What are the experiences of parents and carers of a child with SEND during the

transition from secondary school to a post-16 provider?

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Abstract

Transitions from secondary school to Further Education can present significant challenges for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). However, little research has focused on their parents' experiences during this period (Beresford & Sloper, 2008; Mann, Monahan, & Smith, 2019). Successful transitions have been linked to collaborative planning and sustained communication (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015), but in practice, the parental role often becomes unclear post-16. This study explores how parents perceive and navigate their evolving roles as their children transition to FE settings. Using a qualitative design, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with three mothers whose children had recently made this transition. Data has been analysed using the Listening Guide, a relational method highlighting the multiplicity of voices within personal narratives.

Analysis of the parents' stories suggest that they often experience the transition as isolating and emotionally complex. Key narratives include the confusion surrounding parental roles during the transition beyond school, the critical importance of clear and ongoing communication, the emotional difficulty of accepting a reduced role, and a lack of meaningful collaboration between schools, colleges, and families. Parents reflect that they often felt unsupported and excluded, acknowledging that stepping back to enable their child greater independence was also necessary. The study highlights the potential for Educational Psychologists (EPs) to play a key role in supporting young people and their families during this phase of their child's life. Implications for practice include more structured, relational transition planning that explicitly recognises and promotes parental involvement.

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Acronyms

BPS – British Psychological Society

COP – Code of Practice

CYP – Child and Young Person

DfE – Department for Education

DfE – Department for Education

DoH – Department of Health

EHCP – Education, Health and Care Plan

EP – Educational Psychologist

FE – Further Education

HCPC – Health Care Professionals Council

HE - Higher Education

IPA - Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

LA – Local Authority

LG – Listening Guide

NEET – Not in Employment, Education or Training

PCF – Parent/Carer Forum

QTVI - Qualified Teacher of the Visually Impaired

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disability

SENDCo – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator

SLI - Specific Language Impairment

VI – Visually Impaired

Chapter 1: Introduction

Before commencing Educational Psychology doctoral training, I worked as a SENDCo within a college setting and as a secondary school teacher. In both roles, I supported students and parents with the transition from Key Stage Four to college and therefore had the privilege of understanding the experience from the perspective of the school and the college setting. It occurred to me in both roles that the CYP was being encouraged to take ownership of the transition and would often be the one to gain the knowledge and insight about the process. This would involve attending assemblies for information gathering, applying for post-16 or college settings independently, and writing personal statements with teacher support. While working at the college setting, I also supported CYP attending open days and open evenings, transition days, as well as gathering SEND information from CYP directly. During most of these activities there was no expectation for the parent/carers to be involved.

I have often reflected upon this transition, especially since becoming a parent myself, with the role of the parent/carer in mind. I have been at the heart of both of my daughters' transitions to nursery and primary school and have felt a great sense of involvement and reassurance as a result. Reflecting on the diminished role of parents of the CYP transitioning from Key Stage four to their FE setting made me realise how challenging this experience could have been for them, especially if their child had a recognised SEND. Research indicates that parents whose child has a recognised SEND have often been heavily involved from the beginning of their school journey and had to be energised to advocate, or if necessary, fight any battles that arose along the way, to support their child (Carpenter & Egerton, 2005; Macleod et al., 2013; Norbury et al., 2016).

There also seem to be some inconsistencies with how schools support CYP during this transition, which must have been confusing and frustrating for parents/carers.

I have found that the range of research exploring parents' experiences of their child moving from secondary school to a post-16 provider seems minimal, especially in relation to those children with a recognised SEND but without an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Most research seems to explore the transition from primary school to secondary school, and the current guidance outlined in the SEN/D Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) focuses on the transition of young people with an EHCP. There is mention of best practices for students with SEND, but the guidelines for students with an EHCP are more specific.

Spending time reflecting on the guidance for a successful transition into FE, particularly the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015), has indicated to me that parents could be confused around the process, with schools potentially drawing upon differing aspects of the guidance leading to an inconsistent approach. From my experience of working as a SENDCo in a college, it became clear early in the academic year that schools approach the transition in very different ways, with some schools leaving it to the CYP to administer the relevant information and others being more proactive with their communications.

Parents may also feel left out of the process if their child has opted to become more independent during the different phases of their transition, and this could therefore be a confusing time for them. They may be encouraged that their child has shown autonomy and

agency but also feel trepidation in that they may not be fully ready to relinquish all their responsibilities and support previously given. During my time at the college, we adopted a student-first approach where information was given to the student before being passed on to their parents/carers. Students would also be independent in discussing their personal SEND requirements with me, with some choosing not to notify me about any previous support. This could feel conflicting for some parents.

Through this research I have aimed to listen to the parents of CYP with SEND who have recently transitioned to a college/FE setting to gain a sense of their experiences and learn about how they felt during this process. I have hoped to develop my knowledge of how parents experience this transition to support secondary schools and post-16 providers/colleges in evaluating and developing their own transition processes.

Chapter 2: Critical Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

My research focus is on the experiences of parents whose child has recognised SEND and has transitioned from secondary school to a FE college or setting within the last three years. From my experience, much of the research into the impact of transitions on young people tends to relate to children transitioning from primary school to secondary school, as this is considered the most significant educational event (West et al., 2010). Parents' views have been considered in prior research, but again, mainly based on their experiences during their child's primary school to secondary school transition. Much of this research also seems to draw upon quantitative data where questionnaires were used to explore the views of Year Six children and their parents (Ashton, 2008) or statistical analysis of pupil and parent concerns pre and post transition was a focus (Rice et al., 2011). As a result, there seems to be a gap in the research considering the transition from secondary school to a FE setting and in qualitatively exploring the parents' perspectives and experiences during this process.

This review of the literature aims to critically analyse the most recent and relevant policies and research relating specifically to the transition for young people with SEND and their parents' experiences. I begin by exploring how concepts of adolescence, childhood, and transitions have been conceptualised through different psychological and sociological perspectives. I then discuss the legislation that underpins transitions within the UK and the policies that settings must consider or uphold. I go on to introduce the school's role in the process of transition

before introducing research exploring a range of factors which influence transitions, and the success of them, from a variety of perspectives including the CYP and the parent. The final section focuses on the identity of parents whose child has recognised SEND through this process.

2.1 Childhood and Adulthood

It has been postulated that childhood, as a concept, has evolved historically, for example from it being acceptable for children to increase the home's income through work, to children having more of a protected state in the modern world where they are pushed back from adulthood (Kehily, 2004). The child has been positioned as a threat or as a victim to highlight the weakness and innocence childhood portrays (Hendrick, 2005). Childhood can also be viewed as the investment of the nation, conveying the country's expectations for the future (Hendrick, 2003). From a developmental point of view, childhood is the period from birth to adolescence and can be characterised by the rapid development of physical, social, emotional and cognitive changes (Santroick, 2019). It can also be understood from a sociocultural perspective as a category of time in our lives that varies depending on each person's historical, cultural, and contextual setting (James & Prout, 1997).

Adulthood is usually defined as a period where cognitive, physical, and psychosocial developments reach their highest level (Klimczuk, 2016). This perceived highest level can be different depending on cultural and socio-economic factors. From a developmental psychology lens, adulthood can be defined as that part of our human development which takes place after

adolescence and puberty and lasts until the end of life. This can start at approximately 13-19

years of age (Klimczuk, 2016). Steinberg (2017) describes adolescence as the period between

childhood and adulthood, spanning the ages of 10 to 19 years. Arnett (2000) felt there was an

additional period between adolescence and adulthood, which is defined as emerging

adulthood, where the exploration of identity continues.

The typical period the transition to a FE college or setting takes place is when the CYP is aged

16, situated within their period of adolescence or early adulthood.

2.2 Adolescence to Early Adulthood

There are many theories that examine the shift from adolescence to early adulthood, often

coming from a developmental paradigm, that help in understanding the importance of a

successful transition.

Erikson (1950) associated an essential aspect of development into adulthood as intimacy,

suggesting that for an adolescent to develop into early adulthood, they would need to establish

intimate relationships to ensure they do not carry a feeling of isolation. This is an aspect of his

eight-stage theory which has been critiqued as being too structured, as one stage must be

completed before moving onto the next. There is also, arguably, little consideration of

sociocultural context. Bronfenbrenner's model (1979) on the other hand outlined the influence

of environmental systems on our development, which provides a framework for helping us

understand the social contexts that impact our lives and shape adolescent experiences.

Arnett (2006) considered that development into adulthood can be viewed as a positive, optimistic time when dreams and motivations are established, as it is a stage of life that can be fluid and changeable, leading to increased independence and agency. Piaget (1952) argued that cognitive development continues throughout our life cycle and that the adolescent stage can be defined as the operational stage, which is recognised as developing abstract thought and hypothetical reasoning.

These various perspectives and emphases display how confusing and conflicting it can be for a person developing through this stage of time. Erikson (1968) identified the main task for adolescents to solve is their identity versus role confusion crisis, developing their sense of self and identity whilst also developing relationships with others. This is a significant idea relevant to successful transitions in that it feels important to ensure the student has enough support to establish and sustain relationships with peer groups and to recognise their own qualities as part of their identity development.

The concept of identity and relationship to different contexts seems complex. Waterman (1993) believed that identity can be understood through an individual's reflected best potential, displayed through activities that an individual views as meaningful and purposeful in achieving life goals. Motyl (2010) proposed that identity can be summed up with the answer to the question: Who am I? This is a question an adolescent may ask themselves as they transition to adulthood and onto their next educational setting after secondary school.

From a sociological perspective, adolescence can be viewed through a structural-functionalist lens, which suggests it is a period of socialisation that prepares young people for their forthcoming adult roles, thereby contributing to the stability of society (Merton, 1938). However, this perspective has been critiqued for its failure to acknowledge how structural inequalities including class, race, gender, and disability can shape adolescent experiences (Lesko, 2012; Wyn & White, 1997). From a Marxist perspective, education does not just prepare children and young people for their forthcoming adult roles, but it serves to maintain existing class hierarchies (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Willis, 1977). A symbolic interactionist paradigm, however, views the meaning of adolescence to be constructed through our social interactions, which influence identity formation through exchanges with family, peers, and the media (Russell, 1984). This perspective highlights our subjective experiences of adolescence but perhaps does not consider broader structural influences in enough detail.

The development into adolescence and our experiences during this time, it can be argued, are not only shaped by age but also by other factors, including gender, race, class, and sexuality. Considering an intersectional lens highlights the complexity and diverse nature of adolescent experiences.

2.3 Transitions

Transition is a movement between systems that anyone can experience at any age (Cooley et al., 1993). As a concept, transition has become linked with the process of leaving school (Dee, 2006), and it is argued that one of the most significant transitions we will make is that into

adulthood, where there are multiple new systems which the young person must learn about

and negotiate (Kohler et al., 2003). It is during this period when many potentially unsettling

events occur, including understanding the changing relationships we have and our roles in

society (Heslop et al., 2002). McGinty and Fish (1992) discuss this as a multi-factored phase that

changes the responsibilities and dependence of the young person, including in relation to their

education. The transition into adulthood for young people, therefore, seems a complex process.

The process for children with an EHCP transitioning throughout the Key Stages is one that gives

greater emphasis to identifying the child's strengths and needs and encourages parental

engagement. As outlined in the SEND Code of Practice: "Local authorities must ensure that

children, their parents, and young people are involved in discussions and decisions about their

individual support and about local provision" (DfE & DfH, 2015, p. 20).

The Education and Skills Act 2008 made it a legal requirement for students to continue their

education or enrol in a suitable training programme until they reach the age of 18, or until they

have completed a level three qualification. These requirements are designed to ensure all

students leave education with suitable skills and qualifications: "A person who is over

compulsory school age but under 18 must participate in education or training" (Education and

Skills Act, 2008, Section 2(1)). The aim behind the requirement was to improve the

qualifications and abilities of students to ensure they would help develop the workforce,

enabling the UK to compete on the international market: "…to increase participation to

improve the qualifications and skills of young people and to help them to succeed in life and in

work, thereby contributing to the economy" (Education and Skills Act 2008, Explanatory Notes,

para. 9). This would also ensure students had an increase in the knowledge needed to ensure they could thrive in adult life and earn more money, thus keeping them away from crime: "Participation in education and training can bring significant benefits to young people themselves, including better job prospects, higher wages, and a lower likelihood of being involved in crime" (Education and Skills Act 2008, Explanatory Notes, para. 8).

The transition proposals identified within the Education and Skills Act (2008) were critiqued by Maguire (2013), who outlined the various impacts the new measures would have on children categorised as not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Maguire adopts a sceptical tone when focusing on the information within the paper, and states that the rates of students aged 16+ choosing to stay within post-16 education were increasing anyway, before the new proposals were introduced. Maguire suggests that the reason for the increase could have been the introduction of incentives, including the now-redacted in England means-tested education maintenance grant (EMA), which financially rewarded students from lower income households for attending a post-16 setting. Removing such incentives has left Local Authorities (LA) in England to plan their own bespoke proposals and measures to help engage post-16 learners to stay within education and training. Nevertheless, Maguire also highlights that even though there was an increase of 16 and 17-year-olds staying in education and training at this time, the number of 18-year-olds classed as NEET was increasing. This potentially highlighted that the financial incentive was a short-term measure which could have been masking other relevant issues.

Within her paper, Maguire acknowledges the complexity of transitions to and after college for some young people, and the need to try and engage with the vulnerable young people who are at risk of becoming NEET. Maguire argues that a combination of financial incentives, support from services, and bespoke provision for each young person is needed to support and engage with young people to convince them to continue with their education or training (Maguire, 2013).

It can be interpreted that the message from Maguire is that an increase in the compulsory education leaving age will not work at keeping young people in education and training as a solitary measure. Instead, various incentives and provisions should work alongside it to have the most impact. My reflections on the proposals are that the increase in compulsory education age at least brings conversations about the importance of post-16 education to the forefront, given that this was a national proposal that affected every school-aged child. I also believe this policy required some reinforcement for it to encourage young people to show commitment. This view is supported by Spielhofer et al. (2009), who found that legislative change alone is insufficient to motivate young people to remain in education or training. Instead, they are more likely to stay if they are offered personalised support, trusted relationships, and bespoke educational pathways.

Acquah and Huddlestone (2014) discussed the significance of the support young people require as they go through the transition process post education. A concern expressed focused on cuts to funding for mainstream schools across the UK and how this might affect how well schools

inform and guide their students to make informed decisions, as well as give adequate and bespoke career guidance. Both Maguire (2013) and Acquah and Huddlestone (2014) also highlight the need for tailored individual support for vulnerable students within school settings, including those with SEND, so they can access personalised programmes that offer thoughtful and differentiated delivery that makes make them accessible and more likely to make a positive impact on the young person's life.

2.4 Transitions for children with SEND

Research has been conducted on the experiences of post-16 students with SEND in their transition to adulthood. Keil & Crews (2008) explored the experiences of young people with a visual impairment (VI) who had gone through a recent transition using a longitudinal multiple case study design. The research aimed to identify any themes that emerged. The researchers wanted to understand what could be defined as a successful and an unsuccessful transition based on the CYP's experiences. A key finding of the research was the difference in experience between those who stayed within their sixth form setting and those who went to a FE college. The study identified a vastly different experience for CYP in sixth forms with a VI regarding their access to specialised equipment to support their education, and access to specialised VI staff. Having access to a Qualified Teacher of the Visually Impaired (QTVI) was highlighted as a prominent benefit for those students who stayed at the sixth form provision of their secondary school as typically the support from the QTVI continued and they were able to support classroom teachers with their teaching and speak with outside agencies and services. The QTVI also monitored the progress of the young person.

This kind of transition seemed easier and helped the young person feel more settled sooner. Reading how this support was so quickly put in place at the school sixth form setting demonstrates the importance of continuing support and how especially important this is for a young person going to an external FE setting. The 2015 SEND Code of Practice states that relevant information should be shared between settings as quickly as possible to ensure that provision can be put in place and the young person can feel settled and confident that they will receive the support they need. (DfE & DoH, 2015, p. 99). Keil & Crews' (2008) research identified that one young person within their study moved to an external setting, and this led to their support not starting as soon as they enrolled and the communication between the settings not being efficient. These complications led to the young person leaving their college. It does not seem clear within the Code of Practice (2014) who is responsible for passing the relevant information over to the new setting, and from my experience, it is often left to the young person to do so.

Another study that highlights the voices of young people with SEND and their experiences of transitions was that by Palikara, Lindsay & Dockrell (2009). They conducted a longitudinal study focusing on young people with specific language impairment (SLI) and how their voices were heard, specifically within their first year at their post-16 settings. The research initially identified that these young people were experts in their own SEND and could detail the specific interventions and support they required. They could expertly evaluate the previous support they had received and how effective it had been. This outlined that young people could, and should, be fully involved in their transition and have a voice within the decision-making process.

Madriaga and Goodley (2010) support this view and highlight the need to listen to young people within Higher Education (HE) and ensure their voice is heard to best support their needs and provide them with best experience. Although this paper focuses on CYP with a diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome and how they have experienced HE, the lessons and ideas could be applied to CYP with SEND more generally within any educational institution, which indicates how important it is that the young person's voice and opinions are captured and drawn upon when planning their support.

Despite much of this study highlighting the frustrations CYP can face when trying to attain the right support, and their negative experiences including problems with their peers, it also demonstrates that a large proportion nevertheless had good experiences post-16 and felt their time in education was largely positive. One example voiced by the CYP was having a network of support that extends to friends, which was stated as invaluable for those with SEND feeling settled and supported.

Parental support has also been highlighted as another important aspect of a successful transition to a post-16 educational institution. Carrol and Dockrell (2012) researched the challenges students with SLI faced when transitioning to a new setting. They gained the perspectives of young people with SLI and of their experiences of their transitions to post-16 education, where parental support was acknowledged as a fundamental element of a successful transition. Parents were utilised during this phase to build the CYP's confidence, provide important emotional support, and be a voice for the young person when required. In

my experience, parents are often encouraged to allow the young person to take control of their transition to help them develop agency and autonomy. Parents, as a result, can feel left out of the process.

I have been curious about how parents feel about losing some of the support they have previously offered in the decision-making process. Carroll and Dockrell's (2012) study took place between two and three years after each young person had already transitioned to a post-16 setting, which could be seen as a limitation as each young person was looking back retrospectively at the experience, and so their insight may have been harder to achieve given a few years had passed. It may also mean that some of their experiences may have been inaccurately stated.

Polat et al (2001) conducted a three-wave longitudinal study involving over 5000 participants using semi-structured interviewing with the aim of exploring the experiences of young people and their transition from compulsory education. The study encouraged participants to discuss the strengths and challenges of their transition. Practitioners and others involved in the transition process also participated, including parents and carers, teachers and SENDCos. This study differed from Carroll and Dockrell's in that the participants took part when they were still in Year 11 and going through the transition process, giving a more current perspective. Key findings from the study included that 70% of the young people interviewed stated that they believed school had supported them in planning their future. Interestingly, 60% of the participants also felt that school had given them the confidence to make their own decisions.

