got up sat at the table – he matched the photo and repeated the name of the child after miss. He noticed the frogs and said 'frogs', miss ignored and he began spitting, ignored. I asked was this a new task, and was told no it was an old task but new behaviour. Task finished and X told 'frogs or cash register' he chose the cash register. He put the coins in and out, looked at miss lots and said lots of echolalic speech, very fast it was difficult to understand exactly what he was saying due to the volume and speed. He looked at the frogs and said 'frogs' 'frogs later' magnets? He was presented with a choose board but he didn't choose anything else. Next to the cash register, there was a PODD board all about the cash register, 'his speech and language therapist made it' I asked does he use it, mostly no but on occasion he does.	

56. Later on when J was having his table top activity, X was wandering around the room he looked at me and I thought he was looking because he was going to throw the pegs onto the floor. He picked up a handful and dropped them onto the floor. I moved the whole lot, partly because I was trying to be helpful to miss. Initially I though he looked at me because he wanted to initiate interaction, however miss believes he looks to check if anyone is watching, or of they will stop him. He proceeded to post the pegs behind the easel, they were still in sight, however they were posted behind. He appeared happy one he posted all of the pegs. Miss got the large post box out and a box of toy figures. It was just X and J in the room. They both participated in the posting and looking at the back of the post box. X seemed happy with the activity, he was happy at the posting, he appeared happy, laughing and banging his knee. X wanted to post a different box of toys, told 'no' – he began to hit J. taken out of the room for timeout. When he came back in he picked up a toy banana to post, told no and he put it back. He heard 'toast' and sat down for toast. When others sitting and speaking and began spitting into his hand, 'ready for toast' 'toast'. During toast time, V said, 'I am not having a good day' singing hands came on the white board, X when watching repeated the word 'deer', V said, 'good job Xavier.'	The room is quieter now, with just Xavier and J remaining. The sounds of the others have faded into the distance, and the atmosphere feels different—still, but full of underlying currents. Xavier's movements are slower now, his usual bursts of energy muted as he drifts around the room. His gaze falls on me, and for a brief moment, I think he's seeking connection, perhaps an opportunity to engage. But there's a stillness in his eyes, a calculation behind the glance. He doesn't want interaction in the way I expect. Without warning, he picks up a handful of pegs from the table. I see the familiar look in his eyes—the silent question of whether anyone will intervene. His hand moves in a quick, decisive motion, letting the pegs fall to the floor with a light clatter. It's not an accident. It's intentional, but it's subtle. My instinct is to help, to clean it up quickly, and so I move the pegs away. The motion is partly to assist Miss, but also, I admit, to avoid the slight tension of the moment. Xavier looks at me again, but this time, it's not for interaction. I misread it. Miss has explained before that his gaze often isn't about engaging with others but more of a check—does anyone notice? Will anyone stop him? It's like a game for him, one where the rules are his own, and the stakes are low but meaningful. He moves on, picking up the pegs again, but now with a different purpose. He walks over to the easel, looks behind it, and begins posting the pegs behind the frame. The action seems almost secretive, his eyes scanning the room as he pushes each peg out of sight, one after the other. But there's something calming about it for him, something almost ritualistic. Once the pegs are gone, hidden from view, Xavier seems satisfied. There's a soft smile tugging at his lips, a tiny laugh that escapes his mouth. His knee bangs lightly on the floor as he sits back, a physical reminder that this small act, simple as it is, has given him a moment of peace. Miss notices and sets out the large post box with toy figures, trying to redirect his attention. Xavier moves closer, intrigued by the new opportunity. He participates in the task, posting the toy figures through the box, his hands quick and decisive. With each figure dropped into the slot, there's a quiet joy on his face, a release. The rhythm of the task seems to soothe him, the action simple and controlled. There's no pressure, just the steady motion of placing the toys in their proper place. Laughter bubbles up from Xavier, a sound of pure enjoyment. His knee bounces lightly again as he continues with the task, clapping his hands briefly. It's like the room fades away around him, leaving just the post box, the toys, and the small moments of pleasure that come from repetition. But then, the moment shifts. The next toy is a box of figures, and Xavier reaches for it, expecting to repeat the action. But Miss says, "No," and the change in tone is enough to snap him back from his world of focus. His face shifts. His hands clench. It's too much for him, and the frustration rises like a wave. Before anyone can react, he hits J. The action is quick and sharp, born from that unmet desire to continue with the activity on his own terms. Miss intervenes immediately, guiding him out of the room for a timeout. The timer clicks into place, and Xavier's frustration seems to soften a little, but there's still a sense of dissatisfaction in the air. When he returns, his eyes are still a little wide, uncertain. He moves to the toy box and picks up a toy banana, holding it in his hand with a firm grip. He starts to reach for the post box again, but Miss says, "No." This time, Xavier pauses, looking at the toy banana in his hand. There's a brief moment of

	hesitation, and then he places it back down. He doesn't fight it. There's no explosion this time. Instead, he listens and complies, but his body is tight, like a coil wound too tightly. The words *"toast"* filter through the room, and the change in focus seems to offer Xavier a soft reprieve. His eyes brighten at the mention of toast. Without hesitation, he moves to the table where the others are sitting. The noise and bustle of their conversation don't seem to affect him as much now. He's focused on the simple act of sitting, of waiting for his toast, and when it arrives, he grabs it with a determined focus. But even in this small moment of calm, there's a flicker of something else. Xavier spits into his hand, a reflexive motion, something he does to ease the unease. His body shifts slightly in his chair, a reminder that, even in the stillness of the moment, the waves inside him are always moving.
57. There were just 3 children and 1 TA. Spontaneously J and X were playing with the dominoes. Each had their own colour, green and orange. X took some of J's green colours which he responded with a shout. X gave him the colours back. Miss later reported how she was surprised as earlier before my arrival, X had been hitting J. J went off to play with a helicopter, imitating it moving around. S came into the class, she had been brought back from the whole school mass at church, because she was struggling. Miss stopped her interactions with J to discuss the incident, and provide reassurance. I reflected on how X & J are brought in and out of the class dependent on sometimes incidents, but they often don't need directing or interacting with, maybe they don't hold onto the negative experiences in quite the same way? The nurture space is a space of safety, containment and calm? Even though there are demands throughout the day.	The room feels quieter than usual, a softness in the air as just three children remain with the TA. The ebb and flow of the class has settled, leaving space for something spontaneous to unfold. Xavier and J are at the table, sitting side by side, each with a small set of dominoes in front of them—green for J, orange for X. There's a slight rhythm to their play, a sort of silent conversation between them as they start lining up the dominoes. Xavier reaches for a few of J's green ones, and J's response is quick—an abrupt shout, sharp in the otherwise still room. X looks at him, momentarily puzzled, then hands the pieces back to J, his movements slow and deliberate. The tension evaporates just as quickly as it arrived. There's something unspoken in the exchange, a quiet understanding. Xavier's actions were not meant to upset, but perhaps to test or to see how J would respond. J, in turn, accepts the return of the dominoes, and the moment of potential conflict fades into the background of their play. Miss, who had been observing from the side, later shares how surprised she was. Just before I arrived, Xavier had been hitting J, a much sharper interaction that now feels distant. It's strange, really—how quickly things can shift. I wonder if Xavier and J have a different way of holding onto moments like these. Perhaps, unlike others, they don't carry the weight of past events so heavily. Their interactions seem to reset with every new moment, a clean slate that allows them to navigate the space of the room without the baggage of past encounters lingering. J eventually moves on, his interest shifting to a toy helicopter. He begins imitating its movements, sending it zooming across the table with wide, exaggerated gestures. The shift is seamless, as though the conflict over the dominoes never happened. It's a curious thing—how quickly they let go of moments of tension and move into new worlds of play. Just as the dynamic between Xavier and J settles into its rhythm, the door opens and S enters the room. She has been brought back from the whole school mass at church, clearly struggling, her face drawn with the weight of whatever had unfolded there. Miss shifts her focus, moving away from her interaction with J to speak with S, offering reassurance and a safe space for her to regroup. As the conversation continues, I reflect on the ebb and flow of the room—the ways in which the children are brought in and out of the space, depending on what's happening around them. It's something I've noticed before, this pattern of movement and adjustment. Xavier and J are not often the ones who need