The study also found that of the parents and CYP who had taken part, most had been a part of an annual review process where planning for adulthood was a focus, and a transition plan was created. This had tended to happen during Year 10, which is a year behind the recommended Year Nine annual review (DfE & DoH, 2015, p. 116). The study also found that some parents and young people were unaware of whether they had a transition plan or attended an annual review. They described being uncertain about the process. Despite the SEND Code of Practice (2015) stating: "Children, their parents and young people should be involved in discussions and decisions about their individual support…" (DfE & DoH, 2015, p. 20), which makes it important that young people have a voice throughout the process, 38% of the young people interviewed felt that their views had not been expressed or heard (Shaw & Hatton, 2009).

Having external support can be an essential element of the transition process (Mann, Monahan, & Smith, 2019), especially if the practitioners like careers advisors have specific expert knowledge. It is necessary to note that most of the participants in Polet et al.'s research had been given access to a career's advisor and 80% felt that the experience and opportunity was helpful in assisting them to develop their plan.

Polet et al's (2001) study could be evaluated as being too descriptive and exploratory in its analysis, as the data is not as qualitatively rich as it could have been. The large number of participants meant the research involved statistical analysis of the data, allowing for an understanding of the significance of the results from a positivist stance but not an exploration of individual experiences of the transition. The options provided for to which participants were

asked to respond were closed, compared to a more qualitative or mixed-methods approach. This included participants being asked to rate their level of preparedness for the transition using Likert scales and then indicate whether they had received support using simple yes or no options. These fixed-response categories limited participants' opportunities to expand on their views or describe their personal experiences in detail.

Aston el at. (2005) identified that parents and carers play a pivotal role within the transition period and their support for the young person is an influential factor. This research also highlighted that parents and carers can feel undermined if they have not been given the relevant information regarding either the process or the different outcomes each post-16 provider may provide. The transition can be especially difficult to navigate if those it affects have not been through it before. There may also be tensions between what parents would like for their child to experience and access and what their child may find beneficial and accessible.

Kohler and Field (2003) considered some essential aspects of successful transitions for young people, which they suggest should ensure the young person can develop their knowledge and skills but also include opportunities to use these skills in different contexts. They acknowledge that students should play a key role in their own transition. Interestingly, parents are not acknowledged in this study. The research took place in 2003, when access to extracurricular opportunities and more vocational opportunities was discussed as a prospect for the young person in developing their confidence. With changes in curriculum and schools focusing more on a narrower subject offering due to the inclusion of accountability measures including

Progress 8 and the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) which have contributed to the reduction in

the range of subjects offered (Worth, 2021; EPI, 2017), I wonder if this would still be the case.

Parents' expectations have been highlighted as playing a pivotal role within a young person's

transition and the experiences and opportunities they go on to have (Carpenter & Fleishman,

1987; Hossler & Stage, 1988). Parents' expectations sometimes impact the long-term outcomes

of the young person and their aspirational goals, which shows the powerful and influential role

parents can play in the transition process. However, studies focusing on the role of parents

within the transition process are sparse, and there are few that capture parents' own specific

experiences.

The involvement of parents in the transition process and in the schooling of young people, both

with and without SEND, has been shown to impact how the CYP have progressed (Danek and

Busby, 1999). It is suggested that there are various systems at play during the process, and for

parents to be involved they need to have knowledge of the systems and be involved in them

before the transition period begins (Rizzo and Varrin, 1997). Danek and Busby (1999) discuss

the impact parents can have on successful transitions if they have a good relationship with both

the school and the various agencies that have supported the young person, their own

expectations for the young person are realistic and they have resources at their disposal. The

transition can be severely hampered if the parents have been given the wrong, or no

information. Research has shown that unclear communication between services and families

leads to increased parental anxiety and feelings of exclusion during the transition to post-16 provision (Sloper, 2004; Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016).

In Gillan and Coughlan's research (2010), parents have identified transition to adulthood as their CYP moving from school to employment and seem to hold this definition in isolation without much consideration for any other aspects or experience it could encompass. It was identified by Tarleton & Ward (2005), however, that some parents identified transitions as the young person moving towards becoming an adult and adapting to adult responsibilities. This has been highlighted as a difficult time for parents but also exciting, as they might discuss how they encourage their children to make independent decisions about their lives (Maddison & Beresford, 2012). In other research parents accept that their child has developed into a young adult. In contrast, others have not wanted to label them as such just yet and defined their CYP as being in a phase of life between childhood and adulthood (Murphy et al., 2010). Murphy (2010) have also identified that some parents find it difficult to accept that their child has developed into a young adult as they are still very much dependent on them for support and may see the transition period as a moment where they are identifying new provision to keep their child occupied throughout the day.

These different perspectives and viewpoints held by parents of children with SEND reflect the variety of needs and bespoke support they may require.

Ward et al. (1992) interviewed a small sample of parents of children with SEND. During the research, it was identified that there was no consistent view on their child's transition through education. Views tended to demonstrate satisfaction with the provision their child received during their time at school but that this experience declined significantly after they had left. The parents interviewed felt the system at the time did not offer enough support to the young person during this period and the needs of the young person were no longer met once they ceased attending school. This suggests the important role schools play in supporting the young person and meeting their needs through this period. It would be helpful to understand whether the perspective of parents has changed since this research was completed.

2.5 Legislation:

As indicated, an important policy document used by schools and most specifically SENDCos, to guide support for CYP with SEND, is the SEND Code of Practice (2015) which details clear stages for schools to apply to ensure the transition to post-16 for their students with SEND is effective. As part of a holistic transition process the Code of Practice (2015) recommends that transition begins in Year Nine during the annual review. The focus of the annual review should be on creating the transition plan for the young person, which would then be reviewed in ensuing years (DfE & DoH, 2015, Section 8.9). The Year Nine annual review should also involve external agencies and staff members who can support the young person with their ideas for future aspirations (DfE & DoH, 2015, Section 8.9).

Starting the transition period at this early stage can be viewed positively in that it allows the

young person adequate time to consider their options and to think seriously about their next

steps before entering the next phase of their educational life. The time between transitions and

the factors which influence the final decision have been identified as being more important

than the transition itself (Bradley, 2012).

The Code of Practice also recommends that once the CYP has identified their next provision, a

representative from the setting will attend each annual review from Year 10 onwards to build

up knowledge about the young person. However, this might be problematic as it may be

difficult for a representative to attend each review, and the young person may ultimately

change their mind and no longer want to attend the setting.

There is also a question of what support those young people with SEND, but without an EHCP,

receive during their transition beyond school. The Ofsted Inspection Handbook (2023) indicates

that schools are required to offer effective career guidance, which needs to be evidenced

during an inspection. It is also advised that career guidance begins from Year Eight to support

young people in considering their aspirations and options for the future.

When the SEND Code of Practice was published in 2015 it included changes which should have

increased clarity round the support required during the transition process and enabled better

experiences for students with SEND. The main amendment was to ensure that the child,

together with their parents, is heavily involved in decision making (DfE & DoH, 2015, Section

1.9). There is also an increase to the age range of CYP with SEND to 25, emphasising the importance of supporting this group of young people with into adulthood, which is viewed as a major transition (Keller et al., 2007). The Code of Practice also highlights the importance of documenting conversations focusing upon life outcomes for the young person, no matter how young they may be when they receive their EHCP. These life outcomes are aspirational and include living independently, good health, participating in the community and employment (DfE & DoH, 2015, Section 8.15). The Code of Practice highlights that this process should begin once a plan has been issued but it is not at least until Year Nine when the detailed planning tends to start (DfE & DoH, 2015, Section 8.9).

The Code of Practice also gives objectives of what should be achieved through the planning for post-16 transitions. These include: exploring the aspirations of the individual; ensuring the school and the college/post-16 setting create taster sessions and visits to support the individual to feel confident and comfortable in their new setting and that the key information is passed between establishments; utilising provision which develops the skills and achievements of the young person; discussing the ambitions of the young person and ensuring the new setting is aware of these and of how they can support the young person so that they are realised (DfE & DoH, 2015, Sections 8.9–8.14). It could be argued that a flaw in this system is that no one is named as the person responsible for overseeing the process, although it is stated that the local authority should ensure the meetings and reviews take place (DfE & DoH, 2015, Section 8.9) so it could be inferred that they have the responsibility, but this is not clear.

2.6 The Role of Schools

One of the roles of schools is to act as a place of socialisation for young people so they are equipped and prepared to develop into adulthood (Wallace, 1989; Lyons & Coyle, 2007). This idea of schools being a place of socialisation could be seen as a simplistic observation as schools are complex institutions, but this idea has been developed further in relation to the transition from childhood to adulthood by other theorists including Rudd (1997), who acknowledges the important part schools play. Rudd (1997) discussed the autonomy that young people have during this process and how they do not just passively conform. Rather, schools have a key role in supporting the young person in developing their skills and confidence in decision making during this time (Ashton, 2008).

The School Inspection Handbook (Ofsted, 2023) states that schools must provide evidence that the CYP in their schools are equipped and ready for the next phase in their education, training, or employment. It is also explicit in its demands that schools ensure the curriculum complements the transition by highlighting experiences and responsibilities that the students may come up against in their later life, and the skills they will need. These include obtaining the knowledge and skills to live independently, with a focus on money management and accessing transportation in order to travel. Schools classed as 'good' or 'outstanding' will have a focus on their SEND cohort and ensure they are included within this process.

While these expectations promote independence and adult readiness, my research suggests that such expectations can feel overwhelming for parents of CYP with SEND, particularly if their

child requires a high level of support. The tension between supporting and preparing the CYP

for independence, whilst maintaining parental involvement, demonstrates that this is a

complex landscape which can be very emotional for all involved.

2.7 Advocacy and Partnerships

Partnership between parents and educational providers is widely recognised as a key principle of

effective SEND provision, yet research highlights significant variation in the quality and nature of

these partnerships. The SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education & Department of

Health, 2015) promotes co-production and collaborative working with parents, reflecting a policy

shift towards shared decision-making. However, several studies note that this aspiration is often

not realised in practice, with partnerships tending to be uneven or tokenistic (Bryan et al., 2018;

Harris & Rutter, 2020). Parents frequently describe feeling peripheral to key decisions,

particularly during transition periods, as schools and colleges prioritise institutional procedures

and resource management over meaningful engagement (Mann et al., 2019). Critical analysis of

this literature reveals a tension between policy rhetoric and lived experience, while co-

production is framed as a statutory and ethical obligation. In practice, power remains largely with

professionals, leaving parents to navigate uncertainty and feelings of exclusion (Beresford et al.,

2017).

Within this dynamic, mothers are often positioned as the primary advocates for their children

with SEND, carrying the responsibility of negotiating services and coordinating provision whilst

ensuring their child's needs are recognised. This advocacy role is frequently experienced as both

necessary and emotionally taxing, and requiring persistence, resilience, and the management of complex relational dynamics. Vincent (2012) describes this as invisible labour, whereby mothers perform the behind-the-scenes emotional and administrative work of sustaining their child's education while managing interactions with multiple professionals. Several qualitative studies emphasise the emotional toll of this role. Mothers report feeling that they must remain calm and diplomatic as well as informed, even when experiencing frustration or distress, in order to maintain positive relationships with schools and local authorities (Angell et al., 2009; Lalvani, 2015). The experience of advocacy is often compounded by systemic and cultural expectations of mothers as primary carers and protectors. Ryan and Runswick-Cole (2008) and Lalvani (2015) note a double bind, whereby mothers who persist in seeking support also risk being perceived as overbearing, yet stepping back can leave their child's needs unmet. This constant negotiation of self-presentation and emotion reflects both the emotional labour and the gendered dimensions of advocacy. Studies such as Todd and Higgins (1998) and Gray (2002) have further highlighted that mothers often feel isolated in this role, as advocacy frequently falls on one parent, usually the mother, while fathers are less visible in educational processes. Critical analysis of this literature suggests that advocacy is not a neutral activity as it is shaped by unequal power dynamics, with mothers navigating professional hierarchies and implicit judgments about their parenting.

Despite this extensive labour, the contribution of mothers is often unrecognised or undervalued by educational systems. Research highlights that even highly engaged mothers may find their input marginalised (Bryan et al., 2018; Harris & Rutter, 2020). This outlines the importance of

attending to the emotional and identity work of advocacy, which remains underexplored in the context of post-16 transitions.

2.8 Conclusion

In researching this area, it became apparent to me that much of the existing literature focused on earlier transitions from either primary to secondary school (West et al., 2010; Evangelou et al., 2008), and there is less research focusing on secondary to post-16 transitions (Griffin & Shevlin, 2011; Mann et al., 2019). Parents' views have been considered in some research but when they are included, they are often reported in quantitative studies (Polet et al., 2001) or referenced as a way of complementing practitioner-focused findings. This leaves a gap in the research in attempting to understand the lived experiences of parents and carers during what seems to be a highly emotional and uncertain period, particularly when their child has a recognised SEND (Beresford & Sloper, 2008; Cummings et al., 2012). Although guidance such as the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) encourages person-centred planning and parental involvement, research suggests that there can be a disparity in how this is implemented (Adams et al., 2017).

Many studies focus on systemic or structural aspects of transition without capturing the relational and emotional complexities that parents may face (Todd & Jones, 2005; Black & Simon, 2014). I noticed a lack of research that captures the voices and lived experiences of parents/carers, particularly through qualitative approaches that allow for the richness of their experiences to be explored (Downes et al., 2018; Woodcock, 2016).

The literature included in this chapter helped to frame the transition to further education as a complex and emotionally charged process for parents of young people with SEND. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) offered a useful structure for thinking about the wider systems surrounding transition, and Erikson's (1950) work helped to position the transition within the broader developmental tasks of adolescence. These theoretical perspectives supported a more layered understanding of the issues parents described in existing studies.

Several of the empirical papers brought parental voice to the front. Ryan and Runswick-Cole (2009), for example, captured some of the emotional and identity work involved in parenting a child with SEND within systems that often feel hard to navigate. Coughlan and Kelly (2021) drew attention to how structures and processes within education can unintentionally reinforce disadvantage, which was helpful when thinking about the institutional context surrounding parents. These studies complemented the focus of this thesis and supported some of the emerging lines of enquiry.

While the literature offered breadth, there were relatively few studies that focused specifically on the transition from secondary to further education, and fewer still that explored this from the perspective of parents. Much of the research was weighted towards mothers, which reflects wider trends but also leaves some voices under-represented. Research also focused heavily on commentary or policy critique, without always offering rich accounts of lived experience. This left some gaps, particularly in terms of understanding how parents themselves made sense of the

transition process. My own research sought to contribute to this space by offering a more focused exploration of parental perspectives at this specific transition point.

2.9 Research Question

My research aims to address this gap by asking: What are the experiences of parents and carers of a child with SEND during the transition from secondary school to a post-16 provider? I hope that by amplifying their voices, this study can offer meaningful insight into how transition processes can be better supported, both practically and emotionally, for families navigating this important stage of their child's development.

The overall aims of my research are:

- To explore the experiences of parents and carers of children with recognised SEND during the transition from secondary school to post-16 education.

- To examine the emotional and practical challenges parents and carers face during this transition period.

- To identify potential implications for professional practice, with a focus on schools, colleges and Educational Psychologists, to help improve the transition experience for parents.

2.10 Rationale for the Research

The rationale for this study emerged from the gaps and limitations in the existing literature, alongside the practical realities of current educational practice. Transitions to FE represent a period of significant change for young people with SEND and their families, yet this stage has received far less empirical attention than the research in primary to secondary transition. The research that does exist has often focused on statutory processes, leaving the experiences of families navigating non-statutory pathways underexplored (Hughes et al., 2019; Mann et al., 2015). Parents of CYP with a recognised SEN are frequently expected to manage transition without the statutory protections afforded by an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), which can increase uncertainty and place greater responsibility on parental advocacy. This gap in understanding the emotional and relational dimensions of non-statutory transitions highlights the need for a study that captures the lived experiences of these parents in their own words.

This study is also justified by the relational and systemic complexities revealed in the literature. Policy frameworks emphasise partnership and co-production, but in practice, parental voice is often marginalised, and mothers in particular carry the primary burden of advocacy within unequal systems (Ryan & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Kyzar et al., 2012). By foregrounding the voices of parents or carers whose children have recently transitioned to FE without an EHCP, this research addresses a critical gap in both contemporary research and professional understanding. Much of the foundational work on parental advocacy and SEND transitions was conducted between the late 1990s and early 2010s (e.g., Todd & Higgins, 1998; Angell et al., 2009), limiting its reflection of the current post-2015 policy landscape. There remains a need for research that

situates parental experience within the realities of today's educational and policy context, where co-production is emphasised but inconsistently enacted. This study responds to that need by providing a qualitative exploration of parental experience under the current SEND framework, contributing to a more inclusive and emotionally attuned understanding of transition within educational psychology.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this section I will aim to examine and explain the reason for my choice of method and my approach to the analysis of the data, beginning with my ontological and epistemological positioning.

3.2 Positionality

Ontology can be defined as a position we take that underpins ideas about our reality and how we choose to interpret it (Hepburn, 2003). The range of ontological positions I could have embraced included, on one end of the spectrum, a realist position which suggests that a fixed truth exists. In contrast to this is relativism and the belief that multiple realities exist, which our own experiences and contexts shape over time (Rorty, 1991). I felt that it was important that I understood my own concepts of truth and reality whilst exploring and considering my positioning within my research. Bracken (2010) outlined the impact understanding of our ontological positions can have on identifying the influence of our contexts, including historical, cultural, and philosophical, on our research.

I planned to use a narrative approach to explore my research question as my aim was to capture the experiences of parents and carers within a broader social and cultural context (Emerson & Frosh, 2004). Narratives can also illuminate the intersections of the cultural contexts of the individual concerned (Gergen, 2015). My epistemological position within the

narrative perspective is social constructionism, as I believe there is no objective reality, and that social interaction creates our understanding of the world (Berger, 1966). I believe that each participant in my research will have a different experience of the transition process and will have been impacted in different ways; I do not believe there will be one truth and one way to experience it (Foucault, 1972).

By adopting a narrative-based interpretation of my participants' experiences of their child making the transition from secondary school to a post-16 provider, I intended to try to come as close to their version of their truth as possible. I therefore explored different positions to help me understand my own thinking and I eventually felt that relativism ontologically matched my aims. I believed that the way each participant would interpret their experiences through their narrative would depend on their unique experience. This also led me to consider the Listening Guide (LG) to inform the analysis of my data as it involves analysing each interview separately with no comparison needed. Having the opportunity to explore multiple experiences and accept that some may be conflicting supported me to identify my relativist perspective, which I felt aligned with Young (1990) who argued that social identities and experiences shape people's perspectives and can lead to different understandings of justice, rights, and inclusion. I felt that this was directly relevant when considering the varying experiences of parents in educational contexts. Relativism helps frame research in a way that acknowledges the complexity of human experiences, suggesting that "truths" and "realities" are subjective and shaped by personal, cultural, and social factors.