	heavy direction or intervention. Instead, they find their own rhythm, their own way of navigating the environment. In this room, there's a unique sort of containment—a safety net woven through the space itself. The demands of the day are ever-present, but there's something calming about the way the room holds them, offering both a structure and a freedom to explore within its boundaries. It's not about perfect order, but rather about finding peace within the ebb and flow of each moment, as the children move between the spaces of play, interaction, and calm. Perhaps it's this balance, this careful mix of containment and freedom, that makes the nurture space so special—a place where the children can return to themselves, even in the midst of the demands of the day. And in these moments, I wonder if they don't carry the weight of negative experiences quite as much as we think. Maybe the room itself helps them let go and move forward, always ready for the next spontaneous moment.
58. Outside on the playground, I watched both boys as they ran up and down, round and round alone, both had happy content facial expressions, they were alone but didn't seem alone? J in particular appeared to smile when the groups of boys were going around the yard together. X seemed happy with the freedom to move and eat his snack. I wondered if they would be as happy on the yard without the hustle and bustle of the other children, whilst it is hard to predict, I wonder if they would be bored, or would attend to more sensory aspects. They seemed to be in the perfect place at the perfect time.	The playground hums with the sounds of children's laughter and the bustle of play, yet in a quieter corner, two boys—J and X—move with a different rhythm. They are alone, but not lonely, their paths intertwining with a quiet sense of contentment. J runs in a circle, his movements quick, his face breaking into a smile as a group of boys pass by, running in their own playful sprint across the yard. He watches them for a moment, his gaze light and amused, and then continues his own solitary race, unbothered by the absence of others. His smile lingers, a sign of his quiet happiness in the movement and the space around him. Xavier is a little farther away, his pace a bit slower but no less focused. He runs up and down, tracing the boundaries of his own little world in the playground, his expression calm and content. He's eating his snack, enjoying the sensory satisfaction of each bite as he moves freely, seemingly unaware of the busyness of the yard around him. He looks up occasionally, his face still and observant, but there's a sense of ease to his movements—his freedom. I watch them both, a quiet curiosity growing. Neither seems troubled by being apart from the larger groups of children, yet neither seems entirely alone. There's a peacefulness in their autonomy, a contentment in the stillness of their play. For Xavier, especially, it's clear that the open space—the movement—has a calming effect. His body is in constant motion, yet his face is relaxed, grounded in the moment. The snack he's eating is a small comfort, adding a sensory layer to the peacefulness of the playground. I wonder, though, what would happen if the yard were more empty—if the buzz of the other children faded away, leaving just the two of them, perhaps more deeply alone. Would they still find this same level of joy? Would they notice more of the sensory details—the way the air feels as it moves past them, the crunch of leaves beneath their feet, the smell of the earth? Or would they, without the distractions of other play, grow bored, seeking out new things to fill the silence? It's hard to predict, but in this moment, they seem to be in the perfect place at the perfect time—unburdened by the clamour of the playground, their world made small but significant in its simplicity. For Xavier, the freedom to run and snack is enough; for J, the occasional interaction with the passing boys brings a moment of joy. Both seem content, grounded in their own ways, with no rush to be anywhere

	else, no need for anything more. The playground, in its hustle and bustle, provides them with space for their own rhythm, and in this moment, it feels just right.
59. X hears S singing 5 little firemen and X repeats the phrase. (It is a song they have started playing at the end of the day to settle Joshua) The tidy up song comes on, Joshua sings the 'tidy up' part every time. His voice is wobbly like it hasn't been used much and he isn't quite sure how to use it but he does seem to enjoy using it. X starts to tidy up, putting the dominoes away and sorting them by colour. He then goes to sit down for his toast.	he morning is still unfolding in the room, the soft sounds of activity filling the air as the day begins. The children are slowly settling into their routines, and the gentle hum of voices and movement marks the start of another day. S, with her usual energy, begins singing the *Five Little Firemen* song, a familiar tune that has become part of the end-of-day ritual. But today, it's different. Today, it catches X's attention. He hears the phrase and, without hesitation, repeats it, his voice joining in with S's words, a quiet but clear echo. He's not just mimicking the sounds; there's something about the rhythm and the comfort of the repeated phrase that resonates with him. It's as if he's finding his place within the song, not just by repeating it but by claiming it as his own for that moment. As the song continues, X remains focused on the rhythm, watching S with a calm but intent expression. The repetition of the lyrics feels grounding for him, a piece of structure amidst the start of the day's busy flow. His participation, while simple, is full of purpose—a gentle thread weaving him into the activity. The *Tidy Up* song then begins, a familiar signal to signal the shift in the room's energy. Joshua, always eager to sing along, begins the familiar chorus, his voice wobbly and unsure, as though it hasn't been used in a while. His attempt is raw but full of intention, and his unsteady voice carries an infectious energy. X, taking in the song, begins to tidy up. He starts with the dominoes, methodically picking them up, placing them with care. First, he sorts them by colour, his movements measured and calm. It's almost as if the song guides him through the task, helping him stay in the rhythm of the morning's quiet routine. As X moves through the task, there's no rush, no sense of urgency—just a quiet engagement in the task at hand. He's absorbed in the small act of tidying, the order of things, each domino picked up and returned to its place. There's comfort in the simplicity of it. As he finishes putting away the dominoes, he turns toward the table where the toast is waiting. With an air of quiet satisfaction, he walks over, ready for his next simple routine: sitting down for his snack. There's an ease to the moment. The room, still settling from the morning bustle, is calm again as X eats. It's not the end of the day, but the rhythm of his actions—the song, the tidying, the toast—brings a sense of quiet joy and contentment to this part of the morning
60. Outside in the playground the whole school has arrived back from church. X is outside, he has his peppers on a table for his snack. He walks around the periphery on his tiptoes, bouce jumping/running at various intervals. He runs across to the middle, clapping, smiling, intermittently getting his peppers. Another child looks at him as he grabs a pepper. (does he want a pepper? Or is he intrigued by X?)	Outside in the playground, the atmosphere is a blend of excitement and routine as the whole school returns from church. The air is crisp with a slight bite to it, typical of an autumn morning, and the laughter of children fills the space. X is already settled in his own rhythm, quietly engaging with the world around him. He has his peppers on a table, a small but comforting part of his snack time ritual. As he moves, there's a deliberate quality to his steps. X walks around the edges of the playground, his feet hovering just above the ground as he steps on his tiptoes. There's something calming in the movement, almost like a gentle sway, and yet, there's an unmistakable burst of energy every so often—like a bounce or a jump, as if the world's gravity is a little less restrictive at those moments. His running, though brief, is full of joy, the force of it causing his body to almost leap forward before he pauses again,

	clapping his hands with a bright smile. It's as if he's celebrating the very motion of moving through space, reveling in the sensory joy it brings. Every now and then, X pauses at the table to grab a pepper, taking a bite before carrying on his exploration. The pepper seems to be a small but comforting anchor for him amidst the spontaneous bursts of movement. But even the act of eating is interspersed with his little celebrations—clapping and smiling, a silent expression of contentment. Another child nearby watches X with curiosity. The glance isn't hurried or judgemental, but more of a quiet observation. Is the child intrigued by X's movements, or perhaps does X's joy with his peppers spark an unspoken desire to share in that experience? It's hard to say, but there's a fleeting moment where their gazes meet. The child hesitates for a moment, and X, unaware or unbothered, continues on his path—tiptoeing and bouncing, eating peppers in between. X's movements seem to draw the other child in, not just because of his snack, but because of the rhythm and freedom in what he's doing. There's a sense of wonder in how X inhabits the space around him, so fully attuned to his own experience.
61. The whistle blows and everyone freezes, not X he is approached with his now and next board and walks into the year 2 classroom. He has a table at the back of the room, it is a bigger room than last year. He sits down and there is a shape sorting activity on his table. He engages half heartedly, putting the shapes in any tub rather than sorting them, even though he does know. sometimes he will do the task, sometimes he won't and sometimes it is attempted like today he seems dazed and distracted. He says 'm-m-m, looking at miss and smiling as she says it back to him'. He looks at the other year 2 children sat on the carpet. They are discussing Halloween. He says 'book time' as per his routine and he walks over to the books. I notice that the books are starting to look different to the ones he is interested in, apparently he doesn't seem as interested in these books and often tries to sort them by putting them out of the way in a drawer at the bottom of the book shelf. Today, however he gets up and leaves the room, 'I think he has finished'.	he whistle blows, and as the others freeze in place, Xavier is already on the move. He steps toward his *now and next* board with a quiet focus, an unspoken understanding of the routine. It's time for the transition. His movements are purposeful but calm as he walks into the Year 2 classroom, a room that feels larger this year, filled with more space and new faces. Xavier takes his usual place at the back of the room, seated at the table that's his. There's a shape sorting activity in front of him, familiar and expected. But today, something about it doesn't grab him the same way. He picks up the shapes but doesn't engage in the sorting as he normally would. Instead, he drops them haphazardly into any tub that's nearby, not following the task's intent. His eyes are distant, focused on something beyond the shapes, as if the world around him is moving in a different rhythm today. He makes a soft sound, '*m m m'*, the kind of sound that suggests a happy connection, almost like a little hum of contentment. There's no urgency in it—just a quiet response, a moment of connection with Miss as he glances over at her. She smiles back at him, mirroring his expression, and for a brief moment, there's a sense of shared understanding between them. He's not disengaged; he's just on his own wavelength today. Xavier's gaze shifts to the other children sitting on the carpet, talking about Halloween, but he doesn't join in. He's content to watch, to be an observer in this moment. The topic doesn't seem to hold his attention. Instead, he focuses on the familiar rhythm of his environment, the comforting hum of the classroom around him. He stands up without a word, his movements smooth and sure, and walks toward the book area. The books are different today—different than the ones he used to seek out with eagerness. He picks them up, flips through them briefly, but there's no spark of interest. Instead, he starts putting them away, carefully tucking them out of sight in the lower shelf drawer. It's not a rejection, just a quiet decision. These books don't offer what he's seeking today.

	After a brief moment, he gets up again, a subtle shift in his energy, as if he's ready for the next part of his day. Xavier walks out of the room, no words spoken but a sense of completion in his actions. Miss observes, *"I think he's finished"*, noting the quiet confidence with which he exits. There's no fuss, no dramatic change—just a sense that he's moved through what he needed to and is ready for something else. The calmness of his departure speaks to his internal world, one that is sometimes hard to read, but clear in its own way.
62. Xavier is shown the symbol, 'bucket time'. He moves to the enclosed space and sits at the table with Joshua. The first item is a 'press on nails' Joshua looks attentively swinging his legs and smiling. Miss says 'ready, steady, …' Joshua says 'go' so that miss presses the nails in again to make a shape. 'patterns finished'. The next object in the box was a squishy snake toy, Joshua sat on his hands and watched the toy, watching Xavier reach out to grab it. Joshua gets pinched by Xavier but he doesn't seem to feel or notice the pinch. As Xavier gets removed from the table, Joshua is given the bucket item, 'blower', he appears delighted and begins trying to blow it, something he appeared to struggle with. 'bucket time finished'	The classroom hums with a soft rhythm, a quiet stillness that seems to wrap itself around Xavier as he observes the scene. Joshua is called over for his *bucket time*, a familiar ritual that brings with it a sense of calm. He moves with purpose toward the enclosed space, a smile on his face as he takes his seat at the table. Xavier watches, the stillness in his body broken only by the occasional shift of his legs, a subtle tension in the air between him and the toys laid before them. Miss holds up the first item from the bucket, *press-on nails*. Joshua's eyes light up, his legs swinging under the table with an easy joy. Xavier's gaze flickers over to the activity, and though he doesn't react outwardly, there's a soft focus in his expression as he watches. Miss begins, "Ready, steady..." and Joshua eagerly says, "Go," prompting Miss to press the nails into place, forming a pattern. Joshua smiles as the shape forms before him, content with the task, though Xavier's gaze doesn't linger on the result. His focus is elsewhere. Next, Miss draws out a squishy snake toy from the bucket, the texture a soft, inviting thing in her hand. Joshua, ever curious, watches intently. But then, as the snake is placed between them, Xavier's hand slowly reaches out, an instinctive movement that seems to come without thought. His fingers close around the toy, intent on pulling it toward him, though Joshua doesn't seem to notice. Instead, Joshua continues to sit, absorbed in his own world. A pinch, gentle but firm, from Xavier catches Joshua's attention only momentarily, yet it goes unnoticed by him. His focus is fixed on his own internal rhythm, not affected by the gesture. Xavier, however, is aware of the reaction. Miss steps in gently, guiding Xavier away from the table, the interaction now at an end. There's no resistance from him, just a subtle shift in his energy as he is removed from the table, his face unchanging, but his focus shifting. As Xavier is led away, Joshua is given a new item from the bucket—a blower. Joshua's eyes light up again, and he leans forward, eager to try it out. He struggles, his breath coming in short bursts, as he tries to make the blower work. His effort is endearing, his smile wide and full of determination, even as he struggles to create the desired effect.
63. Xavier went seemingly happily to the work area, he noticed the frogs on top of the cabinet. He said, 'frogs' and was told work first and then frogs. He let out a whimper and lay on the floor. The activity was faces of children in his year 2 class. He reluctantly matched the photos and repeated the names that miss said, he at times also covered his	The room breathes with a soft expectancy, a quiet murmur beneath the routines of the morning. Xavier drifts toward the work area, his footsteps light, his presence folding into the gentle structure of the day. There's a glint above—a familiar shape perched on the cabinet. Frogs. He names them as if calling out to old friends, his voice low but certain: *"frogs."* The moment hangs in the air, soft and wanting, until it's redirected—"Work first, then frogs."