Considering this ontological spectrum and deciding to position myself within relativism affirmed to me that working within a socially constructed epistemology also suited my research. Social constructionism is compatible with a relativist ontology, suggesting that there is an array of different possible realities and not a single truth (Burr, 2003). Social Constructionists therefore take the view that knowledge is constructed (Andrews, 2012) and so there is a desire to make sense of the nature of reality whilst acknowledging that observations of the world are not an accurate reflection. I adopted the position that information and our experiences are created through the social processes we experience. The concept of reality is something we do not just exist in but is something that is moulded and shaped by our experiences and interactions. I was aware that each participant would be bringing their own experiences and contexts to their narrative interview that would be relative to them. I felt that it was likely that each participant would reconstruct their experiences using language that would also help them construct their thoughts into something others might understand, thus shaping the meaning of their experiences (Burr, 2003). A social constructionist epistemology was consistent with my desire to consider each individual experience.

I entered my research with a genuine sense of curiosity as I wanted to try to understand the narrated experiences of each of my participants fully; this meant trying to be aware of, and acknowledging, some of my own experiences, preconceptions and ideas of what the transition to a setting after secondary school could feel like. I identified that my prior experiences as a teacher in a mainstream secondary school and former SENDCo at a post 16 provider, and my current experiences as a parent of two children who have recently transitioned to primary

school, were likely to influence the questions I asked, my choice of follow-up questions, the way I interpreted the narratives shared during the interviews and how I would go about analysing my participants' responses using the LG. However, I was keen to ensure that I would not restrict a participant's narrative by bringing my own experiences directly into the interview. It was important to me to reflect on the questions I was going to construct to ensure they would encourage the participants to engage with them authentically, storying their perceived truth in their responses. I also considered how I would ask the questions and how I would analyse the responses.

Social constructionists believe that knowledge is not a separate entity to our experiences and that they each shape the other. What we experience can be accepted as genuine knowledge (Willig, 2013). As indicated, my research will not act to compare one participant's experience with that of another participant, including their perceived facts about transitions. I will instead aim to respect each narrative of experience and explore and analyse it whilst acknowledging my own voice within the narrative told. My research question, therefore, embodies a relativist social constructionist ontology and epistemology through its ambition to explore the personal experiences of each participant:

What are the experiences of parents and carers of a child with SEND during the transition from secondary school to a post-16 provider?

My research question is interested in each participant's subjective and individual experiences and not objective facts around transition. My research question also assumes that the experiences spoken about will not only be personal to each participant but will also have been shaped by each participant's social, cultural, and institutional context. My attempt to understand the perspectives of each parent and their individual experiences as situated within specific societal contexts will allow me to examine how they have been constructed through particular social meanings, aligning with the principles of relativism and social constructionism.

3.3 Qualitative Methods

Qualitative methods appealed to me as they would allow me to focus on experience, meaning and perspective (Hammarberg, 2016) and enable deeper insight into real-world problems (Moser, 2017) than quantitative methodologies might have done. These were elements I was keen for my research to encompass. Qualitative research also appealed to me as it offered an open-ended approach (Cleland, 2017), allowing each participant to explore their experiences without too much structure limiting their communication. A strength of qualitative research is that it offers a way to explain patterns of human behaviour that can be challenging to quantify (Foley, 2015). Another strength is the ability to capture the story from the perspective of the person involved in the experience, which prompted my interest in narrative research. Qualitative methods also aim to explain human behaviour by examining the social structures within which it occurs (Flick, 2004). I chose to proceed with a qualitative methodology because this would offer me an opportunity to examine and attempt to better understand the complexities and nuances of a parent's experience of their child's transition process.

A qualitative approach aims to gather deeper insight into each participant's experiences than might be achieved using quantitative research (Anderson and Kirkpatrick, 2016). The literature related to transitions contained a large amount of quantitative research already, where data had been gathered related to the students transitioning but not their parents' experiences, so I was aware of a need for such research.

3.4 Rejecting Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a useful method when exploring areas which are rich in emotion (Smith, 2015). I had initially considered using IPA as I was drawn to the possibility of gaining exposure to each participant's individual experiences (Willig, 2014). IPA is a qualitative method which focuses on providing in-depth insights into individuals' personal lived experiences (Smith, 2009). As a method it aims to understand lived experiences by focusing on the specific experiences individuals have and the meanings they attach to them. It emphasises the process of meaning-making in relation to these experiences. IPA is a collaborative approach as it explores these meanings through the interpretative interaction between the researcher and the participant rather than being driven by predefined theories (Smith, 2009). I liked that it offers opportunities to seek to understand the experiences of participants and that it places emphasis on their voice. IPA also attempts to understand how individuals interpret their own experiences, which is something I also wanted to explore within my research.

One aspect which dissuaded me from using IPA was the idiographic element of the method, which requires the researcher to interpret the data from the participant using two levels of interpretation (double hermeneutics). This involves making sense of the participant's sense making (Smith, 2011) and for the researcher to adopt a central role in the analysis of the data and of the interpretations of each participant (Finley, 2011). I was seeking to explore the narratives my participants wanted to tell of their experiences and not our joint sense making of the experience, and I did not want to be positioned as a central figure within the research. Instead, I wished to privilege the voice of each participant and their respective story.

Another reason I did not use IPA related to the requirement to identify shared themes across all participants. I wanted my research to focus on each narrated individual experience as a separate story without any need for comparing and contrasting. After considering these arguments, I decided to reject IPA as my chosen method.

3.5 Choosing a Suitable Methodology

Research design is typically referred to as methodology. Deciding upon a suitable methodology is essential when designing research as it underpins and shapes the methods we choose to employ (Jupp, 2006). During my Doctorate course I have been exposed to a wide range of different methodologies. I noticed that when a narrative approach was referred to, I was more enthused and interested in the process and meaning behind it. I also knew that it was important to find a method that would allow me to answer my research question and gain rich and insightful data.

3.6 Narrative Approach

I therefore approached this research keen to use qualitative research to gain meaningful insight into each participant's experiences of their child's transition to a post-16 provider. I felt that a narrative-based approach would support my research aims as it would encourage each participant to talk openly and in some detail about their experiences. Narrative researchers believe that the stories we choose to narrate allow the narrator to make sense of their own experiences (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000). Speaking to a friend or partner and recounting an incident that has affected us is part of a retelling experience where we combine events and characters to create a plot; this plot eventually generates a sense of meaning as different aspects connect (Polkinghorne, 1988).

The data generated from a qualitative narrative-based approach can therefore be understood as a story. Stories people tell of their experiences can give insight into what they feel is important about their experiences (Reissman, 2008). I was attracted to a narrative approach as I wanted rich data. Furthermore, as an ex-English teacher at a secondary school, I have always been drawn to stories as a way of making sense of history or experience. I appreciate that stories are accessible and insightful on different levels, and they have the power to pull people in and expose them to a deeper understanding of an experience.

Holloway and Jefferson (2000) explain narrative interviewing as a way of using conversation to generate a narrative or story. They explain that their approach is not just about collecting data from the participant but that it attempts to explore how the participants construct meaning

and make sense of their own personal experiences (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000). Using a narrative-based approach in this way would also give me the opportunity to amplify the voices of my participants, as a narrative approach centres the participant as the storyteller and gives them the autonomy of sharing the narratives they wish to share (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000). The participant has the agency to lead the direction of an interview into areas they wish to speak about, allowing them to prioritise essential aspects of the story they wish to tell (Anderson and Kirkpatrick, 2016). This also means they can refocus any dominant narrative into something which feels more meaningful to them (Anderson and Kirkpatrick, 2016).

Dominant narratives can be understood as socially constructed stories that shape our collective understanding of individuals, groups, and experiences; these narratives often reinforce any existing power dynamics and institutional structures (White & Epston, 1990). Dominant narratives have emerged from cultural, historical, and political contexts and they involve privileging certain perspectives while marginalising others. Narrative practitioners and researchers White and Epston (1990) believed that there can be issues when a person's lived experiences are not the main representation of the story told either about themselves or by others about them. If this is the case, then the dominant narratives can be limiting and create a negative representation of the person or their situation. Within narrative therapy, the participant is encouraged to externalise the problem from themselves so they can create some distance from it to in order to understand it better. The participant is then supported to reauthor their story and feel the sense of agency that comes from being the author of their own narrative.

The research interviews were not intended to be narrative therapy, but I had hoped there might be a therapeutic element within them for each participant in that they were being given the agency to create their own story of their experience of their child's transition.

Narrative research therefore has the power to be emancipatory, as it allows individuals opportunities to tell their own story using their own words (Oliver, 1997). I was keen for my research to be emancipatory but was also aware that for this to happen there would have to be trust and respect between me and my participants (Barton, 2006). This would be challenging to develop in a short time (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000) and I acknowledged that there would inevitably be some power imbalance as the participant may feel obliged to take direction from me as the interviewer (Parker, 2005). Nevertheless, throughout this research I aimed to explore and understand each participant's experience of the transition process with as little influence from me as possible in their retelling of their story.

It was also possible that the participants might delve into other aspects of their life story as they retold the narrative of the transition period, and even though this would not necessarily be relevant to the core aim of my research, I wanted to continue to provide agency by letting them explore these aspects in case any connections did materialise. Narrative research gives the participant an opportunity to thicken a narrative they feel is important and offer rich insight into their experiences (Walther and Fox, 2012).

The narrative that each participant chooses to share within the narrative interview is dependent on the direction they choose to take, therefore giving them some power and control of the content (Anderson and Kirkpatrick, 2016). Narrative interviewing can, as a result, give the researcher access to a deeper understanding of each participant's experiences (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000). This appealed to me as a method as it allowed me, as an interviewer, to enter the interview without any fixed idea or agenda and instead use open questions which were related to my research to gain insight into each participant's experiences. This allowed the participant to prioritise what they felt was most important about their narrative and focus on that (Kartch, 2017).

I had briefly considered using a mixed methods approach, where I might gain some responses to a survey about the transition and then facilitate interviews with a smaller group of participants. However, I felt that the survey responses may have overly influenced my questions and taken me further away from the authenticity of each participant's experiences. I decided to try and create as much opportunity as possible for the participant to have agency in telling their stories by attempting to only ask three questions. I had initially wanted to use an interpretive narrative approach (Ricoeur, 1983), where a single question is used to encourage the participant to vocalise the narrative and to also reflect upon the significant and meaningful aspects. This would have involved asking one open-ended question and then allowing each participant to speak candidly for the duration of the interview without any follow-up questions from me. However, I felt that it was possible not all participants would feel comfortable with

this approach and that appropriate follow-up questions may be needed to support them in telling their story.

Reflection

I have been in situations as a TEP when a professional has spoken candidly about a parent after they have left a meeting. This always brought deep discomfort to me and was another reason I wanted to gain the experiences of parents first hand. Being a parent is a challenging role and I feel professionals can easily blame an individual without fully understanding their experience. Using a narrative approach and working with parents, I hoped to capture some of their perceived truths and perhaps give them the therapeutic experience of being listened to and taken seriously.

3.7 My Choice of Method

This research adopted a qualitative, narrative methodology in order to capture the rich and emotionally complex experiences of parents navigating the transition of their child with SEND to FE. Narrative approaches are grounded in the recognition that people make sense of their experiences through storytelling and that these stories are shaped by context, relationships, and social meaning (Riessman, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative theory positions participants as active meaning-makers rather than passive subjects, and it privileges subjective experience and voice. In this study, a narrative approach enabled parents to share their experiences in their own words, highlighting not only what happened but also how they understood and felt about the transition. This method aligns closely with my epistemological

stance as a social constructionist researcher, recognising that knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue and embedded in relational and cultural contexts.

Choosing a narrative method was also driven by the nature of the research question, which sought to explore the lived experiences of parents rather than measure predefined variables or test hypotheses. Narrative interviews provided a flexible and participant-led structure that encouraged reflection and emotional expression. This was particularly important given the sensitivity of the topic, as parents were invited to discuss moments of uncertainty that may have been deeply personal. Through narrative analysis, the study was able to capture the layered elements of parental experience, including both the overt content of what was said and the underlying emotional and relational meanings.

By employing a narrative approach, the study was able to access forms of knowledge that might be overlooked in more structured or positivist methods. This approach also facilitated the use of the Listening Guide, which allowed me to attend to the multiple voices and identities present within each parent's account. Overall, narrative methodology provided a framework that honoured participant voice and aligned with the study's aim to produce a nuanced, relationally informed understanding of parental experience.

3.8 Interview Influences

This was my first attempt at qualitative research and my first experience of narrative interviewing. Holloway and Jefferson (2005) influenced how I approached my interviews as they

support an uninterrupted approach where the participant has the chance to share their story.

The researcher's role is to encourage the participant to share their experiences, even if they do

not always seem relevant to the research. Holloway and Jefferson's (2005) free association

narrative interview was the approach I eventually adopted. This focuses on exploring the

participant's emotions and unconscious associations, which is different to traditional

questioning. The participant is encouraged to speak candidly and freely, as well as

spontaneously, so they have an opportunity to holistically voice any unconscious narratives. I

wanted to ensure that I would minimise any power dynamics by only using a small number of

questions, keeping them open-ended. This helped me to feel confident to enable each

participant to speak freely about whatever came to them throughout the interview and not

attempt to interject.

Mason (2018) argued that the researcher's assumptions and unconscious biases can influence

how the narratives of the participants are analysed within this approach. This is echoed by

Parker (2005), who believes that regardless of how the researcher tries to mitigate it, the

researcher will always be in a position of power as they determine what is seen as meaningful

within the story of the participant. Parker (2005) also questions whether a psychoanalytic

interpretation (for example, referring to unconscious narratives) informs us more about the

researcher's assumptions than what the participant has experienced. Unconscious bias is

difficult to mitigate, but I attempted to adopt reflexive practice in my research (Finlay, 2002) by

keeping a reflexive journal, actively questioning how my psychological understanding, position,

and power might shape any interpretations.

> **Reflection**
>
> **Working as a SENDCo at a post-16 provider, I had been struck by how quickly the dynamics of the relationship between the educational setting and the parent diminished. During my time as a secondary school teacher, I was comfortable with all the correspondence going to parents first and for them to be the main decision-maker for their child. This was not the case when the child attended the post-16 setting, as we were encouraged to speak with the child first to support their developing independence as a young adult. Reflecting on this has made me acknowledge the metaphorical barriers that were put up to discourage direct communication and interaction with parents, which I thought must have been a challenging experience for them, especially those whose children might be considered vulnerable, for example children with SEND. This encouraged me to explore the Listening Guide as the method I would use to analyse my data as it would allow me to listen to each participant's narrative in significant depth, bringing their voice to the fore, enabling me to reflect on any potential significant meanings.**

3.9 Procedure

In this section, I will explore and share the procedure I adopted to realise my research. This will include the planning phase of the research, recruiting my participants and gaining ethical approval. I will also explore the data-gathering experience, how I organised the interviews and transcribed my data.

3.10 Participants

I decided that I would aim to recruit three parents as this was a small-scale piece of research. I wanted to explore and understand individual experiences rather than generalise any findings to the general population (Creswell, 2013). Riessman (2008) states that narrative research should focus on individual subjectivity. Using a small sample size allows for personal meanings to be explored in depth. I intended to treat each participant's story as rich data incorporating complex themes and ideas (Polkinghorne, 1995) and therefore felt it was important to keep the sample size small to give enough time for in-depth analysis. Narrative research does not usually include a large number of participants, and three participants is fairly typical for this type of research, which requires the researcher to value quality over quantity in interviewing (Reissman, 2008).

I set out the following inclusion criteria for each participant:

- They should have a child who has transitioned to a post-16/Further Education setting within the last three years to ensure the experience is fresh and current in their minds.
- They should have a child who has recognised SEND and would have had their needs met in their previous school through a SEND Support Plan. This is a document a setting creates to outline the additional needs of the child and the provision they will enable as a result.
- The participant's child should not have an EHCP as there is already a documented process for their transition to a post-16 setting if a young person already has an EHCP.

I decided to contact the Parent/Carers Forum (PCF) in my EPS's local authority area to access

participants. This is an example of convenience sampling, where participants are selected based

on their availability and convenience to recruit them. Convenience sampling offers advantages

in that it is a feasible way to recruit, offers simplicity and increased access to participants,

(Etikan, 2016) and is typically used in situations where the researcher has to recruit participants

with a degree of urgency (Lohr, 2009). It has limitations in that it cannot always be used for

generalisability (Bornstein, 2017) as the participants may not reflect diversity of characteristics

of a larger population. Using convenience sampling was considered appropriate for my research

as I had limited time to recruit my participants, and I was exploring a topic area about which so

far limited research has been produced. I wanted to generate some initial research which could

be developed further in the future.

A PCF is a group of parents/carers who advocate for children and young people with special

educational needs and disabilities (SEND). They are created to amplify the voices of parents and

carers within local areas and ensure they are heard in decisions which may affect children with

SEND (DfE & DoH, 2015). This felt like the right approach as I was already aware that locally this

was an active and large group of parents/carers who would have children with SEND. I had

hoped that I could recruit at least one participant from this group, and that others may come

forward or share the advert with those they knew who met the recruitment criteria, which is

also called snowball sampling. This is a sampling technique where existing participants recruit

new participants from their social or professional networks (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). This

has some advantages in that it can reach hard-to-reach participants and helps build trust

(Becker, 1963), as participants will be more likely to engage in the research if they are referred

by someone they know.

Heckathorn (1997) was critical of this technique for the bias it projects. The selection of

participants depends on who the initial person is, who is recruited first, and what group they

belong to, as this will inevitably be the group from which they recruit. Goodman (1961) also

warns that recruiting participants from the same social group can lead to participants having

similar opinions, which could reduce the validity of the data. I was fortunate that two parents

matched the criteria and consented to take part. My third participant was not a member of the

PCF but a friend of a participant who contacted me about taking part in the research after being

forwarded my advert.

All three of my participants were mothers who were based within my EPS's local authority area.

I found it interesting that I did not recruit a male participant but my interpretation of this is that

the PCF has a large female contingency so it was more likely I would gain the attention of

female participants. It did not matter to my research that they were all female, as I was not

going to be comparing the data. Each of my participants seemed to have knowledge of the

education system and shared that they had needed to navigate SEND systems extensively to

gain support for their child.

Each of the interviews lasted less than an hour, with one finishing early at the request of the participant as they realised they were holding onto some emotional thoughts which they had not yet worked through. After speaking about their experience they shared that they felt overwhelmed with the realisation of their feelings and asked to stop the interview. This helped me appreciate the amount of distress some parents must be experiencing. I responded by giving the participant some time to gather her thoughts before asking if she would like the interview to end. I did not want to make that decision for her as I felt it was important for her to have a sense of control over the situation. Ultimately, exploring the transition process for their child, and themselves as parent/carers, became a difficult experience for two of the participants. It became apparent they had not had the opportunity to talk about this in any depth prior to the interview.