mouth and appeared to mumble something (gestalt?) but it was difficult to hear. After the task, he was asked 'frogs or cash register' he said 'register' and played happily with the cash register, putting the coins in and out. He said Gruffalo and I tried to remember words of the Gruffalo to see if he would acknowledge me. Miss and myself thought we heard him say 'wrong'. At times he covered his mouth and appeared to be saying more mumbles (gestalt?) when it was time to finish playing with the cash register, he asked for the frogs. He was told no, but asked did he want the magnets. He didn't appear so and therefore was shown a choose board, but didn't choose anything, he later said magnets. I wondered if he had been looking for something else that he didn't know the word for or was looking for a picture of the frogs. He said magnets because this was the last word remembered?	A quiet line, but one that changes the shape of the moment. Xavier's body speaks before words can form—he lets out a small, aching sound, somewhere between a sigh and a whimper, and melts to the floor, as though gravity suddenly asked too much of him. It isn't resistance, not really. More like an unravelling. A longing paused. He is coaxed gently toward the table, to the task—photographs of classmates, familiar faces waiting to be matched. He joins in, though his presence is partial, distant. The photos are placed before him like puzzle pieces from a world just beyond reach. He responds in fragments—echoes of names repeated back, the thread of connection held by Miss's steady voice. Sometimes he places the pieces, sometimes his fingers hesitate. At times, his hand floats to his mouth, half-hiding the words that try to rise. There's something there—something soft and mumbled, shaped but not spoken. A quiet flicker of language trying to surface. It doesn't quite land, but it lingers, textured and unfinished. The task ends. The path opens again. *"Frogs or cash register?"* A beat. A breath. *"Register,"* he says, and the shift is instant. His energy settles into the new rhythm of play, his body more fluid, his hands purposeful. The coins chime as they fall, small circles of gold dropping into place. There's comfort here—in the repetition, in the weight of each action. He is focused, content, absorbed. *"Gruffalo,"* he says, softly, as if a line from another story has drifted into the room. A ripple of possibility stirs—I try to meet him there, offering lines from the tale, sending them like small boats across the water. He doesn't answer, not directly. But Miss and I both pause, sensing something beneath the surface. *"Wrong,"* we think we hear. A thread of meaning flickers and vanishes. Again, the hand at the mouth. Again, the soft, private sound. His eyes are focused but faraway, his voice hidden in the crook of his palm. The play continues, but something else moves underneath—something half-formed, still becoming. Time bends again. The moment arrives. *"Frogs?"* he asks, like someone returning to the start of a story. But the answer is no. The line is redrawn. Another offer—*magnets?*—but it lands with a thud. The choice board appears, its bright squares offering new possibilities, but none seem to land. He doesn't reach. He waits. Eventually, he says it—*"magnets."* Not with excitement, but like someone choosing the last word that stayed behind when the others left the room. I wonder then—was he still looking for frogs? Or for something else he couldn't name, something he hoped might appear in picture form? Maybe the magnets weren't what he wanted at all. Maybe they were just what was left.
64. My immediate reflections were that Xavier doesn't like the new organised classroom which places greater expectations on him. He cannot move as freely and has to	Xavier once roamed his world like a comet—quick, tactile, self-directed, tracing the landscape of the classroom with certainty and sensation. But now, the world has changed shape. The classroom—once

ask to be able to access toys that he previously was able to get out. There were a few incidents where he became stressed or angry when he was stopped from doing things that he wanted. Staff are trying to teach him that he needs to ask and wait, however I wondered if this was clear to Xavier. When his behaviour escalates he has to go into timeout. Usually, 'he likes time out' but on one occasion he was hitting his head and pinching his chest. Back in class he seemed calmer, he played for a little while with the toys that were available before wandering off. During attention autism he seemed really excited and happy, but suddenly he began pinching Joshua, he was trying to communicate something, did he feel encased, he wanted to touch the items and in attention autism 'children are not meant to touch' just look. Xavier is quite a tactile child, he likes to explore toys enthusiastically, therefore was he frustrated that he couldn't touch them. He pinched Joshua instead, but was this communicative or pure frustration?	open terrain—is reorganised, tightened. It has rules now, invisible fences, and gates locked by language: 'ask,' 'wait,' 'stop.' These are heavy words for a body that moves faster than thought. The freedom of reach has been replaced by permission. His instinct—to stretch, to seize, to explore—is now filtered through systems he may not fully comprehend. So he crashes into the boundaries. Not out of defiance, but dissonance. Each time he is stopped, told to wait, to ask—he hears a language that doesn't match his knowledge. His frustration is not random; it is architectural. He is pushing against a new architecture of limits, and he doesn't yet know the blueprint. Time-out becomes the paradox. A place of calm, perhaps because it is a pause in the noise of rules, a zone with fewer expectations. Usually, it brings quiet. But on this occasion, the storm followed him in. He pinches, hits himself—not to punish, but to ground, to discharge the chaos inside. A desperate attempt to regain control when the outer structure has collapsed. Back in class, the ground settles. Familiar toys help him reestablish the emotional topography. But the security is temporary—he is still scanning for alignment. Then, Attention Autism: a dazzling spectacle of sight, rhythm, anticipation. Xavier is ignited—his energy rises. But this time, the rules are inverted: he can look, but not touch. The very objects that draw his joy are locked behind the invisible glass of "don't." And for a child who understands the world through fingers, pressure, motion, this is not just frustrating—it is alienating. So he reaches—not for the objects, but for Joshua. The pinch may look like aggression, but deeper down it could be a message, a displacement, an SOS. His fingers speak louder than his voice. In this touch, he says: I want in. I want connection. I want to feel what I see. He communicates through the only sensory channel left open to him.

65. Appendix 3 – Reflective thoughts after visits – Joshua and Xavier

Joshua

66. Joshua had an understanding of some of the school rules – he complied with them albeit on the edge of a boundary – Adults were the enforcers of boundaries, he would look to check that an adult was maintaining a boundary
67. Joshua 'went along' with some of the curriculum based activities on offer even though they weren't chosen by him, or seemingly that interesting to him
68. The classroom was a busy place, and Joshua had a busy job to do in checking the movement sensor was working. In the nurture base, Joshua had the same job to do, however because the base wasn't as 'busy' Joshua's checking wasn't as busy, therefore he had more time to 'test' other equipment such as the marble run.
69. For a time I was able to engage Joshua in a game, copying his movements, he noticed that I was watching him- he made a peculiar facial expression and seemed to enjoy me making the same face back to him. Outside we engaged in a game of throwing the ball, we ran together to get the ball and Joshua seemed to enjoy the thrill of the chase, giggling as we approached. However as this game was outside of the boundary, we couldn't continue.
70. I discussed Joshua's morning with the nurture room staff. They too wondered if the classroom was 'too much and too busy' for Joshua and it was difficult for him to understand the routine.
71. Joshua seeks out quieter less stimulating spaces when there are lots of children the same age as him = but they are also spaces which bring him comfort such as being outside of a boundary or being in a space with movement sensors/light switches when <u>no other children are there</u>
72. Joshua recognises people's faces and appreciates familiarity
73. I had to turn away when they physically removed him from spaces where he shouldn't have been – I couldn't be complicit – also as a researcher, what could I change? 74. Did this deny Joshua his voice?
75. Feeling of getting to know the environment and people within it so that I can truly understand what is occurring. Observed the same routine 3 times now. Because I am participating I am finding it difficult to write detailed vignettes, however definitely building up a picture and essence of the children's experiences whilst also being part of them. Thinking of writing 30 minute observations.

76. Is Joshua and Xavier's experience the same as all of the other children's- school is school. There are tasks to do that don't make sense but they have to be done – as that is what 'school' is, officially, their rules that keep the system functioning in regards to who belongs in what space and with whom. There is a hierarchy of being and doing the same is a greater good. No children's voices are listened to really, if they object to the regime, or if it doesn't make sense. Joshua and Xander, articulate their understanding of and rejection of the system a bit more clearly. They don't know, that there isn't a choice. This places them in vulnerable positions as eventually they will not even be the slightest bit compatible within the regime.
77. But – do those children who have no voice, develop the capacity as adults to have a voice and make choices – does this alleviate some of the reality. The children within my study who communicate in non-typical ways and are unable to comply with the system – will also probably and most likely have no voice in adulthood. Does this mean that we need to advocate for their voice now – life isn't equal in the long term.
78. Shaw, (2017) concludes that inclusion creates acceptance from the non-disabled child for the child with CN. Is that an adult perception? The children within the class accept the children with CN in the same way that they accept everything that happens to them and is expected of them. The depth of 'acceptance' is implied to be more meaningful than what it is occurring.

79. Do Joshua or Xavier care how they are positioned by me? Are all children unconsciously positioned.

80. Joshua trusts the staff – when they took his hand he willingly went with them, however when they reached the nurture base, he began to cry as I don't think he was expecting to go there?

81. I have had to change my approach to listening to children to fit in with the context of the school. For example, by not engaging in intensive interaction as a participation approach as Joshua would extend what he wanted to 'show' me and then we would end up in places where he wasn't allowed and to be and then would be carried back. Therefore to 'protect' Joshua it was better that I ignored his wishes so that it didn't correlate with a physical intervention.

82. Reflections 18/10/24
    Staff are happier with Joshua? Joshua is happier? Joshua is shown the symbol, 'bucket time'.
    He appeared a lot more focused on activities, likes the routine, giving more eye contact, showing enjoyment in his face (almost like how he looked with the movement sensor). Singing during the group whiteboard and saying the colours in a song. Counting lots to himself. In the reception classroom I noticed him noticing the other children more, wanting to do things that they did but not initiating, like he doesn't know how to, but knows not to take or grab. What else is he thinking but not expressing. Still very self -sufficient, it doesn't make him unhappy.

83. Written Notes from structured conversation with teacher of nurture (who normally isn't in school on the days of my research) + head teacher 'what is Joshua's and Xavier's experience of school?' Quite a positive experience, good relationship with adults, they are loved and we want them to feel they belong – feeling of belonging is something that is important to us in this school. Joshua is very tactile, he loves rough and tumble play (close your ears maria) he feel safe when with people he knows, likes in the classroom, likes the freedom compared to when in nurture. He likes looking at photos of himself , things being the same, he knows the timetable. Do worry about his sleep and diet. It is difficult to connect with mum, busy household, very difficult for both parents. Probably does his own thing, probably hard to manage. Going to try and get him to do more formal work next term. BST said lots of it is just behaviour.

Xavier

84. Xavier likes particular parts of the routines, in particular songs on the whiteboard, he likes particular books, such as elmer and he likes that they are available in school.
85. Xavier likes to interact with the adults and likes their reaction in the routine of throwing something on the floor.
86. He uses his voice through his consistent choices.
87. The school experience is made better by patterns within the environment, in particular within the book corner,
88. The school experience is made better by routines involving other children that are visual and musical
89. The school experience is made better by access to the hammock swing and when people are willing to push the swing
90. The school experience is perhaps tiresome when having to do a task that is boring, irrelevant, demanding -ie posting activity
91. The school experience is tiresome when presented with foods that not interested in or asked to use cutlery
92. The school experience is exciting/scary when transitioning between spaces or going to a space where boring tasks are anticipated.
93. The weather creating different opportunities such as going on the swing in the garden.
94. Behaviour log Bit self at 10.10- told 'no stop'

At 11.15- hit a child 3x and laughed
1.20- kicked at Mrs M x 2 attempted headbutting on beanbag
11.55- pulled mrs m pony tailhaed butted laughed
11.33 bit mrs M – laughed
13/11
14/11
21/11
22/11
23/11- throughout the day
28/11 –
18/12
May June July

95. The voices of outsiders that influence the children's (both J & X's) experiences possibly
Special school: 'he's one of ours'
Specialist advisory teacher: 'look there is logic to what he is doing'
Behaviour Support Teacher: 'that's pure behaviour'
SaLT: 'have your heard of GLP', 'I wonder if we place some things that he is already doing into his routine'
Other parents: I want my child to be kept away from X.
These children may have many more voices that impacts upon their voice/experience now but also their future voice and experience.

96. <u>Discussion with mum</u>
97. Xavier mostly likes coming to school. Sometimes he will say, 'no school' however that is often in conjunction with something else he is doing at home.
98. Xavier likes to create sequences within routines and finds it difficult to move on if he hasn't finished. That can make transitions difficult and routines hard to shift. Recently the SaLT worked with the school to show them how to utilise routines that Xavier had created into routines that work within the classroom.
99. Xavier loves to be outside, at home this is sometimes difficult as he isn't predictable, for example he ate a red berry and needed to go to a&E
100. Xavier loves Disney movies at home, he knows all of the words and uses some of the emotions in context, mum wonders about Gestalt language processing but no one had heard of it at school or the SaLT
101. Xavier is tactile, he makes loud clapping noises often when he is giddy or excited. Emotions are tricky as he finds it difficult to calm down.
102. Mum knows that sometimes Xavier uses negative behaviours to express himself, but feels sad because his faclal expressions suggest that he doesn't mean to.
103. Timers work well for Xavier for coming off things or for doing things like getting into the bath.
104. Mum knows at school he will have to do somethings that he doesn't like, like sitting at a desk and doing learning but she wonders how this will make sense to him

105. Reflections – children are known at home and at school, parents give their children to school because that's what they do and if they need to be unhappy doing it -it is all in the process of having to learn. Mum seemed grateful for the experience – 'they don't have to do this'

106. Does any of this impact on Xaviers experience – would he be heard better if staff understood GLP and were working on this?

107. Other children 'see' Xavier when he is out where he lives

108. Do children have rights anyway?

109. Xavier can no longer ‘play’ with two children because he has hit them and laughed when they became upset—it is assumed that ‘he knows what he is doing’ meaning he is aware of the emotional impact of his actions, there is no leniency of acknowledgment of his disability.
110. He turned over the mud kitchen that a child was playing with, he had to go into ‘time out’ for that, because he can’t be seen to be getting away with it.
111. All week he has been targeting Mrs M. and has had to have a time out every time. He knows what he is doing. When I curiously asked, ‘was it possible he liked the cause and effect’ of the reactions, it was equally pondered that he did. However they cannot be seen to be tolerating that behaviour.
112. Other parents have told their children to not be near him, in case he hits them again. One of them was one of the only children he demonstrated consistent initiation of interaction with. I wondered about the possibility he hit more the people he liked, in attempts to interact with them.
113. <u>Written notes from conversation with Mum</u> ‘How does Xavier experience school’ He likes coming to school, non-uniform throws him but mostly he is happy to see his school bag. Sometimes he doesn’t want to go to school, but that is usually related to if he has started watching a film at home or if a program comes on he has to see it until the end. He likes the swing, he only recently went on a swing for the first time at home, got one in the garden. Tries to make him go to the toilet before school, but he won’t, am then worried that he will wet himself at school. 114. Transitions go well when the ‘stars are aligned’ when he knows what is happening and he has finished a routine. He can’t be interrupted. He has a sequence with his books at home and has to finish it before he will do anything else. At times traffic lights work, for example when it is time to get into the bath. Very tactile at home – negative behaviours can occur when bored or frustrated. Getting worse, think it is linked to sensory overload, more hyper sensitive to noise. 115. Had a speech therapist from home, trying to teach him to follow a routine based on what he already likes. Working with staff at school, likes school because he can move around, not sure what he would do if had to stay in the classroom like the other year 1 children. Loves the swing. Knows films off by heart, cars, moana, despicable me, tangled. Home Salt mentioned Gestalt LP, never heard of it before. Mum mentioned how, ‘everyone knows who he is’ when they go shopping, they will hear children say, ‘that’s Xavier’.
116. Xavier is possibly a GLP- Therefore- how does Xavier experience people who want him to say I instead of ‘Xavier want to go on the swing’ as a way of ‘enabling him to see himself within the 1st person’ is it confusing, for him?
117. Conversation with teacher- Xavier- likes a much slower pace, having a reading area, being outside, having jigsaws and posting. ‘purple spot’. Behaviour at transitions, hurt others but also himself, awful to see. Good relationship with Mum.
118. Reflections – 18/10/24 My immediate reflections were that Xavier doesn’t like the new organised classroom which places greater expectations on him. He cannot move as freely and has to ask to be able to access toys that he previously was able to get out. There were a few incidents where