Reflection

I had predicted the participants may wish to speak about their frustrations with the transition process beyond school for their child, which became apparent, but so did ideas of their identity as a parent of a child with SEND and letting go of that when, perhaps, they were not ready. This allowed me to reflect on my role as a researcher within the interviews and how I had created a space for them to tell their story in which strong emotions had been generated. It made me wonder how many opportunities they had previously been given to vocalise their story and process emotions which may so far have been hidden.

I also felt a sense of guilt during some parts of the interview, when a participant was discussing something difficult, or when they had a realisation which led to a negative feeling. I was aware that I had created the conditions in which the participant then experienced sometimes unanticipated emotions. I therefore hoped that there would also be a containing, therapeutic aspect to the interview for the participant, which is what I stated within the ethical process, as well as ensuring that I signposted the participants to a service of support. It struck me that even with these scaffolds in place, my guilt that the interview introduced emotional pain, even if it ended up being cathartic, remained.

3.11 How the interviews were conducted

I opted to interview each participant face-to-face and collect their narrative through audio recording. Rogers (1961) suggests that the presence of a non-judgmental interviewer allows for greater ability in truly understanding the participant's world. This felt like the best way to ensure a natural interaction and to help the participant feel as comfortable as possible. I had contemplated conducting the interview online so that the participant could be in the environment of their choosing, but I felt that this would be less personable, and a distance would be created compared with us being in the same room together. Seeing the participant would also allow me to notice any non-verbal cues which might help me understand the experiences of the participant in greater depth (Goffman, 1959).

Storing the interview as an audio recording also felt more natural, as using a camera might be imposing and make someone feel more self-conscious, which could influence their interactions

(Meyrowitz, 1985). The recorder was small and did not feel obtrusive. I wanted to ensure the participants felt comfortable enough to share insight into their experiences and I was aware that this could put them in a vulnerable position, so generating an oral interview felt the most natural approach as I thought it was likely they might have previously shared similar narratives with friends or family members.

Rogers (1961) believed that by using a small number of questions, the participant can explore and articulate their own experiences without much influence from the researcher. I hoped that each participant would feel able to speak about their experiences with as little interruption from me as possible. I also decided to use open-ended questions to support the participant in narrating their own experiences so that they would feel they could elaborate as much as they wanted to in their own words. By using open-ended questions, I hoped that the data I collected would include depth and detail, supporting me in answering my research question. Open-ended questions allow the participant to construct their own meanings (Jordan, 1989) and the participant to share experiences in a way that feels authentic to them (Goffman, 1959). They encourage the participant to think deeply about their experiences and give them freedom to express themselves more (Creswell, 2013). Frankl (1963) emphasised how important reflective open-ended questions can be for the participant to explore deep insights and engage in personal meaning-making.

To capture the authentic voice of the participant, I adopted a semi-structured interview approach, which would utilise narrative principles throughout. As stated above, I had three core interview questions I planned to ask.

- Tell me about your experience of supporting your child as they transitioned from secondary school to a post-16 provider.

- How did you feel about the support your child received during the transition from secondary school to post-16 education?

- What were some of the biggest challenges you faced during the transition, and how did you overcome them?

I wanted to be flexible to allow each participant to expand upon relevant ideas and experiences beyond these initial questions. I planned to ask the questions but then employ considered pauses to allow the participant to think deeply about their answer and have the agency to tell their own story. I did not want to direct their ideas, but I did have some additional follow up questions beyond the three above in case they were needed. However, these were not required during any of the narrative interviews.

I adopted some of Rogers' (1961) active listening principles which included allowing the participant to take the lead in the conversation where possible. I also wanted to work with any silences and to see them as a space for reflection so the participant could have time to explore their ideas further before narrating them (Jordan, 1989). Atkinson and Delamont (2006)

emphasise that silences in conversations can be used as tools to support participants with

reflecting and continuing their story. I also researched echoing as a technique I could use to

support the participant in continuing their story (Kvale, 1996), which is where I would repeat

key phrases back to them for them to explore in more detail. This would also mean I was not

using my own words or perspectives to influence their ideas.

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Reflection

I noted that leaving silence and space for reflection was difficult to do and I was conscious there would be a limit where the participant might become uncomfortable and feel awkward. I attempted to mitigate this by informing them of my intention to leave space and silence for reflection, so they were prepared. When I was a teacher, I found it challenging to leave enough silence for reflection after I had asked a class a question, but I now understand the importance of doing so.

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3.12 Interview Questions

The initial question asked in each interview was: "Tell me about your experience of supporting

your child as they transitioned from secondary school to a post-16 provider". I noted that even

though I asked the same question in each interview, the ensuing narratives' directions were

noticeably different. This was because each participant would have had a unique experience to

tell. However, I also feel that for my second and third interviews I became more confident and

comfortable as an interviewer at leaving the silences lingering for slightly longer to allow the

participants to continue their train of thought. I asked my two follow-up questions in all the

interviews, but they seemed to arrive later each time as the participant spoke for longer about the initial, opening question. I reflected on this process after each interview was finished.

It was important to me that I kept my research ethos by coming back to the idea that I was curious about the participants' experiences and had no desire to influence their narratives. My approach was to respond in a way that allowed each participant to feel I was truly listening and absorbed, and that I was responding in a natural way. I used active listening approaches, including attending to the participant and ensuring they were aware I was engaged through eye-contact and body language (Rogers, 1951). I deliberately attempted empathetic listening by responding in a way that displayed understanding and compassion to what was being shared with me (Goleman, 1995) and avoiding interruptions and judgements by not jumping in when there was a period of silence (Bok, 1978).

I had been reluctant, initially, to use active listening as I did not want to sound superficial or display a lack of true empathy by reflecting my participants' words back to them in an artificial manner (Herman, 1992), but as the interview progressed, I found that I quickly became invested in the participants' narratives and experiences. I was aware of my choice to use a narrative approach so attempted not to influence their stories, but I did reflect some of their responses back to them to make them aware that I was paying attention to what they were saying and was attuned to their responses. This also supported a sense of active participation and collaboration (Bruner, 1990). My only concern with doing this too much was that I might have ended up unwittingly influencing the participants' answers by encouraging them to

expand upon an item based on how they heard my interpretation of their own words back to them, as meaning can be constructed through dialogue (Gergen, 1999). I was hopeful that when I did reflect their words back to them it was, instead, reinforcing their agency by helping them to feel listened to rather than misrepresented (Stanley & Wise, 1993).

Each participant responded to the questions with their own narrative and interpretation. I tried to mask any of my differences of opinion as I was also aware that this was their narrative, and it was important I did not show any judgement (Rogers, 1967). As indicated above, I felt that each of the participants exposed some aspects of themselves they may have found difficult. This was evidenced particularly during the first interview, which, as indicated, was cut short at the request of the participant. All three participants expressed during rapport building that they had not had much opportunity previously to explore their feelings around this topic. I hoped that my effort to create a safe and trusting environment, and relationship, enabled this opportunity.

A safe space was attempted by using a neutral venue to reduce any power imbalance between us and ensuring each participant was informed of the format of the interview at the start, as well as that they had the agency to cease the interview at any point. It was important that the participants felt in control and were aware they could opt out of the interview and request for the data to be destroyed and not used. I did not feel the questions I asked were too complex or emotive as each participant could access them, but they did lead to some emotionally complex

responses. I was prepared for this from a logistical point of view, but I had not expected to be

as emotionally impacted by it as it occurred.

Reflection

I had not anticipated how much emotional impact the narratives and experiences of the

participants would have on me. Listening to deeply personal stories of frustration,

uncertainty but also reflections on happier, more positive experiences, made me feel

privileged that they would be willing to share such personal accounts with me. It also made

me reflect on the weight of parental responsibilities and how challenging a role it can be

when you feel stuck and helpless. This strengthened my appreciation of narrative research

and my appreciation of treating each narrative with the sensitivity and care it deserves.

Each participant was made aware that I would be audio recording their interview, to which they

consented. After the interview had finished, they were thanked for their involvement, and I

offered to answer any questions they may have. I felt it was also important to let each

participant know that I would send them the analysis of the interview and their stories, if they

wanted to receive them. Stanley & Wise (1993) believe that providing a representation of their

experiences in the form of an artefact can support the participant in feeling heard and

validated. It also supports reflexivity and agency as the participant can reflect upon, and

challenge, any interpretations made by the researcher (Gadamr, 1975).

3.13 Process and Ethics

Each interview took place at the same Family Hub within my EPS's local authority. All three

participants lived within close proximity, and they agreed to meet in the location as it was

familiar to them. I felt this was an appropriate place to meet as it was quiet, neutral and

confidential, as I was aware, as already indicated, that there could be an imbalance of the

power dynamics if the interviews took place within my LA's office. I hoped that using a venue

that did not introduce authority differentials in this way would help neutralise this potential

(Bourdieu, 1993). I was able to use the same room each time I held an interview, which made

me feel more at ease as I became comfortable with the surroundings and processes of signing

in and setting up. I was also able to offer refreshments to each participant which seemed to

help put them at ease and supported the building of rapport, as it was an opportunity to break

the ice. Rogers (1951) advocated for rapport building as a way of ensuring participants feel

comfortable to share any personal experiences. Goffman (1959) also explored rapport building

as a means of decreasing any feelings for the participant that they were being judged.

Each participant received an information pack and consent form before attending the

interview. They also had to obtain consent from their child to ensure they were happy to be

spoken about, and all three children gave their consent. Gaining informed consent was

imperative to my research and my ethical stance, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017)

emphasise the need for informed consent when working directly or in-directly with vulnerable

people, including children. To ensure that the children did not feel they were under any duress

to agree to their parents participating, and to adhere to my ethical stance, I spoke to each child

prior to them giving their consent to ensure they understood the process and focus of their parent's interview. Archard (2004) advocates for child-centred research, where the child's autonomy is respected as well as their rights and dignity.

I ensured I arrived at the Family Hub at least 15 minutes early to check that the room was available, and the equipment was set up and was working. I also found that arriving early helped me feel more at ease, as I knew everything was set up before each participant's arrival. I moved the furniture so we both had a seat to ourselves as it did not feel appropriate to sit on the same sofa to conduct the interview. I moved the chairs, so we faced each other but I did not want it to feel too formal, so I made sure there was nothing between us to create a barrier. Riessman (2008) supports the idea that having an informal setting and environment during an interview can lead to richer storytelling and for the participant to feel more in control of their narrative, which was my aim. Barret and McNamara (2019) also refer to an informal and comfortable setting being integral in allowing the interviewer to act as a listener and the participant as the storyteller feeling more empowered to share their story.

Before the interview started, I checked in with each of my participants to ensure they were comfortable and that they still consented to take part. I felt it was important that I briefly explained my research focus and process again before giving them an opportunity to ask any questions prior to starting the interview, adhering to Fisher's (1984) idea that a participant will feel more engaged and offer authentic experiences if they are fully informed.

Reflection

This felt like an important aspect of my interactions with each participant. I observed that they all gave an impression of feeling nervous or apprehensive prior to the interview beginning so I ensured I took them through the intentions of my research and highlighted the aims of the interview. I took my time with this as I did not want to start the interview with each participant feeling anxious. This felt like good rapport building at the time and an opportunity to connect and allow the participants to feel comfortable with the process. Two of the participants demonstrated some vulnerabilities during the interview which suggests they were made to feel comfortable enough to share this information with me and offer an authentic experience.

3.14 Ethics

Before I started recruiting, I had to gain ethical approval from the University of Sheffield for my research. This involved completing an application form detailing my research and how I would ensure it adhered to the ethical criteria. My research was approved, and I tried my best to adhere to ethical considerations throughout in line with guidelines from the BPS and HCPC. I was thankful that the participants had agreed to take part in my research and so I felt it important that ethical considerations were thought about in detail. Smith (2005) takes the view that ethics should not simply be used and followed to meet regulatory rules, but that research should have the community at the heart of it. I took this as my position with ethics as I was also conscious of potential power imbalances the interviewer and interviewee could bring with them to the interaction. To attempt to rebalance the dynamics between us and ensure that

power imbalances were reduced I tried to be as open and transparent as possible with each participant and give them as much information as I could. I did feel a sense of power and responsibility once I had asked my opening question, however, as I felt that the responses I was hearing because of that question were very personal, and the participants would not have had to share these stories about themselves unless I had asked this question of them.

During one interview, the participant spoke candidly about her experiences of the transition process for around 20 minutes when she started to reflect on how she felt. I noticed that she was pausing a lot and seemed to be finding it challenging to discuss her ideas. She asked if she could stop the interview at this point as it felt overwhelming for her, and of course we did so. After I had stopped the recording device, she asked me if I wanted to carry on with the interview in a few minutes after she had given herself some time to process what had happened. I had observed her demeanour change and her emotions increase during the end of the interview, when she had reflected on how the process of the transition had affected her identity. I suggested that it might be best to end the interview for the day and perhaps rearrange it for a future date. The participant contacted me a few days after the interview to thank me for the opportunity but explained she felt she had provided enough information and did not want to proceed with another. I felt that, ethically, I had made the correct judgement in ceasing the interview and giving her agency about whether she wanted to carry on. I also asked her if she still wanted me to analyse her data, and she agreed to this.

Reissman (2008) believes that sharing stories can be a helpful and cathartic process for the participant and the participant fed back to me that speaking about the process with me had benefitted her in acknowledging some hidden emotions. As part of my ethical process, all the participants were signposted to the Family Hub where there was support should they need it. The ethics application form and associated documents are located in Appendices 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 3E, 3F.

3.15 Analysing: The Listening Guide

Gilligan created the Listening Guide (LG) as a feminist qualitative analysis technique (Gilligan, 1982). It aims to support researchers with hearing the voices of participants and in understanding them (Koelsch, 2015). As a technique, it amplifies the silenced voices of participants and supports the researcher in being as true to the stories told by each participant as possible (Woodcock, 2016). This was an important factor to me as I wanted to hear their authentic experiences. By using the LG I would be able to acknowledge my role as interviewer and in the developing knowledge through my analysis of the data (Woodcock, 2016). This means that even though my verbal contributions throughout the interviews were minimal in comparison to what each participant talked about, I would still have had an influence on the narrative told, for example because of the questions I asked and any non-verbal communications I displayed.

Using a feminist qualitative analysis technique for my research allowed me to adopt the emancipatory approach I aspired to achieve. I involved the participants in my data collection

and prioritised their voices as a marginalised group within the context of my research. The participants were positioned within the process as the experts of their own stories and experiences instead of being the subject of my research. This was made clear to them at the start of the process so they were aware of their role, which I hoped would empower them and help redistribute any power between us. Throughout the process, I also kept a reflexive diary where I was able to note down and acknowledge any of my own thoughts and biases which may influence the research process. Using the LG (Gilligan, 1982) leant towards how parents experience a process in which what may be missing is their voice. Gilligan (2015) expressed that method means 'way', and she believed that the LG could act as a way of listening which can then facilitate psychological discovery.

The LG includes four stages for the researcher to follow during the analysis of data from each interview. Each stage has a specific focus that the researcher adopts to listen for different voices and perspectives. The researcher is encouraged to listen to the data several times to become close to it and have a rich understanding of the stories each participant shares. The guidance for each stage of the process was followed using Woodcock (2016):

Stage One involves analysing the interview and focusing on the plot; the guide also allows for the identification of any silence within the interview for the researcher to take a moment of reflection, thus enabling a trail of evidence. The researcher listens out for any plots they feel develop, any words which are repeated and any words or phrases which give an idea of the story. They then create a brief synopsis of what they hear with the focus on this being as rich as

possible. As each narrative is acknowledged, the researcher colour codes them and notes down their reaction to the story in an honest fashion. Brown and Gilligan (1992) encourage the researcher to consider where they identify with the participant, their emotional reaction to the story and where they feel a sense of confusion.

Stage Two involves another listen with a focus on the research question, honing in on aspects of the interview that are relevant. As the researcher listens to the answers, they are to identify any moments where the participant speaks about themselves in the first person using the pronoun 'I', turning these statements into an I-poem. The I-poem is a tool which highlights the participant's emotion, agency, and subjectivity in their story. This is done by isolating any statements which highlight their sense of self (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The 'I' statements are then constructed into a poem, which is given to the participant as an artefact at the end. Ellis (2004) encourages this practice as it allows the participant to reflect on their own identity and experiences.

Stage Three focuses on interactions of the different narratives within the interview and where any tensions between them exist. Identifying the narratives and the tensions can highlight a richer understanding of the participant's story and what is important to them. There is a focus on these polyphonic readings to identify any narratives that recur throughout, as well as any opposing ideas behind them (Woodcock, 2016). Polyphonic voices is a term used to describe the multiple voices within the narrative. Multiple voices within the narrative can also include internal contradictions, where a speaker may demonstrate conflicting ideas and perspectives.

Our narratives are also shaped by social discourses which can have an influence on how we construct and deconstruct our experiences. This could mean that during an interview a participant may shift between a professional voice, where they are commenting on policies, to a personal voice where frustrations are evident. The researcher also analyses any contradictions within the interview as these can reflect any inner confusion or tensions (Gilligan, 2003).

Stage Four involves the researcher bringing all their listens together to create a final analysis of the data, which forms my discussion section.

Reflection

The Listening Guide felt like the right analytical tool for me as it offered the potential for profound insight into the experiences of each parent. It would allow me to celebrate their voice and identify their ideas, perhaps in a way they had not reflected on before. The use of the voice poem artefact and then sharing this with them, I hoped, would add value to their experiences and help them feel listened to and appreciated, as well as support them to make sense of their experiences.

3.16 Purpose

I wanted my research to have a purpose and to benefit others once it had been completed. Emihovich (1995) states that narrative research should have a moral purpose to be considered

ethical otherwise there is a danger that narrative research could simply become a vanity project for the researcher or something to satisfy their curiosity. This thought had initially crossed my mind, and I had to see past my own experiences to identify how the research would benefit others.

Listening to the narratives and experiences of the participants made me realise that they had not been asked these questions before, and that it was important that the school and colleges were given insight into their responses. I feel it is important that my research is disseminated to educational settings so they might be able to support parents differently and differentiate their transition offer to include parents. It also felt important that schools consider the young person as well during the process, especially if they are moving to a different setting, as parents have rich information about their child, which could be used to support a successful transition.

3.17 Trustworthiness of the Research

There can be some judgement of qualitative research and its reliability and rigour. Models have been produced to enhance the credibility of qualitative research, focusing on its trustworthiness rather than reliability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed a framework for the quality assurance of qualitative research which focused on four key areas: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Reliability and generalisability are not viewed as appropriate terms to use when gauging the trustworthiness of qualitative research as they are grounded in a positivist paradigm which suggests that research can be repeated and replicated. Creswell (2013) advocates for qualitative research to be thick in description and to

focus on the complexity of human experience rather than generalisation. As much as I wanted

to remain impartial as a researcher so that I could privilege my participants' voices, I

acknowledged that this is an impossible feat as the researcher is not detached in qualitative

research, which challenges how reliably it can be considered. I therefore decided instead to use

the Lincoln and Guba (1985) framework for quality assuring my research.