he became stressed or angry when he was stopped from doing things that he wanted. Staff are trying to teach him that he needs to ask and wait, however I wondered if this was clear to Xavier. When his behaviour escalates he has to go into timeout. Usually, 'he likes time out' but on one occasion he was hitting his head and pinching his chest. Back in class he seemed calmer, he played for a little while with the toys that were available before wandering off. During attention autism he seemed really excited and happy, but suddenly he began pinching Jacob, he was trying to communicate something, did he feel encased, he wanted to touch the items and in attention autism 'children are not meant to touch' just look. Xavier is quite a tactile child, he likes to explore toys enthusiastically, therefore was he frustrated that he couldn't touch them. He pinched Jacob instead, but was this communicative or pure frustration?
119. Further reflections 18/10/24 Later X came back into the room he sat down for at the toast table and I made and we commented that X is hungry, miss said he probably is but he is also contrary and often he will get up when everyone else sits down. Today, though I noticed that when everyone sat down X starting to make spitting gestures (it was difficult for him to spit properly) after a while, he stopped spitting and ate the toast. I wondered if everyone that came to the table was speaking a different language to X and therefore he moved away from the table to avoid feeling confused. However on this day, spitting was trialled as an interaction because usually when he spits, something happens that he feels connect to, somebody says words that he understands like 'no' and 'toast'. These words he does understand, therefore he can stay at the table. Sometimes he forgets about the spitting word, so he leaves the table. More and more though he is remembering and toast time with the others feels more certain. Emotions – calm, energised, engaged, calm.
120. Staff at the beginning of my research wondered if the school was 'right' for Joshua but they seemed confident that Xavier was in the 'right' place. This was because Xavier appeared mostly happy, whereas Joshua, seemed distressed at times, especially when he couldn't interact with the lights like he wanted to. What was interesting – was that during my observations, it was Xavier who appeared to challenge the staff with physical behaviours. They were ok with this, though despite being confused by the cause of the behaviours- because he would express overt joy every day, whereas Joshua is more quieter, more reserved.

Appendix 4- example reflexivity

Reflexivity of 'moments' that I noticed more

121. The enthusiasm and neutrality of the reception team.

I remember feeling happy at the reactions of the reception teacher to wide ranging events in the day. Various changes had occurred within the timetable due to the euros and some children had become dysregulated throughout the afternoon. I was struck in particular to how patient she had been to one child in particular who couldn't settle back down amongst the chaos of trying to keep everyone else on task. I commented to the head teacher how wonderful the class team was. Later I wondered what this feeling meant, why did I feel happy, and why did I feel the need to comment?

122. *Part of my need to comment came from a feeling of helplessness that I was perhaps an added stress to an already stressful day, and as such I tried to minimise my presence.*

Overall, however though, I think I was happy to observe such overt warmth and nurture of a child whom in other environments maybe would not have received such kindness. The child who was one of my participants wasn't part of these interactions but the acceptance of the needs of the other child also illuminated how Joshua was also accepted within micro classroom for fundamentally who is was, a child in their class.

123. The Send teacher stating how Joshua liked to be swung around (whilst simultaneously telling the head teacher to cover her ears)
Here there was a real moment of recognition of the things that Joshua found joyful, whilst also acknowledging some of the potentially frowned upon cultural health and safety rules of a school. I liked hearing this, in part because it reminded me of my earlier days as a teacher of autistic children and one child in particular liked to be piggy backed around the playground. I imagined Joshua's joy at this interaction even though I didn't observe it due to my research taking place on days when she wasn't in school. I liked the subtle advocacy for Joshua and the stretching of the boundary for Joshua. It expressed a desire to connect with Joshua and an emphasis of 'knowing him'.

124. A child within the nurture base telling Xavier to be quiet.
During toast time in the nurture base there were 5 children waiting to have toast and Xavier was making some excited noises, clapping his hands and shouting from the guttural of his throat. A child sitting next to him said 'Xavier be quiet please' and immediately he stopped making noises. I was curious to this interaction as I wondered if he would have stopped if an adult had asked him. I also wondered about why I was drawn to this moment and I think it is because I am trying to highlight the reasons for environments with a wide mix of children, rather than a specialist primary school, of which the most local one predominantly taught children very similar to Xavier, who didn't speak using words. It struck me that I was making a judgement about Xavier's right to be at the school because of this interaction and that he may learn how to listen to others comments about his noise. What I hadn't considered at the time, was how this may have impacted Xavier to have his noise and his way of being commented on, essentially in a negative way. I had jumped straight to the narrative of Xavier learning how to behave through his interactions with peers. Nobody, including me wondered about Xavier's expression of joy, it was rejected in favour of sitting still at the table, waiting quietly for toast.

125. Xavier's mum saying that the SaLT had mentioned gestalt language processing. 'is it American' but in a more exploratory way and then the school staff saying, 'have you heard about GLP but in a 'it is just an american thing.
126. *Initially, I got excited for Xavier and his mum, I had done some research into GLP and was pleased we could discuss it in relation to X. I believed it to be a way for X to express himself and for him to be understood, and perhaps also have something that could form part of his identity.*

127. Child's experience dependent on teacher/ta feeling
After my final Friday visits. I started to wonder about how the child's experience is somewhat dependent on the TA's general feeling about the day. In a mainstream school, little changes to routines can throw of 'professional planning', which can result in a 'better

day' or 'worse day' for the children. For example on my final visit, most of the children had gone to a mass at the church. This resulted in only 3 children staying at school. The two children of my research and one other child. I gained the sense that the TA was in 'getting through' mode, maybe they had been told that also. There was a general sense of calm and the children were doing activities to promote a calm state. The routine was kept loosely, but when it was time for X to do his table activity in the 1:1 area, instead of going through the routine of an adult agenda task before choosing from the cupboard, he asked and got a cupboard item first. The TA joined in with his actions and play. No incidents occurred. It could be that X was 'just having a better day' but I reflected on my own experiences as a teacher and when I took the attitude of 'just do what is necessary to get through the day' I may have avoided demands or actions which would have potentially disrupted the state of calm.

128. Some voices are louder than others

The sense that 'specific autism based practice' was sometimes detrimental to a child's wellbeing and mood was coming to my mind a lot. Reflecting on the new set up in the classroom and in particular the 'attention autism' session. The session was carried out as scripted in the training, the idea being that students 'look' but don't touch, with the aim of developing joint attention. However X's need to touch and sensory engage with the objects caused him to be upset when denied. On the other hand, J was very engaged and appeared happy with the boundary and 'rules'. He was maybe an example of the effects of attention autism and how the intervention can have a positive impact on children's attention and interests. However, I wondered about the impact on X and how it led to negative behaviours being used to express himself and how this would perhaps impact on his life and well-being later on. From experience, tall children and adolescents who scratch and pinch to communicate their dissatisfaction, are often the most oppressed, with their quality of life and opportunities for well-being persistently limited.