3.18 Reflexivity

As stated previously, this research adopts a social constructionist epistemology where the

researcher is identified as being part of the research. This means I will have brought my own

subjectivity to the research questions I decided to use, the interactions with each participant

during the interviews, and when the data was analysed. It is important that I, as the researcher,

recognise and acknowledge my own contribution to the interpretation of meaning with a focus

on being reflexive, so the reader is clear of my position and understands my subjectivity.

There are two types of reflexivity that Willig (2013) identifies: personal and epistemological

reflexivity. Personal reflexivity focuses on elements that make up our identity. These include

values, experience, interest, wider aims in life, beliefs and political commitments. The way the

researcher is changed and impacted by the research and the process of the research is also

acknowledged. Finlay (2002) believed that personal reflexivity can support self-discovery and

be an opportunity for the researcher to reconstruct their own subjectivity.

Willig (2013) suggested that epistemological reflexivity is the process of reflecting on the researcher's ontology, assumptions about the world, epistemology, and knowledge, and how these aspects could influence their research.

For me, it has been important to consider both my subjectivity and the impact of the production of the research on me and my participants. To support me with my endeavour of maintaining reflexivity throughout my research, as already mentioned, I kept a reflexive diary, which I used to journal my thoughts throughout the research process. I included my personal feelings, values and experiences and then highlighted how these impacted my interpretations and choices along the way.

3.19 The Listening Guide and Narrative Theory

The Listening Guide (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan et al., 2003) is fundamentally rooted in narrative theory, as it treats personal stories as a primary source of knowledge about human experience. Narrative theory emphasises that individuals make meaning of their lives through stories, and that these narratives are shaped by cultural, relational, and systemic contexts (Riessman, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The Listening Guide builds on this premise by offering a structured approach to listening for both the content of a narrative and the underlying emotional and identity positions within it. By attending to multiple voices and perspectives within a single account, the method reflects a narrative understanding of identity as dynamic and multi-voiced with relational principles.

In practice, the Listening Guide aligns with narrative theory in several ways. First, it recognises that stories are not neutral; they are constructed within relationships, shaped by social expectations, and situated in particular contexts. The method's stages allow the researcher to engage deeply with both what is said and how it is said. This resonates with narrative theory's focus on both the form and function of storytelling: the Listening Guide captures events and explores how participants locate themselves within broader cultural and relational narratives. In this research, the method enabled me to identify multiple voices within each parent's account, illustrating the complexity of their experience and the relational nature of identity during transition.

Reflecting critically, there are aspects of narrative theory that were not fully explored or exploited in this study. I did not, for example, undertake a structural or performative analysis of narratives as described by Riessman (2008), which would have examined how parents' stories were organised or how they performed their identities for the listener. Nor did I focus on how the narratives unfolded in interaction or how my own role as a researcher shaped the co-construction of the story in detail, beyond maintaining reflexivity. Instead, my emphasis remained on the relational, emotional, and multi-voiced aspects of the narratives, consistent with the feminist and identity-focused principles of the Listening Guide. By acknowledging these choices, I recognise that the study privileges depth of emotional and relational insight over formal narrative structure, which reflects the study's aim to amplify parental voice and illuminate the lived experience of transition.

Chapter 4: Analysis

4.1 Introduction

My analysis brings together the first three stages of listening to the interviews using the

Listening Guide. The analyses were completed independently for each participant, but I

followed the same process. This involved listening to the recording multiple times with a focus

on the different elements of the analysis, described in more detail above:

Stage One: Listening for the plot of the narrative.

I listened for any plots that developed, for example by noticing any repeated words or phrases

that give an idea of the story. I colour-coded the various stories and noted my reaction to them

in my reflexive diary. I then provided a synopsis of what I heard, focusing on making it as rich as

possible. See Appendix 7 for example.

Stage Two: Listening for I-statements and the creation of the I-poem.

In my second round of listening, I focused on the statements throughout the transcript that

began with the pronoun 'I' and then brought them together to create a full I-Poem for each

participant (see Appendix 4B, 5B, 6B). In this chapter, I have focused on I Poem sections that I

considered powerful and important in relation to my research question.

Stage Three: Listening for Contrapuntal Voices.

During this stage of the analysis, I listened to the interview of each participant again several times and identified the polyphonic voices through which they were speaking, and where these interacted. Examples of these can be seen in Appendices 4C, 5C and 6C.

Stage Four:

My final listens and analysis of the data occurs in the Discussion chapter.

I began with Anna's narrative, continued onto Sarah's and ended with Leah's. The process of my analysis was completed using a hard copy of the transcript and highlighting relevant aspects of the Listening Guide process, making notes and colour coding as detailed earlier.

4.2 My Participants and Their Stories

4.3 Participant 1: Anna's Story

Anna is a mother to three children. The focus of the interview was her middle child. Anna is also a member of the Parents/Carers Forum, and she had contacted me to take part in the research after seeing my advert.

4.3.1 Listen 1: Listening for the Plot

Anna initially started the interview by informing me that she had a mental health need, "I've been through quite a lot myself with mental health and whatnot" (pg 1, lines 4-5). This was

unprompted and suggested to me that she believed it was important for me to know this

before she started the narrative of her experience of her child's school-to-college transition. I

felt this was Anna gaining a sense of control in the interview, acknowledging any vulnerabilities

she felt she had. This could be described as stake inoculation (Edwards & Potter, 1992), which is

a discursive strategy that involves individuals downplaying or denying their personal stake in

something; acknowledging her mental health needs from the start seemed to allow Anna to

build up a protective wall before discussing her story.

4.4.1 Primary School Transition

Anna recounted her experiences of her child's transition in chronological order, leading up to

the transition to college. This structuring may have felt natural for Anna as it allowed her to

track her narratives from when she had more control and influence to when this seemed to

fade.

Anna contextualised the idea of transitions by recounting her previous experiences: "we spent

a lot of time thinking about his primary school and where we think he should go" (pg 1, lines

24-25). Anna set a serious tone here, suggesting that this was a time-consuming and

emotionally draining process where even the first element of identifying a school that would

meet their expectations was a challenge. Anna used the first part of the interview to speak

about the nursery to primary transition and how important it was for her to find the right

setting for her child, "I found one school that just ticked all the boxes" (pg 2, line 26). The

reference to ticking boxes further supports the idea that Anna had a set of expectations for her

ideal school with a specific focus on her child's needs. This indicated to me a narrative around pressure and perfection for Anna as a parent in identifying the right setting for her child, but also that she desired the agency to be in control of that situation: "And I just felt, you know, this is nice, this is good for him, he will have a lot of support here" (pg 2, line 31). Identifying a school with the right support for her child, but also acknowledging an intuitive aspect of the process where Anna had a feeling about the school, suggested to me that this experience was a complex one. The feeling or sense of the setting seemed important to Anna in that she wanted it to feel aligned with her own parenting style and perhaps replicate the support she had been giving her child at home.

Anna left a gap of three seconds after she had acknowledged how her feelings had played a part in choosing the primary school for her son. After this prolonged pause she informed me, "So, you know, I took that lead in trying to get him that school and it was fine when he got there" (pg 2, line 32). I acknowledged the pause as significant as it seemed to suggest Anna was reflecting on her role and how challenging it was to secure a place in the school, or perhaps how difficult it was to accept it as her final choice. This also felt like a story that Anna had not told before and that she needed time to find the right words. Anna refers to herself as taking the "lead", demonstrating a need to establish control and autonomy over the situation and a narrative of not trusting other family members or services to advocate for the needs of her child. I sensed that Anna did not want to relinquish control about these decisions to anyone else.

The narrative of Anna's changing role as a parent and her acceptance of this continued throughout the interview, especially when she acknowledged, "And I think looking back that was a really happy time for us" (pg 2, line 38). When Anna refers to "us" she was referring to herself and her son, suggesting that she feels their emotions are connected. This also indicated to me that in Anna's pursuit of finding the ideal school for him she was aware that if he was happy, she would also be. It seemed to me that a narrative of nostalgia and connectedness is prevalent in Anna's story.

4.4.2 Secondary School Transition

Anna moved the narrative onto the secondary school transition and recounted some of the values she looked for in a school by informing me, "it's a lot of responsibility because you want to get the right school for your child so they are nice and happy and supported" (pg 2, lines 43-44). Anna did not refer to academic progress within her values and instead focused on her child feeling supported and happy, which for her seemed more important. The responsibility that Anna undertook also supports the earlier observation that she felt she needed to take ownership and that she could not trust others to achieve the same result. The narrative of this transition experience initially focused on the uncertain and uneasy thought of moving on, "I was a bag of nerves, I was very, very worried because I just knew that that was a really big jump for him" (pg 2, lines 46-47). Anna's use of the pronoun "I" also suggests a narrative of isolation and being solely responsible for the transition. It was interesting that Anna referred to it being a "big jump for him" whereas she had previously referred to any transition as something she was

also involved in by using "us". I reflected that this might imply Anna was letting go of some of her control, acknowledging the increase in autonomy for her child.

Anna's reflections on this transition from primary to secondary school also seem to support a narrative of autonomy and agency, "I felt like, you know, I had a say in this" (pg 4, line 74). A distrust in other agencies or school staff might be implied here as the statement suggests that Anna needed to feel she was being listened to, although she does not name who she felt had to listen to her or who gave her this say. I felt that there was some surprise in this expression from Anna as though she did not expect to have a voice during this process, which might have been her initial expectation.

Anna's narrative during her reflections on her child's time at secondary school focused on the turbulent nature of these experiences: "there was never a perfect time there, never a perfect year, very much up and down, but he got to the end" (pg 4, lines 93-94) which is in contrast to the earlier narrative of seeking perfection when identifying his primary school. I perceived that Anna was setting some high standards when she suggested there had not been a "perfect year", demonstrating that this ideal school she was seeking would be challenging to find. Anna does not quantify what a perfect year would look like, as if it is unknown. There also seems to be a narrative Anna related to not wanting to let her son down and wanting the best for him but not knowing what this looks like. "He got to the end" might be Anna acknowledging that the success criteria reduced to her son completing his time at school. It is interesting, again, that here she only refers to him in this situation, and does not include herself, suggesting she

had distanced herself from the process. Perhaps the school did not live up to her aspirations and she needed to develop some space between herself and the setting as a protective factor.

4.4.3 College Transition

As Anna reflected on the transition to college, the narrative appeared to shift to her feeling left out of the process: "I felt maybe less part of it" (pg 5, line 97) and "it never felt like it was up to us about where he was going" (pg 5, line 100). I felt that Anna displayed some strong opinions when she used the word "never" as though she was alienated from what was happening. Anna does not state who made the decision about the choice of college but "us" suggests to me that she felt her son was not involved in this process either. There seems to be a narrative of blame, here, as Anna points to feeling outcast.

A narrative of frustration also became apparent when Anna spoke about the school's involvement: "I feel school maybe didn't involve us as much as maybe we'd have liked to have been involved" (pg 5, lines 109-110) and "I felt like I was not being allowed into that conversation sometimes with school, and that they were talking to him (1) behind my back" (pg 5, lines 114 - 115). The pause prior to "behind my back" may have been displaying Anna's difficulty in accepting being left out, and a sense for her that it felt purposeful. This also seemed like a story untold so far, and that Anna was coming to a realisation about her feelings during this time. Throughout the interview, Anna presented herself as separate from any agencies or settings, and there seemed to be a reluctance from her to accept support or acknowledge other opinions, which demonstrated, to me, a narrative of protection. The use of the repeated

"maybe" in the first quote also suggests a narrative of hesitancy in confirming how she really felt about not being involved.

"And I think schools, or his school was trying to push independence onto him" (pg 6, lines 123-124): Anna here reflected on independence as something young adults will embody when they're ready, but she identified it as something that was pushed on her child, suggesting a lack of choice and a narrative of things being done to him without her permission or acceptance. I wondered if this was an acknowledgement from Anna that she believes her son is not ready for independence but also that she may not be ready to accept his independence. Anna later talked about independence again when she discussed her child's college, "I feel distant from the college, and I like that he is independent" (Pg 6, lines 138 - 139), displaying a growing acceptance of his independence but a disconnect from his new educational establishment. This seemed a challenging relationship to balance for Anna. It appeared that she wanted to feel a greater sense of connection to the college but without upsetting her son, who was gaining his self-confidence. I felt a confliction in Anna here, where she was trying to distinguish her changing role as a parent.

When Anna reflected on the changes she has experienced as a mother to her child during the transition process, she recounted: "I do miss having an input or having a say in his life like I used to, which is sad for me, but I think it's good for him" (Pg 7, lines 140-141). Anna's words suggest longing for the role she used to embody as a parent, but she also accepts her child's needs are developing. The reflection on her past and her changing role as a parent makes her feel sad,

which is a strong emotion, and shows how challenging it is for Anna to accept the change. A

narrative of distance seemed prevalent throughout the interview, especially the metaphorical

distance she felt from the college. There appeared to be a disconnect between Anna and the

setting, the result of which made her feel emotionally distant from the staff as though she was

not experiencing a direct relationship with them, "I don't know many college staff members, I

don't know many of them, I don't go into college" (Pg 6, lines 132-133).

Anna's earlier narratives suggests that she wanted to do things by herself, whereas now there is

a frustration that she can no longer be the advocate and decision-maker for her son. This lack

of control, where she feels she cannot enter the college building, could suggest a sense of a loss

of the ability to protect her son, which she has felt she needed to do in the past. Anna also

reflected on the future for him, "I will be glad maybe in five years that he was given

independence for the transition. I will look back on that with more happiness and more

positivity" (Pg 7, lines 154-155) which felt optimistic but is also an acknowledgement that it is

currently too raw for Anna to feel positive. Again, Anna used "maybe" frequently during the

interview, which emphasises her uncertainty and indecisiveness, as though she is uncertain

about what will happen in the future.

Another narrative for Anna was the concern and apprehension she felt for her child and worry

about his support in college: "I would like to know more about the college, I would like to know

more about the support he's getting" (Pg 7, lines 159-160). I felt real frustration from Anna

here. There was no hesitancy or uncertainty in her statements at this point but instead a really

strong desire to be kept informed and to ensure her son was receiving the support he needed. This concern was repeated when she spoke about being left out of the transition process, "We should be told more from school about what is happening with that transition" (Pg 9, lines 191-192). She was communicating annoyance and a strong opinion about being kept away from receiving information she deemed important. "I can't see it, I can't understand how he's doing. I can't access that part of him" (Pg 9, lines 196-197), also emphasising her narrative of apprehension about being left behind and not being fully informed. The repeated "can't" seemed to be show recognition that she is now on the outside looking in and feels defeated by the process. It felt like an admission that she is powerless and disempowered. This was towards the end of the interview and appeared to be a realisation for Anna as she then requested the interview to cease.

I halted the interview here and turned off my equipment. I informed Anna of this so she was aware that anything she said at this point would not be used in the analysis. I wanted Anna to know that I was available to talk if she needed to, but she was keen to leave.

After listening to the plot, I identified the following narratives from Anna's words: Pressure, perfection, acceptance, nostalgia, isolation, agency, frustration, distance, conflict and apprehension. Throughout the interview, I felt that Anna was torn between wanting her child to develop his independence but also not wanting to be left behind in his life and in his decisions. I reflected on my own relationships with my children and how involved I am now, and how challenging it would feel if I were no longer involved in the same way. When Anna wanted

to end the interview, I was aware that she was taking longer pauses and thinking more deeply about her experiences. This seemed to lead to a realisation about the emotions she was carrying but perhaps had not acknowledged. The pauses seemed to be words unsaid about her true realisation of her changing role.

The overarching plot of the interview, for me, is the journey of Anna's experiences of her child's transition, starting from choosing primary and secondary schools to then feeling pushed aside during her child's final transition to college, struggling to come to terms with her sense that her voice was not being heard. There seems to be a story about her role as a parent and trying her best to protect and provide for her child but feeling a sense of disempowerment during the later transition. Anna seems to have an idea of what makes a successful parent, and she seems protective of this, at times unwilling to let those on the outside of the relationship in to help.

4.4.4 Listen 2: Listening for I-statements and the creation of the I-poem

I know I am a protective parent

I am very much interested in my child

I want the best for them

I found that hard to let go

I think it's good for him

Anna seemed to display moments of certainty during the interview, where she seemed in control and assertive, stating "I tell you", "I am", "I found". These statements come at the start of the interview, when she was reflecting on the transitions to primary school and secondary school, where it appears that she felt she had more autonomy and agency in the decision. Anna was also showing signs of protection and strength where she was fiercely advocating for her child and felt she had the energy and autonomy to do so.

As Anna began to speak about her child transitioning to college, her I-statements became much less assertive: "I wanted,", "I felt", "I've tried". This contrast suggests confusion and a lack of power, as well uncertainty, but still a will to support her child and a desire to ensure he was successful.

<div align="center">

I've tried my best to give my boy the best amount of support

I felt I had a lot of power

I felt that it was me

I felt I had control

I felt that was shared between me and my boy

I wanted him to have good grades

I wanted him to come out of school with a future

I really tried to make sure he was supported

I took him to some colleges

I wanted to be part of that

</div>

"I felt" was used more than any other statement throughout the interview, suggesting that many of Anna's experiences and narratives stemmed from an emotional response to the events as a parent, which took precedence over anything else. This emphasises how the transition process seemed to be an emotional experience for Anna rather than solely a pragmatic one. There was a cluster of "I wanted" as well, in the middle of the interview, which felt more assertive as Anna was reflecting on her reasons for caring and wanting her son to have the right support at secondary school. "I wanted" also appears to reflect these were Anna's own wishes and that there was some disappointment that not all of them were met. It felt as though Anna was clear in her aspirations for her child and that there was a narrative of agency within her experiences at this point. This could also be interpreted as Anna defending her wish to be involved in the process when she felt she was being excluded.

I can't see it

I can't understand how he's doing

I can't access that part of him

The final part of the interview involved Anna displaying moments of frustration and an inability to complete an action which to her that seemed important. The "I can't" statements reflect self-doubt and feelings of helplessness. It was interesting to note that these statements took place at the end of the interview, as Anna was discussing the college transition. Anna ended the interview soon afterwards. Voicing her narrative appeared to be a revelation for her,

empowering her to acknowledge her frustrations out loud, but this also seemed to overwhelm her.

4.4.5 Listen 3: Listening for Contrapuntal Voices;

The Voice of Control and the Voice of Letting Go

Anna demonstrated a number of moments in the interview where I felt that she was illustrating the need for a sense of control. This was evident during the beginning of the interview, when she was exploring the narratives around the early transitions. Anna would speak about how she "took the lead" and "felt like I had a lot of power". These reflections suggest that Anna upheld a narrative of control during the early stages of this transition, and she took ownership of it. This is also emphasised when she said, "I was a vocal parent", which I felt displayed authority and control but also a categorisation of how she felt she may have been seen by school staff. This authoritative and strong voice is then contrasted when Anna reflected on how she is starting to see her role as a parent changing and becoming less prominent. Anna states, "…maybe I was smothering him" and "I think it's good for him" which could be interpreted as Anna accepting a need to step back as a parent for the benefit of her child, but how there is also some hesitation. This could also be Anna critiquing her own parenting style and reflecting on some aspects she feels did not benefit him. It was interesting to think where this pressure to step back was coming from. It appeared to come from the school but also from Anna's own desire to give her child more independence.