129. and 'evidenced based practice' guides the experience. And 'what inclusion looks like'

Appendix 5- post analyses reflections

130. Empathy – I feel I naturally have empathy or intuition when it comes to listening to the voices of children who do not speak in typical ways, maybe from always trying to understand and explain my sisters words and behaviours. However, what became transparent during the imaginative eidetic process, was how much more empathetic I became as I attuned more to the phenomenological experience, and as it was written down, I was beginning to get the feeling how powerful the words could be – if they enabled a different perspective of the children to be understood. Often Xavier's behaviour would be interpreted negatively or under a guise of 'he has to learn'. The analyses reveal, I guess suggested reasons which may make people more empathetic and naturally attuned. 'Empathy' is a word that has been used in feedback to my explications.
131. Identity – when reflecting on explicating the themes for the children and through immersing myself in the eidetic process, what frequently emerged for me, was the identity or personality of Joshua. He was revealed to me, as a highly resilient child, but also quietly mindful of his actions, for example, he would never just take the lolly sticks from the child, even though he wanted them. The way he observed from a distance and then overtime he gradually joined in more, reminded me of my own children and how they are different at home and at school. I imagined him being far more boisterous and confident at home, in the security of his own home. Joshua's 'identity' to me emerged almost spontaneously, but in doing so, it prompted me to reflect upon Xavier's 'identity'

and why his didn't emerge in the same way that Joshua's did. I think it is because Xavier lives more 'ambiguously' – society rules don't make as much sense to him, they seem irrational and as such. I was reminded of the 'double empathy problem' (Milton, 2012) more so when I though of Xander. I felt his 'true' self was at risk of being erased due to his expressive behaviours. His expressive joy was appreciated and accepted but his responses when he was not permitted to express tactile joy and engage with the world in a sensory way caused conflict for him and staff. Xavier's analyses made me feel more uncomfortable, less sure and I think, this was because I 'feared' for him more and all of this interacted with his 'identity' and my 'knowing' of him. I feel this was important to acknowledge in the discussion section- but also make the point that it was the analysing that prompted this insight and reflection.

132. **Official and informal school –** Throughout the research process, I was struct by this idea that school is an enactment at times. Xavier's challenges emerged when school was 'enacted', yet he displayed incredible patience with this, even when it didn't make sense. I thought about all children having to learn what the government has decided, the pressures on teachers through Ofsted and thus performing this 'enactment'. I think lots of the things that children are taught at school do not seem important, and Joshua and Xavier illuminated this further, in particular Xavier who complied with tasks, but at times expressed a deep internal almost aggravated boredom. In some ways Joshua and Xavier where able to express this voice of school as an enactment, more so that the other children, in their refusal to 'go along with it'. I also reflected on how this made them more vulnerable – (Appendix 3, pg. 2. no. 76) eg. The regime will persist despite their discomfort, despite a lot of children's discomfort.

133. **Agency and autonomy-** Throughout the whole ethnographic process and the eidetic analysis, an occurring reflection was around how the children's agency or lack of agency became their voices and how they became to be known. I think this is true for every human, in the choices we make etc- however it felt more pertinent to acknowledge this for the boys, because of the realisation that whilst agency isn't something that is afforded to most children in school, I wondered about people who live within a 'system' for every aspect of their lives, during the day and at home (I was reflecting on my sister living in house that is run by an organisation and her day centre- I am not saying this is a bad thing, but always having to navigate other people to survive, can impact upon agency and autonomy). Therefore, I wanted to bring to the forefront this idea of agency and the things that can impact upon it, like the environment and societal constructs.

134. **Agency and staff well-being –** being ethnographically immersed in the research environment and then 'dwelling' upon my observations and experiences, really illuminated this idea between staff well-being and the children's agency, as something that is highly fluid and difficult to qualify. There was one moment, where the nurture room, low on staff with the rest of school at church was operating in 'survival mode'. Demands where less and there was a sense of everyone being happy was key to that survival. I reflected on how the immersion in the research field, enabled me to understand this, in a way I wouldn't when just going into schools, as part of my daily practice. I was reminded of schools before the national curriculum and Ofsted, where teachers described themselves having more autonomy and abilities to be responsive and whilst I am not in a position to reflect on this regarding pupil well-being, I wondered about the interaction between how staff were feeling on any given day and how this correlated with how much voice was heard, agency afforded to the children.

135. **Email to research school post analyses:** Key points that i am formulating for the discussion from my interpretation of the 'findings' are around;

    a) the autonomy and agency that you afford the boys by having the set up that you do, it's highly enabling for them, in part because of the spaces you have created, the structure and scaffolding, the culture of belonging, the enthusiasm of staff and also because they don't have an assigned 1:1, they

have a freedom to pursue their own interests, as well as opportunities to widen these.

b) I feel that 'seeing' the boys invokes an empathy in the reader, which may overall enable them to be understood more? I don't fully understand the impact of empathy directly towards their experiences yet, I am currently trying to work it out! I am wondering if i can make this way of 'seeing', 'writing' and 'knowing' about children and adults with complex needs, become a useful tool to engage in behaviour support approaches for those children who have severe and complex behaviours that challenge, who knows!

c) The role of staff wellbeing, staff efficacy, mandatory curriculums, outcome driven culture, professional advice, EHCP's and 'evidence based' interventions' has on a child's lived experiences- although this is a much wider indirect reflection.

The University Of Sheffield.

Participant's school staff information.

Title : Exploring the lived experience of children and young people defined as having a complex learning disability who attend a mainstream primary school. An Ethnographic study.

I would like to invite children in your school to take part in this study. Before you decide whether or not you would like your school and staff to be involved, it is important that you understand what they aims of the research are and what the study entails.

The purpose of the study is to learn about the lived experiences of children (aged 5-11) who are defined as having a complex learning disability and who attends a mainstream primary school. It aims to understand how the children experience school from their perspective, because currently this is unknown within academic research. The research also aims to understand how their voice is articulated and how it is heard. The child's participation if you decide that you think you would like your school and staff to be involved, involves;

- Me (Jill Breden) observing them over 10 Fridays in their school setting between June, July and September 2024.
- Archive material (e.g photos) relating to their experiences at school. Me (Jill Breden) sharing in looking at the photos with the child
- Me (Jill Breden) formally and informally discussing and making sense of their school experiences with school staff and parent/carers.
- Me (Jill Breden) participating within their school day alongside other school staff.
- Asking them if they would like to take photos around the school to share with me.
- Me (Jill Breden) interpreting and reflecting upon the child's experience in school through a reflective diary.

You are able to withdraw consent of your school and staff being part of the research up until October 2024.

What are the possible risks and disadvantages of taking part?

- Reflecting on a child's experiences in school may elicit knowledge that you find painful or upsetting.
- You may feel concern or anxiety that the research will cause difficulties for the school and the children and the CYP participant and their families.
- You may worry about how your school will be represented within the research.
- There is a small possibility that the time commitment may cause stress.

It is anticipated that the participating child's school in the research will not impact on them negatively, continual collaborative discussions with yourselves and school staff will aim to ensure your school staff well-being within the research. If you believe their participation is having a negative impact on them and you, you will have the right to withdraw from the study.

If you agree that your school and staff would like to take part in the study, please complete the attached consent form for me to collect at the beginning of June 2024

You will have the right to ask for data relating to your school to be removed up until October 1st 2024.

Confidentiality: If you agree for your school and staff to be part of the research, your personal information (as recorded on the consent form) will be securely stored in a digitised format on the password protected Sheffield University google drive (Encrypted) and not disclosed to anyone except the research supervisor Penny Fogg. This will be kept until the publication of the thesis. The hard copy will be shredded after digitisation. In relation to the collected research data, any details that could identify your school will be anonymised through changes of names and any identifying information. All project data will be kept in line with the Sheffield University policy, securely encrypted on the password protected google drive. I (Jill Breden) will abide by the principles of the Data protection act 1998 and the general data protection regulation 2018. Any information you disclose during the research will be kept confidential, unless you report something that suggests you or another person may be at harm. This would be discussed with you before any other person is notified.

What if something goes wrong or if I want to make a complaint

If you or your school staff are concerned or worried that something has gone wrong, please contact the researcher or Dr Penny Fogg the research supervisor. You can find these contact

details at the end of this document. We are aware of maintaining the safety and wellbeing of your school community during the research and will follow school safeguarding guidelines.