The Voice of Anxiety and the Voice of Reassurance

Another interaction that seems evident in Anna's story revolves around her feeling anxious about the different decisions she had to make when she supported her child during any transition. Anna's anxiety is evident when she stated she was a "bag of nerves", which is a metaphorical way of describing the tangle of complex feelings she was experiencing. This use of imagery emphasises how her child's transitions were challenging for Anna and gives an indication of how the processes absorbed her, in that much of her emotional energy went into trying to support her child. Anna counters this later in the interview when she outlines, in relation to the current transition, "I think it's good for him" and "I have to trust him", where there is more of an acceptance of the situation, and she is perhaps offering herself self-reassurance. The tension between "I feel uncertain" and "I have to trust him" felt particularly interesting to me, with one statement demonstrating an acknowledgement of her feelings about the situation and the other a more assertive action to which she wants, or is attempting, to commit.

Anna spoke at the start of her story of her son's SEND at school and how she had advocated for him from a young age. Her voice of anxiety seems to emerge from this feeling as though, at that point, she was in control and had more of a say in his future but as he has transitioned to college this has been taken away. It also appears that Anna's identity has been strongly influenced by being a parent of a child with SEND and that as she was discouraged to support him during the transition to college, she had to come to terms with the idea of letting this part of her identity go for the good of her child's development and independence. Anna seemed to

be reflecting that he still has needs and that as a parent it is not easy to just stop advocating for him.

4.5 Participant 2: Sarah's Story

Sarah is a mother to two children. Her interview was focused on her eldest child. Sarah responded to my advertisement for participants via her local Parent/Carers Forum and was keen to take part.

4.6 Listen 1: Listening for the Plot

The plot of Sarah's narrative developed into a multi-layered account of her son's transition from secondary school to college. Her plot involved the different roles she adopted as a parent throughout the transition as well as reflections on previous transitions she had experienced with her child.

4.6.1 Secondary School Reflections

At the beginning of the interview, Sarah referred to the schools her son had attended in a positive way, starting with his secondary school: "…he's been supported a lot during his time in school" (Pg1, lines 6-7). This was developed when she referenced the secondary school SENDCo, "…he had a really good secondary school SENDCo. He was really kind to him and really supported his needs" (Pg 1, lines 6-7). Sarah referred to support for her child on a number of

occasions throughout the interview which, I felt, positioned her as someone who wants to work with others to achieve the best for her child, and who is willing to accept help from others.

Sarah also seemed comfortable using educational acronyms and terms, which indicated to me that she is well informed. She continued praising the secondary school, "We really loved them" (Pg1, line 9), "everyone there was really, really lovely" (Pg1, line 10). She focused on her feelings about relationships, here, indicating that she valued building good relationships with the school staff and felt a deep connection with them.

Sarah briefly adopted a pragmatic perspective when she said, "I think he probably outgrew the school" (Pg1, line 11), which demonstrated a narrative of being understanding of her son's needs, and an acceptance of him furthering his development. After this, Sarah highlighted again the importance of professional support, stating, "We had a really good SENDCo who looked after the special educational needs" (Pg 1, line 27). This narrative established a tone of trust and clarity, suggesting that Sarah valued the school's structured approach and thought that it was important in the transition process. It also demonstrated clear roles within the process, which Sarah seemed to accept. The SENDCo's role is further emphasised when Sarah recounted how they, "…took us through on an evening…took us through all the different options for him" (Pg 1, line 17) when she discussed the start of the transition process from secondary school to college. This seemed to alleviate any uncertainty and positioned the school as an active partner in the process. However, her pause after "evening" suggested to me that Sarah still found some aspects overwhelming despite all the additional information from the school.

4.6.2 Transition to College

Within her narratives around the practical aspects of the process, Sarah also reflected on the emotional ambivalence she felt during her child's transition to college, which is reflected in her statement, "I was worried. I can't lie, I was worried" (Pg 1, line 35), capturing the anxiety that she felt. By acknowledging that she "can't lie", it felt to me that Sarah had recognised her emotions and feelings were too raw and important to hide. It was also possible that Sarah was hinting at some internal conflicts, yet she had kept her opinions and feelings hidden during this period. Sarah then changed the tone of the narrative, stating that her son, "settled in very quickly" (Pg 1, Line 38) and "made friends very quickly" (Pg1, Line 38-39). I feel that her acknowledgement of both worry and relief forms a recurring thread in Sarah's narrative, revealing how she found the transition daunting and worrisome, but that the visible progress of her child also provided comfort and a validation of the process.

These conflicting emotions convey to me that Sarah might have found it challenging to know what the right thing was for her to do, and that she battled with these feelings routinely. The repetition of the word "quickly" also indicates that the idea of something happening quickly, or being solved quickly, were important factors for Sarah in judging the success of the transition. This success contrasts with Sarah's earlier worries, strengthening the narrative of relief and comfort, showing that even though she was anxious at first, her son's smooth transition provided reassurance that he was in the right place.

Sarah also reflected on the practical nature of the college experience, which seemed to suit her son. She noted that he enjoyed being able to "make media" (Pg 2, lines 44-45). This hands-on approach is spoken about positively and Sarah seemed to suggest it played to his strengths and helped her son to thrive in ways his secondary school setting had not been able to provide. Sarah's narrative of pride in her son's new skills and interests is clear when she talks about the work he has been doing at college, particularly in media production: "He's really good. Because he seems like he's enjoying it" (Pg2, lines 49-50). There seems to be a further sense of relief from Sarah that her child had identified a subject he enjoyed, although there appears to be some hesitancy in committing to the statement that he is enjoying his experience in her use of the word "seems". This hints at uncertainty, which may come from her not being able to witness her son's success first hand. However, her initial concerns about his transition to college seem to be alleviated in Sarah's acknowledgement that her son is showing progress and enjoyment.

4.6.3 Transition to Nursery

As Sarah moved further into the interview, she reflected on her experiences of her son's transitions from previous stages of his education. She compared the transition to college with early transitions, such as from nursery school to primary school. She shared how she, "felt pretty emotional" (Pg 3, line 117) when her son started nursery and how it was a big moment for her as a parent. Sarah seems to be underplaying her emotions again here when she says "pretty", which could suggest that she finds it challenging or uncomfortable to fully process or articulate the specific emotions she experienced, perhaps because of the vulnerability this

introduces. She might have tried to keep her feelings hidden as a form of protection for her child, and for herself. This may also suggest that Sarah experienced a mix of emotions, indicating that this was a complex time.

Sarah's narrative around emotions conveyed, to me, that she had a deep attachment to her son and was concerned about how the transition would impact him. Despite this Sarah also reflected a narrative of reassurance, "I liked going to nursery. I remember the staff being so lovely and you knew them really well" (Pg 3, lines 119-120) and of needing to accept that her child was getting older "he's not my baby anymore" (Pg 3, lines 120-121). Feeling a sense of connection to the staff at the nursery seemed important to Sarah, especially as their presentation of being "lovely", made her feel at ease. There is also a sense that there was a reciprocal relationship between the nursery staff and Sarah which supported her with the transition.

4.6.4 Transition to Secondary School

Looking back on his transition to secondary school, Sarah spoke about how she started the process early by looking around schools when her son was in Year Five, pointing to a narrative of feeling judged. She described how one secondary school staff member had said "...'oh, you're here early, aren't you?'" (Pg 4, line 132). Sarah seemed to see this as an accusatory statement from the teacher, as though she had not attended at the right time and not followed school procedures. This contrasts with Sarah's experiences of taking her child to nursery. Sarah described how she visited various secondary schools and felt significant pressure, as it was clear

that the choice of school would have an impact on her son's life. This narrative of responsibility

weighed heavily on her, and she talked about feeling unsure about which school would be best,

"I think, looking back, I felt overwhelmed. Because there was so much choice" (Pg 4, lines 149-

150). However, she also noted how important it was for her son to have a say in the decision, as

he "wanted to go to that one" (Pg 4, line 148), and this gave her some comfort as it became no

longer just her decision. There seemed to be a conflict here in her wanting to do the best for

her child but also not wanting to feel judged by others, which appeared to be a challenge for

her to navigate.

When reflecting on her child's transition to college, Sarah contrasted it with earlier transitions.

She noted that she felt "less worried about the college" (Pg 4, line 161) and Sarah referred to a

narrative of giving agency to her son as he grew older and became more independent. Sarah

seemed to downplay her worries here by stating she was "less worried" which may not reflect

how she was truly feeling as she is still acknowledging some worry. She described how, as a

parent, she did not feel as much responsibility for making the decisions as she had when he was

younger. She also reflected on a narrative of being listened to by the secondary school when

she stated, "for us it was being given those opportunities to ask questions" (Pg 3, line 165) and

the importance to her of having her voice heard.

In Sarah's story, I sensed that a narrative of support played a central role in making the

transition to college smoother. She described how school and college staff worked together,

exchanging information to ensure that her son's needs were understood, "they all went above

and beyond" (Pg 5, lines 186-187). She mentioned how the secondary school SENDCo "gave loads of information" (Pg 5, line 192) to the college staff, making sure they were well-informed about her son's needs. Sarah's acknowledgement of staff going "above and beyond" suggests that she was appreciative of their additional support. I felt that the support that Sarah described was in line with what SENDCos would usually do anyway, but Sarah acknowledged it as something more than she was expecting. This could suggest a narrative around being grateful or not wanting to be seen as demanding. A narrative of collaboration and partnership between the two institutions was also evident, helping create for Sarah and her son a sense of continuity and reassurance. She highlighted how, "everyone played their part in making him feel supported" (Pg5, line 190), emphasising that this sense of partnership between the school and college was crucial for the whole family during this transition.

Sarah referred to a narrative of change and difference in her son, especially once he had transitioned to college. She described how he was able to take breaks when needed, "[He] just gets up and walks out of his classroom" (Pg 5, line 204), and how this more flexible approach to learning suited him better than the rigid structure at secondary school. The fact that her son could wear his own clothes and address staff members by their first names made him feel "more like an adult" (Pg 5, line 207), which Sarah felt was a positive change for him. This adult-like treatment at college contributed to his sense of independence, something that Sarah recognised as important for his development.

Despite these positive changes, Sarah's narrative of worry and concern did not disappear completely. She outlined that she still felt a sense of sadness about her son's growing independence and the changes in their relationship. She acknowledged missing the close involvement she had with him when he was younger, saying, "I'll never feel fully happy as I miss being the parent and mothering him like I used to" (Pg 5, lines 184-185). This reflection highlights the emotional complexity of the transition: not only is her son growing and adapting to college life, but Sarah is also adjusting to her role as a parent in this new phase of his development. Referring to "mothering" provides a glimpse into Sarah's identity and how she sees herself as a mother and yearns to mother her child again, but she is also coming to terms with the adaptations her changing role involves.

The range of narratives which co-constructed from the interview included: understanding, ambivalence, relief, comfort, reassurance, success, pride, success, judged, responsibility, giving agency, being listening to, collaboration. These narratives suggest that there were more positive experiences than negative for Sarah in her son's transition to college and that she benefitted from receiving support and guidance from school staff. I felt that Sarah was not wanting to take over the process of the transition but she did wish to have some insight into the systems involved so that she could support her child, if needed, and continue to have a sense of purpose. I also reflected on when I was a teacher in a secondary school and how the students were encouraged to develop independence and resiliency but these skills were not always explicitly taught. Instead, there was a presumption that they would be developed by the pupils being given additional agency in their decisions.

Sarah's relationship and partnership with the secondary SENDCo also seemed important in her feeling supported and listened to. If parents do not have an advocate within a school setting, they could end up feeling frustrated and isolated.

4.6.5 Listen 2: Listening for I-statements and the creation of the I-poem

In Sarah's I-Poem, there are many moments where she refers to "I remember" to highlight moments of reflection and realisation of the experiences she encountered during the transition processes.

<div align="center">

I think he probably

I miss that SENDCo

I remember

I remember feeling

I remember

</div>

Here, Sarah reflected on the feelings she experienced with regard to the support she received from the SENDCo at her son's secondary school, who seemed to her to be an important person within the process. The interview allowed her to acknowledge their role in the process and how she would still like them to be involved. The repeated references to "remember" also support the idea of Sarah reflecting back and acknowledging that she is remembering things from the past which were significant to her. Precursing the information with remember could also suggest that these are moments that carry weight and importance for Sarah, as she still has

access to them. It also conveys a sense of needing to be heard and validated, emphasising the event as if to say that this happened, and it mattered.

Sarah also referred to concern and worry within the interview, suggesting some regret as well. This is highlighted in the following section:

I was worried

I can't lie

I was worried

I would have told him

I think if he

I felt that Sarah acknowledging her worry on a few occasions pointed to the anxieties and concerns that she was experiencing and how these may have lasted a long time. There is also a suggestion of regret, when she referred to what she could have told her son, which indicates there may have been words thought but not spoken which have stayed with her. This also seems reflected in her reference to, "I think if he", which describes not being listened to, or not speaking up, during a significant event.

Within the interview Sarah also acknowledged some positive feelings about her child's transition:

I was happy

I think relieved

I felt really supported

I felt happy

There seem to be reflections of relief and comfort within these statements which indicate that even though there were moments of concern and worry, Sarah also felt that in the main the transition went well, and she was able to accept positivity despite the challenge of the experience.

4.6.6 Listen 3: Listening for Contrapuntal Voices;

The Voice of Worry and the Voice of Relief

Sarah expressed moments of concern and worry throughout her interview. She used the word "worry" to further highlight how she was feeling. This includes "I was worried" and "I can't lie, I was worried". For me, this suggested an anxiety and worry about how her son would settle into college life and highlighted a sense of uncertainty about the unknown. This is contrasted with moments where Sarah demonstrated relief by highlighting matters she was worried about and how they were resolved. Sarah stated, "I think he settled in very quickly" and "He made friends very quickly". These statements imply the concerns that Sarah had felt about her son making friends and feeling like he belonged at the college, but the repeated reference to "very quickly" also suggests her relief when they happened at speed. There seems to be a significant journey between these two narratives, with the earlier voice of worry and concern feeling like an

emotion a parent of a child with a SEND would feel for much of their child's time in education. This is then juxtaposed with the feeling of relief that he settled quickly; it felt that Sarah's expectations had been that it would be another battle for her to take on based on her previous experiences.

The Voice of Support and the Voice of Independence

There are moments where Sarah highlighted the support she received and how important she found this when navigating the transition process, especially support from the secondary school SENDCo. "I miss that SENDCo, because they were like really, really nice". This highlights the attributes she identified in the support she received at an emotional level, as she valued the feeling of the staff being accepting of both her and her child. She also stated, "they knew him well", identifying that the support came from the SENDCo taking the time to work with her son, getting to know him, and Sarah gaining comfort from the familiarity and security this provided. Sarah contrasted this with moments of voicing her son's need for independence, "He wanted a fresh start". This suggested to me that she knew her son was ready to move on and access a new setting. I found it interesting that she did not include herself in that statement, perhaps indicating that as a parent she was not yet as ready for this fresh start. This is also demonstrated when she said, "he wanted to be independent." By only referring to her son it seems that she was not ready to move on, but he was, creating some difference between their ambitions.

The Voice of Loss and the Voice of Celebration of Growth

Another related interaction that I felt was evident within Sarah's story is that of her acknowledging the loss of the closeness she once had with her son as he became more independent and moved into this new stage of his life. This is reflected in, "I'll never feel fully happy" and "I miss being the parent and mothering him like I used to". This indicated a change in Sarah's own identity from being a mother of a child with SEND to accepting him becoming an adult who needs her advocacy less. This is contrasted with the celebration of his growth: "He's doing really well there". Sarah also stated, "He seems to be enjoying that where he can make things". Sarah is praising her son's newfound joy and success and how he is accessing a new, hands-on part of his education which aligns with his strengths and interests. This seems to support the idea of growth for Sarah as she is accepting her son's development and independence and acknowledging the next stage for herself, as a parent.

4.7 Participant 3: Leah's Story

Leah has one child, who was the focus of the interview. Leah did not see the initial advertisement for participants and is not a member of a Parent/Carers Forum but is a friend of Sarah, who forwarded her the advert. Leah was keen to take part and contacted me independently.

4.7.1 Listen 1: Listening for the Plot

Leah started the interview by advising that she had not yet thought about the past events of any transitions in any detail, "I don't know how I feel about this at the moment" (Pg1, line 8). I was struck by this statement as it seemed to represent an acknowledgment that she had experienced some uncomfortable emotions and narratives but perhaps did not know how to voice them yet. I had hoped that I had created a safe enough space for her to share some of them. She reflected that having the interview might, "give me some chance to open, to consider some things a bit differently" (Pg1, lines 9-11). Her words seemed to create a complex narrative of uncertainty and opportunity in allowing the interview to explore her experiences.

4.7.2 Transition to Primary School

The next part of the interview gave Leah the space to reflect on her child's experiences of transitions. Leah structured her responses in the chronological order of the different transitions her child had experienced, which seemed to help her remember more details related to her own thoughts and feelings about what had occurred. Leah believed that her child had a "really nice time" in primary school but that she was informed on a regular basis that his teachers were concerned about his academic ability: "They're finding the work more difficult(.) than other students" (Pg 1, lines 13-14). However, this was not obvious at home, "I couldn't see the child they would tell me about at primary school" (Pg1, lines 16-17). This created conflicting narratives for Leah about the experiences of her child during this phase of his education, reflecting a disconnect from the professionals at school in relation to her own thoughts about her child, leading to potential mistrust. Leah included short pauses during her reflection around

her child finding the work "difficult" which suggested that this was a pivotal moment for her and challenging to speak about. From my experience as a teacher, parents can compare their children to other children and their own expectations of having children. Acknowledging the additional challenge her child was facing at school might therefore have caused some internal conflict for Leah.

4.7.3 Transition to Secondary School

The next part of the interview focused on Leah's reflections about her child's transition from primary to secondary school. She recalled the process of choosing a secondary school, which involved extensive research and consideration of the school she felt was the best fit for her child's needs. Leah was particularly drawn to one school because of its supportive SEND department, which provided a sense of reassurance during a time when the transition felt overwhelming, "It just felt like a good school (.) that would support them" (Pg 2, line 32). I felt that the pause between each statement indicated a slight reluctance to speak about support, which could suggest this was difficult for Leah to either ask for or to accept.

Leah noted the issue of no longer being involved in the drop-off routine and the more distant relationship with staff, to which she found it challenging to adapt, "We didn't know who the staff members were to speak to" (Pg 2, line 51). Leah's continued need for connection with staff members perhaps demonstrates her desire to be in partnership with them, ensuring she might have a voice should it be is needed. Despite these challenges, Leah reflected that the transition was ultimately "fine" (Pg2, Line 55) but still difficult due to her child's academic

struggles and adjustment to a new, larger environment. I felt that these were narratives of

seeking support but still feeling isolated, alongside a narrative of accepting change.

Leah reflected next on the challenges she faced in attempting to navigate understanding her

child's special educational needs, which seemed to be another transition, this time in Leah's

thinking: "…we never got a dyslexia diagnosis, but we think it probably is dyslexia" (Pg 2, lines

56-57); "he never met the criteria to get anything extra…he wasn't low enough with his results"

(Pg 2, lines 60-61). There seems to be an underlying narrative of frustration and uncertainty as

well as a desire to understand behaviours associated with a specific diagnosis. Leah's intrigue

with diagnosis also suggests that her voice was not heard here, and there is an implication that

perhaps if a diagnosis had been given it would have helped everyone make sense of the support

her child required, rationalising it for other people. I also sensed a narrative around having to

battle, but Leah's pause prior to "…he wasn't low enough with his results" could display a mixed

and reaction to the fact that his results were not low enough for the diagnosis, which might also

have introduced some relief.

4.7.4 Transition to College

The next part of the interview involved Leah reflecting on her child's experiences during the

final stages of secondary school and his transition to college. Leah described how, despite

facing academic challenges throughout his schooling, her child had made significant progress by

the time they completed secondary school: "He'd got grades that he could be proud of, and

that would allow him to go to a college" (Pg 2, line 67). Leah expressed a narrative of pride in

his achievements. She explained that she wished her child could have stayed at the same school for a few more years but accepted that circumstances led them to explore college options as the school did not have a sixth form: "We'd have loved him to stay at that school, loved him to have another couple of years at that school" (Pg 2, lines 75-76). This suggests that Leah's preference would have been for her child to remain at the school, and that he was forced into making the transition before he (or she) was ready.

Leah reflected on how her child took the lead in choosing the college he wanted to attend; she compared this to her choosing his previous educational settings and feeling part of the process "I don't feel like I'm part of that at all" (Pg3, lines 118-119), creating a narrative of distance and irrelevancy. Leah elaborated on this when she said, "I didn't know what grades he would need, what courses he would do, how they would support him" (Pg3, lines 126-127). There seemed, again, to be an underlying narrative of isolation for Leah within the process and a lot of uncertainty as she listed her frustrations. This sounded like something Leah had spoken about before this interview. Leah's identity as a parent appeared to have shifted without her being informed of it. Leah then discussed how she made contact with the secondary school's SENDCo to outline her concerns at not being involved, "I left there feeling like I had a plan, I knew more" (Pg 4, line 132), creating a narrative of support being sought to increase her understanding of the process. Leah instigated contact with the SENDCo to ensure she had adequate information to support her child. I felt that this meant Leah did not seem ready to fully lose her role as a parent and instead took the initiative to embrace this identity and ensure she was heard.

Leah discussed what the meeting with the SENDCo involved by introducing a narrative of simplicity and direction, "…all she did was took me onto the college's website and navigated that with me" (Pg 4, line 135) and ensure "I had a date for an open evening" (Pg 4, line 138). Leah discussed how having this information made her feel part of the process and gave her more awareness of what her involvement could be, creating a narrative of empowerment, "I was a bit anxious before that meeting, but after that meeting, I didn't feel as anxious" (Pg4, lines 144-145). Leah gained the information proactively acquired by arranging the meeting. It was not something that was automatically offered.

Leah moved on to discussing the experience of her child moving to college and how this affected her. A narrative of reflection and acceptance was demonstrated when she discussed how she had taken a step back during his initial start at college, "I didn't want to meddle. I let him go into college by himself" (Pg 5, line 193). Using the statement "I let" shows that Leah is still holding onto her role as a parent in giving her child permission to be independent. Leah then talked about how her child began to navigate the bus system on his own and how, while she did not interfere, she still worried about his wellbeing in these new situations, "I was well aware of his difficulties with writing and reading" (Pg 5, line 199). This suggested a narrative of concern and feeling isolated, "I wanted him to feel supported (Pg 5, line 203). Leah mentioned "support" through a narrative of often having to fight or challenge to obtain it. I perceived that her identity as a parent is about protecting her child and advocating for them. Leah also referred to herself as though she were the only one aware of his difficulties. Not including anyone else indicates this was a personal battle.

Given her concerns for her child and her feelings of isolation, Leah then discussed how she made contact with the college SENDCo to arrange a meeting. She said, "I didn't tell him I did this until afterward" (Pg 5, lines 205-206) in reference to her son, creating a narrative of secrecy which is further highlighted when Leah stated, "So I went into the college and I made sure he wasn't there" Pg 5, line 209). A narrative of reassurance is then evident when she speaks of meeting the SENDCo, "…she pulled out loads of information about him (.) which was great" (Pg 5, lines 216-217). To me, the pause here demonstrates relief as Leah seems to suggest that she expected to have to challenge and fight for her child but this became unnecessary when she saw what was already being put in place for them. Leah conveyed frustration when she commented, "I think what struck me from telling you these things is that I had to take the lead" (Pg 6, lines 230-231). This was a moment of realisation for Leah as she acknowledged to me, and herself, all the battling she had felt she needed to do for her child.

Towards the end of the interview, Leah reflected on how she felt during the process of the transition, drawing upon a narrative of personal development, "I felt frustrated I wasn't maybe part of that process more than I would like to have been." (Pg 6, lines 251-252). However, once Leah had reflected on her changing emotions, she suggested, "But now I'm feeling positive" (Pg 6, lines 253-254) and "I don't go into college for any more meetings. I let him do his thing. I let him enjoy it" (Pg 6, lines 254-255). The secrecy of having to organise a meeting behind her child's back seemed to be a pivotal moment for Leah. She could then see he was being

supported and felt able to support his independence. Mirroring her proactivity with the secondary SENDCo, Leah was the one to initiate the meeting.

Later in the interview, Leah seemed to be balancing feeling left out of the transition and decision-making process with also feeling positive and happy that her child had taken some ownership over his decision-making, "…maybe it's a good thing I wasn't involved in it" (Pg7, line 297-298). "Maybe" brings some uncertainty to her statement; it feels as though she is waiting for validation of her role. Leah paused for two seconds after this statement and could have been waiting for me to interject and refute or strengthen the claim, but I did not. Instead, I allowed Leah to continue with her story. There were a few occasions where Leah referenced seeking support and advice from others, which could suggest that although she desires to have a voice, she also finds it difficult to accept that this is possible and continues to require reassurance.

Leah's interview included a range of narratives: uncertainty, conflict, seeking support, isolated, change, uncertainty, pride, distance, relevancy, frustration, simplicity, direction, reflection, acceptance, concern, secrecy, development. When Leah spoke about how she had to go behind her child's back to meet with the college SENDCo as she did not want him to stand out from his peers, it made me reflect on the difficult choice parents have to make and how her organising a meeting with the SENDCo, which was a reasonable thing to do, could equally have damaged her relationship with her child. Leah had a right to know how her child was going to be supported,

and I found myself supporting her actions during the interview without considering, at the time, how they may have affected her son.

There was a lot of reflection from Leah throughout the interview as she explored her experiences and emotions. I remember sharing her feelings of frustration with the educational settings, especially the college, as all Leah needed was reassurance, which was not forthcoming until she contacted them. Within Leah's story of her experience there seemed to be an expectation from the educational settings that she would sit back and let her child take ownership of his transition to college, whereas Leah still saw her child as vulnerable and that his SEND continued to require support, which was a barrier to her complying with the role with which she had suddenly been allocated.

4.7.5 Listen 2: Listening for I-statements and the creation of the I-poem

Throughout her interview, Leah referred to "I can", which is suggestive of her realisation of her own agency as well as reinforcing her sense of her identity as her child's advocate. This is supported by other references to "I hadn't", which might display an acknowledgement of her own growth as a parent yet these being aspects of herself she had kept unspoken or unacknowledged:

I can be more than that.

I can have friends.

I can go out.

I can have more money.

I hadn't spoken about that to anyone

I hadn't even thought of that before

I hadn't thought that properly before.

Throughout the interview, Leah also references her positive emotions, and relief when she realised that her child was accessing college independently. She speaks of her growing confidence as a parent and how she is able to find fulfilment in other aspects of her life as a result. She also acknowledges a feeling of pride for her child and a reflection that she has done a good job as a parent in supporting him into adulthood:

I was happy.

I was happy.

I feel positive.

I feel optimistic about the future.

I left that meeting just feeling like, yes

I'm enjoying work more.

I'm now a parent who's letting their son become more independent.

Prior to this, Leah talked about her frustrations at having to take responsibility for gaining information to ensure that her child's needs were met at college and how burdened she was with this responsibility. Leah uses "I had" frequently, which for me demonstrates her

perception that her role is still being the driving force behind her child's transition even though she had felt excluded and isolated from the process:

I had to lead on both of those.

I had to organise those.

I think that's a bit frustrating.

I find that very difficult to understand.

I couldn't work out what I can see now.

I think that's a bit frustrating.

I couldn't work out what I can see now.

"I had" emphasises Leah's urge to take control and her lack of trust in the process. It also reflects her sense of responsibility in needing to fulfil tasks she associates with being a parent advocate, as no one else was supporting her.

4.7.6 Listen 3: Listening for Contrapuntal Voices;

The Voice of Frustration and the Voice of Acceptance

I believe that Leah displayed moments of frustration and puzzlement throughout the interview, especially when she reflected on the responsibilities she had to undertake, for example in arranging meetings with the college SENDCo and ensuring that the necessary support was in place for her child. This is demonstrated when she said, "I find that very difficult to understand" in relation to having to organise the meetings. Leah had expected the SENDCo to contact her

directly and displayed frustration that this did not happen. Contrary to this, Leah showed

moments of acceptance by acknowledging that stepping back from her child and allowing him

to accept more responsibility and independence had ultimately been a positive move. "I think

it's a good thing that I became less involved" shows how Leah was able to admit that her

involvement was not needed as much during her son's time at college, and she sees the

benefits her child now has because he took on more responsibility for his own support.

The Voice of Letting Go and the Voice of Holding On

There seemed to be a clear and interesting tension taking place throughout the interview

involving Leah's acknowledgement that she needed to let her son have a voice and that her role

as a parent had evolved from the years prior to his attending college: "It's hard to accept, I

think, that you're becoming a bit more in the distance (.) less prominent in his life." Here, Leah

attempted to accept the emotional difficulty of letting go and her changing role as a parent.

This is in tension with the voice of her holding on to her parent advocate role, where Leah

recognised that she would always be there for her child; "I'm still his parent. I will always be his

parent(.) I want him to do well". This shows how Leah's identity as a parent is instilled in her

and is something she does not want to lose.

The Voice of Feeling Excluded and the Voice of Being Proactive

There were many moments in the interview where Leah alluded to feeling isolated and alone

during the transition to college process, especially when she compared this with the support

she received as a parent during her son's transition to primary school. Leah was quite explicit when she said, "I don't feel like I'm part of it at all" which displayed the exclusion she experienced. When Leah moved on from this, she referred to all the pro-active tasks in which she engaged to ensure she made contact with the SENDCo so that she would receive the responses she needed, "I contacted the SENDCo at this point because I just felt a bit lost" and "I'm going to become involved." This showed her determination to be an active participant in her child's transition to college despite this not being an immediately obvious role made available.

Leah's narrative contained a series of conflicting emotions and perspectives, reflecting the complexity of her role as a parent of a child with SEND during her child's transition to college. On the one hand, she struggled with feelings of exclusion, frustration, and anxiety as she navigated the process. On the other hand, she recognised the importance of encouraging her child's independence, embracing her role in helping him grow, yet seeking reassurance in the support system in place. These interacting voices highlighted the emotional complexity of parenting during a transitional period, where a parent must balance protective instincts with the need to foster independence and self-sufficiency in their child. The protective instincts seemed especially important for Leah as a parent of a child with SEND, as she had adopted an advocacy role for a sustained period and had previously needed to be proactive in generating what she perceived to be right support for her child. Her loss of control during her child's transition to college was challenging for Leah to accept. She may have felt that her involvement in the transition supported her child's success at college, validating her previous role and need

to advocate for her child. This may also have enhanced her desire to continue supporting her

child in the future.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Overview

In this thesis, I have explored the experiences of parents whose children have transitioned to a FE setting, focusing on how each parent experienced the transition. Within this chapter, I have addressed my research question and referred to relevant literature, building on the individual narratives and voices of my participants. I consider how the narratives combined can be understood, whilst acknowledging that the methodology in which I chose to ground my research is designed to look at and consider subjectivity, which typically refers to individual experience as unique. Even though subjectivity can be defined from an individual perspective, the information and experiences gathered throughout my research might also provide a shared understanding of the transition experience beyond school.

Reflecting on the narratives and views of my participants, I have additionally considered how FE settings, Educational Psychologists and school staff can support parents during this transition and develop their own professional practice. I have reflected on recommendations for any potential future research and considered the limitations and trustworthiness of this study.

My positionality as both a former SENDCo and a parent significantly shaped my engagement with the data and my interpretation of the participants' narratives. I entered the research with professional experience of supporting transitions to FE, alongside personal awareness of the emotional complexity that can accompany navigating a transition to an educational setting. This

dual perspective heightened my sensitivity to the emotional and relational dimensions of parental experience, allowing me to empathise with the participants. It also informed my choice of narrative methodology and the use of the Listening Guide, which aligned with my commitment to amplifying parental voice and attending to multiple layers of meaning.

At the same time, I was aware that my background could introduce assumptions or expectations into the analysis. My professional experience may have made me more attuned to systemic barriers and gaps in communication, and my parental perspective could have led me to identify strongly with the participants' feelings of advocacy and exclusion. I managed this potential influence through reflexivity, maintaining a journal to document my reactions and decisions throughout the analysis. This process allowed me to acknowledge moments where I felt resonance or emotional alignment with participants, while ensuring that their voices remained central. By situating my interpretations within this reflexive awareness, I sought to balance empathy with analytical rigour, ensuring that the findings reflected the participants' experiences rather than my own expectations.

5.2 Research Question

What are the experiences of parents and carers of a child with SEND during the transition from secondary school to a post-16 provider?

I feel that each parent shared a slightly different perspective of their experiences during the process of their child's transition to a FE setting, demonstrating that support on offer for

parents and CYP during this time varies. Downes, Nairz-Wirth and Anderson (2018) identified that the concept of transition to a FE environment is too linear and that a successful transition should be considered as an evolving process for as long as the CYP needs it to be. They state that seeing a transition as a one-off event can be disruptive to the CYP and not offer the individualised support over time that is required. An ongoing process of transition might also allow parents to feel supported and more accepting, finding their place within it.

The voices in each parent's account were shaped by wider cultural narratives around parenting, disability, and transition. These narratives influenced how parents made sense of their roles and interacted with relevant systems. A tension was clear between wanting to promote independence and needing to stay protective. Parents often expressed pride in their child's growing autonomy and a sense that they should begin to step back, reflecting common discourses around adulthood and self-reliance (Arnett, 2000; Hughes et al., 2019). At the same time, these feelings sat alongside a continued drive to protect, shaped by cultural expectations that mothers remain closely involved (Ryan & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Vincent, 2012).

This interplay was evident in each parent's narrative. Anna's voice of pride around her child's independence echoed dominant ideas of successful parenting, while her sense of disconnection suggested the emotional impact of stepping back without trust in the system. Sarah's narrative reflected the pressure to advocate persistently, despite the risk of being dismissed or criticised (Lalvani, 2015; Runswick-Cole, 2011). Leah's narrative pointed to a lack of faith in the systems around her and a feeling that she had to take responsibility.

Placing these voices within cultural narratives highlights that the emotional complexity expressed by parents was not only a response to their individual situations, but it was also socially shaped. Without stronger relational and systemic support, parents are left managing these tensions alone, often at personal cost.

My research question set out to identify the experiences of each of my participants during the transition process. A summary of key individual and shared narratives (Stage Four of the Listening Guide) are as follows:

5.3 The Confusing and Isolating Role of the Parent in their Child's Transition to FE

One of the central narratives within my research for each of the parents I interviewed was their experience of their child's transition to Further Education (FE) being both isolating and confusing. They described feeling uncertain about their role, unsure of when or how they should be involved, at times feeling excluded from conversations about their child's future. Anna reflected: "[I] felt like I was not being allowed into that conversation sometimes with school". Anna seems to be demonstrating a frustration here at being excluded from the process and that she did not feel she had the school's permission to enter into the conversations. This was confusing for her when she had previously considered herself the caregiver and main advocate for her child. It also demonstrates a transition of roles. Anna would have been the decision maker prior to this transition for her child, whereas now she is no longer considered an important part of the process.

Leah displayed similar concerns: "I don't feel like I'm part of that at all", suggesting she was being distanced from the transition. This is coming from Leah's experience of feeling that her thoughts and emotions were not being considered. School and college staff may have thought they were including Leah, but her narrative still demonstrates a sense of exclusion. Leah also compared this to her previous involvement during her child's other transition, when she felt her role was important throughout those processes. She highlighted how this transition was particularly confusing.

This echoes earlier research by Clegg et al. (2013), who identified that parents of young people with SEND often navigate transition with a burden of responsibility but with little clear guidance or structured support to enable them to feel part of the process. In this research, the parents' voices within each interview reflected a sense of being on the periphery of the process, with an expectation from the FE setting and the secondary school that they would have to step back despite not being fully prepared or emotionally ready to do so. It seemed as though this was a process that was being done to them as opposed to one in which they were actively involved and could offer support.

This can also be understood through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, where the transition to FE represents a major shift in the mesosystem, involving changes in relationships between home, school, and the new FE setting. When communication between these systems is weak or inconsistent, as all three participants described, it seemed to contribute to the breakdown of collaborative relationships and left the parents feeling on their

own and confused. The Listening Guide method was particularly useful in empowering the emotional undertones of this experience to be voiced. The I-poems (see Appendices 4B, 5B, and 6B) often reflected inner conflict, with the participants wanting to support their child whilst simultaneously feeling excluded or pushed out.

This confusion around parental roles may also reflect a lack of clarity within the wider policy landscape, where emphasis on young people's rights and autonomy post-16, including in the Children and Families Act (2014), can unintentionally sideline parents. While person-centred planning prioritises the voice of the young person, these narratives suggest that the parental voice still needs space and should be included as part of a relational and supportive transition process. Parents of children with SEND may not yet feel ready to let go of their advocacy roles to systems they have little knowledge about. It also seems that my participants' past negative experiences of previous transitions have also played their part in decreasing their trust in such processes. Finding the balance between enabling parental voice but also allowing the child to develop independence is important but perhaps challenging to navigate, especially if the child is perceived to be vulnerable/experience SEND. Beresford and Sloper (2008) similarly note that when parents are unsure of their role, they often default to protective instincts. This can cause breakdowns in relationships between educational settings and the parent as well as put a strain on their relationship with their child.