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research and wish to make a complaint, please contact Dr Penny Fogg (listed below) in the first instance. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the Head of the Department Professor Rebecca Lawthom, r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk . If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection

Who has ethically reviewed the research?

The research has been ethically approved via Sheffield University's school of Education ethical review procedure. The university's research ethics committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's ethics review procedure across the university.

Thank you for your time

	**Researcher/Trainee Educational psychologist** Jill Breden School of Education 2 Whitham Road, Sheffield S10 2AH jbreden1@sheffield.ac.uk
	Research supervisor/Director DEdPsych course **Dr Penny Fogg** School of Education 2 Whitham Road, Sheffield S10 2AH p.fogg@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix 7-

The University Of Sheffield.

Participant's school staff information.

Title : Exploring the lived experience of children and young people defined as having a complex learning disability who attend a mainstream primary school. An Ethnographic study.

I would like to invite your child to take part in this study. Before you decide whether or not they would like to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

The purpose of the study is to learn about the lived experiences of children (aged 5-11) who are defined as having a severe and complex learning disability and who attend a mainstream primary school. It aims to understand how the children experience school from their perspective, because currently this is unknown within academic research. The research also aims to understand how their voice is articulated and how it is heard. Your child's participation if you decide that you think they would like to participate will involve;

- Me (Jill Breden) observing them over 10 Fridays in their school setting between June, July and September 2024.
- Archive material (e.g photos) relating to their experiences at school. Me (Jill Breden) sharing in looking at the photos with your child
- Me (Jill Breden) informally discussing and making sense of their school experiences with school staff and yourselves as parent/carers.
- Me (Jill Breden) participating within their school day alongside other school staff.
- Asking them if they would like to take photos around the school to share with me.
- Me (Jill Breden) interpreting and reflecting upon your child's experience in school through a reflective diary.

When giving consent on behalf of your child, you must consider whether they would like to take part in the research or whether doing so may upset them. If at any stage you feel that your child would not like to continue as a participant within the research, you must let me (Jill Breden) know. I will also be checking for assent when I am in school with your child and will also be guided by teaching staff in collaboration with yourselves.

What are the possible risks and disadvantages of taking part?

- Reflecting on your child's experiences in school may elicit knowledge that you find painful or upsetting.
- You may feel concern or anxiety that the research will cause difficulties for your child.
- You may worry about how your child will be represented within the research.
- There is a small possibility that the time commitment may cause stress.

It is anticipated that your child's participation in the research will not impact on them negatively, continual collaborative discussions with yourselves and school staff will aim to ensure your child's well-being within the research. If you believe their participation is having a negative impact on them and you, you will have the right to withdraw them from the study.

If you agree that your child would like to take part in the study, please complete the attached consent form and return to your child's school by June 12th 2024.

You will have the right to ask for data relating to your child to be removed up until October 1st 2024.

Confidentiality: If you agree for your child to participate, your personal information (as recorded on the consent form) will be securely stored in a digitised format on the password protected Sheffield University google drive (Encrypted) and not disclosed to anyone except the research supervisor Penny Fogg. This will be kept until the publication of the thesis. The hard copy will be shredded after digitisation. In relation to the collected research data, any details that could identify your child will be anonymised through changes of names and any identifying information (e.g name of school). All project data will be kept in line with the Sheffield University policy, securely encrypted on the password protected google drive. I (Jill Breden) will abide by the principles of the Data protection act 1998 and the general data protection regulation 2018. Any information you disclose during the research will be kept

confidential, unless you report something that suggests you or another person may be at harm. This would be discussed with you before any other person is notified.

What if something goes wrong or if I want to make a complaint

If you or your child is concerned or worried that something has gone wrong, please contact the researcher or Dr Penny Fogg the research supervisor. You can find these contact details at the end of this document. We are aware of maintaining the safety and wellbeing of your child in school during the research and will follow school safeguarding guidelines.

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research and wish to make a complaint, please contact Dr Penny Fogg (listed below) in the first instance. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the Head of the Department Professor Rebecca Lawthom, r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk . If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection

Who has ethically reviewed the research?

The research has been ethically approved via Sheffield University's school of Education ethical review procedure. The university's research ethics committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's ethics review procedure across the university.

Thank you for your time

	**Researcher/Trainee Educational psychologist** Jill Breden School of Education 2 Whitham Road, Sheffield S10 2AH jbreden1@sheffield.ac.uk
	Research supervisor/Director DEdPsych course **Dr Penny Fogg** School of Education 2 Whitham Road, Sheffield S10 2AH p.fogg@sheffield.ac.uk
	Designated safeguarding lead – Professor Rebecca Lawthom School of Education – 2 Whitham Road, Sheffield S10 2AH R.Lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix 8

The University Of Sheffield.

Exploring the lived experience of children and young people defined as having a complex learning disability who attend a mainstream primary school. An Ethnographic study.

Parent consent form

Please tick the appropriate boxes	yes	no
I have read and understood the parent information sheet dated and the research 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 that my child can take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include the researcher observing my child, sharing historical photos with them, looking at their photos (If they choose to take any) and the researcher reflecting and interpreting data with informal conversations with school staff and parent carers.		
I understand that taking part is voluntary and that my child can withdraw from the study before October 2024. I do not have to give any reasons for why my child no longer wants to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.		
I understand mine and my child's personal details such as name and school will not be revealed to people outside the project.		
I understand and agree that my child's actions and words may be quoted in a published university thesis and other research outputs including the possibility of a published research paper, under a pseudonym.		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.		
I understand who to contact if I have any concerns or need to make a complaint as outlined on the parent information sheet.		

Participant (Your child)	**Please print name here:**	**Date:**
Parent/Legal Guardian	**Please Print here:** **Please sign here:**	**Date:**
Researcher	**Please Print here:** **Please sign here:**	**Date:**

Appendix 9

The University Of Sheffield.

Exploring the lived experience of children and young people defined as having a complex learning disability who attend a mainstream primary school. An Ethnographic study.

Parent consent form

Please tick the appropriate boxes	**yes**	**no**
I have read and understood the parent information sheet dated and the research 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 that my child can take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include the researcher observing my child, sharing historical photos with them, looking at their photos (If they choose to take any) and the researcher reflecting and interpreting data with informal conversations with school staff and parent carers.		
I understand that taking part is voluntary and that my child can withdraw from the study before October 2024. I do not have to give any reasons for why my child no longer wants to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.		
I understand mine and my child's personal details such as name and school will not be revealed to people outside the project.		
I understand and agree that my child's actions and words may be quoted in a published university thesis and other research outputs including the possibility of a published research paper, under a pseudonym.		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.		
I understand who to contact if I have any concerns or need to make a complaint as outlined on the parent information sheet.		

Participant (Your child)	**Please print name here:**	**Date:**
Parent/Legal Guardian	**Please Print here:** **Please sign here:**	**Date:**
Researcher	**Please Print here:** **Please sign here:**	**Date:**

The University Of Sheffield.

Downloaded: 10/04/2025
Approved: 10/05/2024

Jill Breden
Registration number: 220110301
School of Education
Programme: DEdpsych

Dear Jill

PROJECT TITLE: Exploring the lived experience of children with complex learning disabilities when attending a mainstream primary school
APPLICATION: Reference Number 059605

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 10/05/2024 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 059605 (form submission date: 29/04/2024); (expected project end date: 18/05/2025).
- Participant information sheet 1135601 version 1 (06/04/2024).
- Participant information sheet 1135806 version 2 (20/04/2024).
- Participant information sheet 1135809 version 2 (20/04/2024).
- Participant consent form 1135807 version 1 (13/04/2024).
- Participant consent form 1135808 version 1 (13/04/2024).

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

James Bradbury
Ethics Admin
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/research-services/ethics-integrity/policy
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066!/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Admin (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.