5.3.1 Implications for Practice

I believe that these narratives suggest important implications for practice. Educational Psychologists (EPs), with their systemic understanding and relational training, may be particularly well placed to support parents through this confusing period. They could facilitate spaces where families might reflect on their evolving roles, engage in collaborative planning, and feel heard within the wider system. Without such support, parents may continue to experience their child's transition beyond school not as disempowering. Other professionals could carry out this role, but recent research suggests that EPs are particularly well placed to engage in systemic and reflective work. The University of Warwick's report on the Educational Psychology workforce (2023) emphasises the value of EPs working preventatively and relationally with families, beyond their statutory duties. Boyle and MacKay (2007) also suggest that EPs occupy a particular position that facilitates collaborative planning by creating spaces for reflective dialogue, especially during key transition points.

This study has raised some important points for educational practice, particularly for Educational Psychologists and others involved in post-16 transitions. The emotional toll described by parents is not just about how well individual families cope but it pointed towards the way systems are set up. When schools, colleges and local authorities aren't working closely together, parents often end up taking on a lot of the emotional and practical heavy lifting, especially when there's no EHCP in place. It is often mothers who are left to hold everything together.

Good transition support is not just about putting on a meeting, it is about systems being better connected and communicating clearly with each other and with families. EPs are in a good position to help with this by supporting relationships between services, helping to build trust with families, and noticing when the system is placing too much pressure on parents. It also means being aware that things like co-production don't always play out in practice in the way they are talked about in policy.

Supporting parents more effectively means more than just being reassuring, it involves practical changes to how things are done. Clearer communication and earlier involvement as well as shared planning meetings that include parents and making sure families without EHCPs have access to support would benefit.

There may also be a role for holding some of these conversations in community spaces, like Family Hubs or Better Start Centres, rather than in schools. That shift could help to rebalance the power dynamic and make space for more open and honest conversations.

5.4 The Role of Communication in Shaping Parental Experience

Another key narrative to emerge from this study was the important role that communication plays in shaping parents' experiences and expectations of their child's transition to Further Education (FE). Across all three interviews, the absence of communication was referred to, and this had a significant emotional and practical impact. Communication with parents can influence how informed and included they feel throughout a transition process. Where

communication is clear and ongoing, parents can feel more confident and less anxious (Black, R., & Simon, M. A., 2014). Conversely, poor communication for these parents led to uncertainty and in some cases, mistrust. Anna informed me: "[I] felt like I was not being allowed into that conversation" and that "they were talking to him behind my back". This alludes to a narrative around secrecy and not being allowed access to important information. The communication between the school and Anna did not seem clear and informing and had an isolating effect on how Anna experienced the transition. Anna's experience of feeling as though people were talking behind her back could have made her feel undermined, not included and was likely to erode trust.

Leah discussed her experience of communication and reflected: "…maybe it's a good thing I wasn't involved in it". Here, it seems as though she is trying to find a positive reason for not being as involved in the transition or the communications as she would have liked. There is a feeling of hesitancy, however, in her use of the word "maybe", which I feel demonstrates a sense of uncertainty. It is interesting that Leah has taken this position as it appeared that she was attempting to appreciate her child's position in the process by stepping back, but in effect this was a decision she was not consulted on and instead it was a process done to her. This suggests a lack of coherent and sustained communication with Leah which has ended with her having to make assumptions and feel unclear about her role, supporting her son to make his own decisions but not feeling confident to do so.

Sarah had a different experience, which is outlined in her reflection, "for us it was being given those opportunities to ask questions". Here Sarah is exploring the narrative around communication by demonstrating the importance of being listened to and having a voice in the process. The school Sarah's child attended allowed parents to attend an information evening at which she was able to ask questions and engage in conversations with key staff members. This enabled Sarah to feel part of the process and have an idea of her role, which made her communication narrative feel slightly more positive than that of the other participants. It seemed particularly important for Sarah to have her questions answered so that she could gain some clarity about any misunderstandings.

These narratives align with previous research that highlights the importance of open, collaborative dialogue between professionals and families during educational transitions (Lamb, 2009; Pinney, 2005). For parents of children with SEND, this dialogue is particularly important as it is often offers more than the information being sought, but also includes the strengthening of relationships, in that the parents in this research referred to times that connections had been established with those who were supporting their child, at times at their instigation. Communication serves to either include or exclude parents as active participants in planning and decision-making process. Beresford and Sloper (2008) note that when communication is inconsistent or overly professionalised, parents may struggle to understand their child's options, leading to a breakdown in trust and an increased emotional burden.

Through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), communication operates within and between several systems which can include home, school, college, and the local authority, playing a crucial role in connecting them. When these systems are not well connected, parents can feel that they are navigating the transition in isolation and there is increased pressure to act as the glue to hold all the fragmented aspects of the process together. This was evident in the way participants described having to chase professionals, attend meetings without clear agendas, or seek out information independently; each of these activities placed additional pressure on families during an already emotionally demanding time. Lave and Wenger (1991) also outline how developing relationships with CYP together with their family, as well as communicating directly with CYP, is an important element of a successful transition.

5.5 A Diminished Role for Parents

A further narrative within this research was the extent to which parents felt pushed into a reduced role during their child's transition, often before they felt emotionally or practically prepared to let go of their previous role. All three participants described a shift in their involvement, from being highly engaged advocates during their children's school years to being positioned on the margins of decision making and day-to-day communication once their child began the transition process and ultimately started college. It was interesting how each parent took the opportunity to reflect back on previous transitions as points of reference to help them position their narratives and experiences during this particular transition. The reflections on past transitions seemed to bring up a yearning for the previous experiences to be repeated rather than acceptance that their role had changed. Alongside this, there also seemed to be

conflicting narratives as each of the parents agreed in principle with the importance of fostering independence in their child but it was the abruptness, lack of guidance, and emotional cost of this shift that seemed to create feelings of tension and uncertainty.

Anna seemed to have some profound moments of realisation when she concluded that her role had changed and she was not involved as she once was. She reflected: "I do miss having an input or having a say in his life like I used to, which is sad for me, but I think it's good for him". This reflects the confusion generated for Anna. She was battling between wanting to see her child develop and increase his autonomy but not wanting this to be at the detriment of her own involvement and role. This felt like a challenging situation to balance, and one that was emotionally draining for Anna, especially as she seemed unsupported throughout the process. She reflected, "I can't see it, I can't understand how he's doing. I can't access that part of him" which seemed to be a pivotal revelation for her, as she ceased the interview after stating this. Developing a narrative around not having full access to her child suggests that Anna's relationship with him is now restricted and she feels there are parts of him that he is keeping away from her. This is particularly poignant compared with how Anna spoke about the transition to primary school, stating, "And I think looking back that was a really happy time for us". This comparison feels challenging as it highlights clear differences in experiences and emotions between the various transitions for some parents.

Sarah also displayed moments of realisation about her changing role as a parent, when she expressed, "I'll never feel fully happy as I miss being the parent and mothering him like I used

to". There is a sense of yearning for the past here, where Sarah is becoming nostalgic for her former role as a parent, suggestive of a sense of changing identity. Sarah hints that she will never feel fully happy, now, which is a strong narrative to associate with her new role. The concept of mothering also relates to being the caregiver and giving emotional support, which Sarah intimates she is no longer doing in the same way.

Leah also reflected on previous transitions when she had felt more involved, including during her child's transition to primary school: "it felt like we had chosen the right school for them". Leah displayed a positive outlook on her past decisions, which may have given her a sense of confidence in knowing her child needs but also feeling responsible for supporting him to ensure they were met. Leah compares this to the transition to college, about which she reflected, "I didn't know what was happening…how they would support him", which is very different to her previous experiences. Leah decided to attempt to gain some control by contacting the school's SENDCo and arranging a meeting with them to work through the transition process, which had a positive effect in that she seemed to gain confidence as a result. By becoming more involved, Leah reflected, "…things were becoming clearer" and this benefitted her child as "he seemed happy and was, I think, maybe relieved that we were taking him seriously". Leah still expressed some uncertainty here through her use of the word "maybe", showing that even with the additional information she acquired, she still felt uncertain about her role. She had also risked losing the trust of her child.

This resonates with the work by Todd and Jones (2005), who note that transitions often mark not only a change for the young person, but also a significant identity shift for their parent(s). Throughout my research, each parent expressed that their role was changed for them, rather than it evolving through a collaborative process. They explored their changing roles but there did not seem to be very much collaboration unless parents initiated it, as Leah did. The closest example of collaboration came when Sarah discussed the open evening she attended, which was initiated by the school, and allowed her to have any questions answered and feel a sense of connection to the process.

Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development could be applied to offer some insight here. His framework is typically applied to adolescent identity formation, as explained earlier in this thesis, but it can also highlight the parental identity crisis that occurs when long-standing roles are destabilised and changed. During their child's school years, particularly for parents of children with SEND, their parental role often involves high levels of advocacy and involvement in the daily life of their child. The transition to FE represents not just a shift in the young person's context, but a rupture in the interdependent roles that have formed over time. It feels as though it is not the parents' choice to have this change inflicted on them and they do not seem to have any real control over when it takes place. This potentially makes it even more destabilising as they have not initiated when they and their child feel ready for their role as advocate to be reduced. Neal et al. (2016) indicated that a personalised approach to transitions is important, especially if the CYP has SEND, as they often experience a number of difficulties during this period. Nevertheless, each of my participants reflected on the absence of their

support being sought unless they instigated it despite their experiences of advocating and knowing the kind of support that had been helpful previously.

5.6 Linking to Previous Transitions

Another interesting and potentially poignant narrative that emerged during the research was when parents reflected on earlier transitions in their child's educational journey, such as their move to primary or secondary school, contrasting these with their child's move to a FE setting and coming to a realisation of the vast differences between these experiences. For each participant, the interview seemed to be the first opportunity they had been offered to discuss these differences or make sense of them. Their reflections suggested not only a sense of increased distance during the FE transition, but also a feeling of having been more informed, supported, and positioned as central in decision-making in previous transitions. All three participants described feeling as though they had more control and more autonomy over their decisions in the earlier transitions and they all spoke about there being greater collaboration between those involved. However, their child's move into FE felt vague, uncertain, and emotionally disconnected.

I reflected that this must have been a challenging experience for the parents and that it seemed they had been forced to push any frustrations and emotional discomfort aside for the transition to take place. This shift is significant, particularly for parents of children with recognised SEND, who, as indicated, have so far often played highly active roles in advocating for their child as well as supporting and coordinating provision for them. In earlier transitions, the parental role

tends to be formally acknowledged through meetings, during visits and within clear communication channels. However, as these participants' accounts demonstrate, the FE transition can represent a turning point in which the system begins to expect parental withdrawal without explicitly negotiating it or directly informing the parents concerned. This can result in parents feeling pushed to the margins not only in practice, but also through their own changing sense of identity and connection to their child's education.

The concept of liminality (Turner, 1967) might be useful in understanding this phenomenon. Transitions are inherently liminal spaces, periods of in-between where old roles are being shed but new ones are not yet fully formed. For the parents in this study, the transition to FE for their child involved a double liminality: they were not only navigating uncertainty about their child's next steps but also confronting the ambiguity of their own changing role, without the support or closure that accompanied previous transitions.

The sense of increasing distance for my participants during their experience of their child's transition to a post-16 setting was not merely logistical but was also emotional and relational. Using the Listening Guide allowed for a close reading of how parents' voices revealed a quiet sadness and sense of exclusion as they looked back. These reflective moments often carried tones of loss as parents tried to reconcile their past involvement with their current invisibility in the process. This narrative points to a clear implication that just because a young person is older does not mean the parent no longer requires support or recognition. The assumption that maturity in the child equates to detachment from the parent overlooks the emotional

investment and practical knowledge that parents bring, particularly when their children have

ongoing additional needs. The FE transition, unlike earlier ones, often lacks clear structures for

parent inclusion, which can result in feelings of abandonment or disengagement. For my

participants, it was only when they reflected and had the space to compare these transitions

that this was realised and acknowledged.

5.7 Unique Voices

A key strength of using a narrative methodology, particularly the Listening Guide, lies in its

ability to reveal the complex and individual nature of each participant's experience. One of the

central aims of this research was to create a space where parents could voice their stories in a

way that moved beyond surface-level themes, allowing for a deeper recognition of the

emotional and relational dimensions of the transition to FE. By listening closely to the multiple

narratives within each story, the analysis identified a rich understanding of how each parent

navigated feelings of uncertainty, isolation, and a shifting identity.

5.7.1 Anna — Grieving a Lost Role

I felt that Anna's narratives centred around a deep sense of loss as her involvement in her

child's education became minimised. She reflected on feeling unprepared for the shift from

being an active advocate to seeing herself in a passive position. Despite recognising her child's

growing independence, Anna found it challenging to accept the new role and she

acknowledged that she no longer had access to her child like she used to. Her story highlighted

the emotional labour involved in appearing supportive while internally struggling with disconnection and uncertainty. Emotional labour is the process of managing our own feelings as part of fulfilling the requirement of a role (Hochschild, 1983).

5.7.2 Sarah — Battling Silence

Sarah's story was marked by moments of acceptance and positivity towards her child but then also points of confusion and worry about how he would cope. Sarah conveyed a more positive experience of the transition, and she outlined how the secondary school SENDCo had offered support and made her feel at ease with the transference of information to the college. Sarah also described how college is good for her child in allowing him to continue his growth and development, but she also alluded to not feeling able to mother him like she used to. Sarah acknowledged the need for support and the desire to work with others for the benefit of her child but also narrated how she was not able to access college and feels on the periphery of this, looking in.

5.7.3 Leah — Searching for Reassurance

Leah's narratives focused on the emotional tension between encouraging her child's independence and needing reassurance that appropriate support was in place. While Leah was optimistic about the opportunities FE could offer, she also spoke of her underlying anxiety about not being actively involved. Her narrative revealed a longing for involvement which resulted in her meeting with the college SENDCo without informing her child. The Listening

Guide process illuminated her negotiation between trust and fear, and the emotional toll

involved in stepping back while still feeling responsible. Leah positioned herself as someone

forced to chase information, reflecting exhaustion and frustration. Leah's narrative arguably

exposed the gaps between policy aspirations for co-production and the lived reality of parents

navigating fragmented systems.

5.8 Implications for Practice

The information gathered and the findings identified within my research suggest a need for EPs

and other relevant practitioners to be aware that when they work with families and CYP who

are going through the transition to a FE setting, it may be a sensitive and emotive experience. It

is also an experience which is not consistent, so each person's experience, and the support and

information they have received during the transition, could be different.

I believe that a central implication emerging from this study is the underused potential of EPs to

support parents during the transition of their child from school to FE. While the participants in

my study did not always have direct involvement with an EP during their child's transition, their

narratives suggest areas for development in which EPs could play a key role, bridging the gap

between school and college whilst also offering parents much-needed space to process the

emotional complexity of this transition.

EPs are uniquely positioned to offer support at multiple levels. At the individual level they can

facilitate person-centred planning and ensure the child's voice remains central. At a family

level, they can offer consultation to parents, helping them reflect on their evolving role and maintain connection with professionals. At a systemic level, EPs can bring together stakeholders across education, health, and social care if required, to foster more coordinated transitions and address the fragmentation that parents in this study described.

This role aligns closely with Bronfenbrenner (1979). EPs could be seen as a connector across systems as they can strengthen links between the microsystems and enable a more robust mesosystem to form. Where these connections are weak, as illustrated in this study, the transition becomes a site of stress and disempowerment for the parent. The EP's ability to hold a systemic perspective while also attending to individual narratives puts them in an ideal position to support both emotional and practical needs during this time.

What I felt emerged clearly through the stories each parent told was a sense that parents needed the space to talk, reflect, and be heard. Each participant described feeling isolated, particularly once their child moved beyond the more structured support of school. In my work as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), when supporting children in Year 11 I have written reports that not only explore the young person's strengths and challenges but also intentionally gather parent and child perspectives to inform the FE transition. Feedback from parents has been positive, suggesting that this approach offers a space for their voices to be acknowledged, whilst also easing the emotional disconnection often associated with transition. This practice reflects the importance of maintaining relational continuity during periods of identity and systemic change.

This research echoes previous literature on the importance of EP involvement in transition

planning (DfE, 2015; Norwich, 2008), but also suggest a need to reframe the EP role beyond

statutory involvement. Currently, much EP time is directed toward EHCP assessments or annual

reviews. However, the statutory functions do not always allow for relational, ongoing support

from which families navigating their child's transition might benefit. Expanding EP involvement

to include consultation with families and settings during post-16 transition might not only

improve outcomes for young people but also reduce the emotional burden parents often seem

to carry alone.

5.9 Implications for Policy

While the Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (2015) offer strong

foundations for inclusive, person-centred transition planning, the realities and practicalities

remain inconsistent. This study suggests that transition policy could be more clearly defined

and support the changing parental role during this time. Guidance should encourage relational

continuity between school and college and not simply involve informational handovers. Greater

resource allocation seems to be needed for multi-agency working, with EPs and key workers

playing a facilitative role in joined-up planning together with parents.

5.10 Limitations and Future Research

This study involved a small, in-depth sample of three mothers, all of whom were articulate and

reflective in sharing their experiences. While rich in insight, their stories cannot be generalised

which is a potential limitation of the study. Even though I attempted to provide space in which the participants' narratives and experiences could be told with agency, it should be noted that, because the research was completed through a social constructionist lens, the influence of my voice as a researcher is acknowledged. Given the context and history I brought to the research, it is possible that if a different researcher had carried it out, the interpretations and conclusions could have been vastly different.

While I acknowledge that my positioning and experiences influenced the analysis and overall interpretation of the data, I also believe that this reflexivity enhances the trustworthiness of my research as reflexive awareness serves as a tool for deeper insights and supports authenticity in the research process (Finlay, 2002). My aim was not to generalise to a broader population but to generate rich and emotionally resonant accounts of each participant's narratives that could help to develop a deeper understanding of their experiences during the transition process.

Future research could explore a more diverse range of parental experiences, including fathers, foster carers, or families from underrepresented backgrounds, to gain a richer narrative of the experiences of a wider range of parents. An investigation of young people's and professionals' perspectives alongside parents would develop a fuller picture of post-16 transition dynamics to explore whether each group has similar experiences and generate reflections that could help develop policy in a way that benefits everyone. A further element of the research that might be expanded upon is the evaluation of models of EP involvement in transition post-16, including

the incorporation of consultation-based approaches and relational frameworks, to determine if there is a best-fit model that could be used universally when working with parents.

A further limitation of this study relates to the diversity of the sample. The three participants were all mothers, all recruited via the same Parent/Carer Forum in a single Local Authority, which inevitably limits the range of perspectives captured. This means that the research reflects the experiences of mothers who are relatively engaged and connected to local SEND networks, and may not represent the views of fathers, other carers, or families who are more socially isolated or less confident in navigating educational systems. Including a more diverse sample in terms of gender, cultural background, and socioeconomic status could have provided a broader understanding of how advocacy and transition experiences are shaped by intersecting social factors.

In designing the study, I decided not to focus on the specific needs of the young people involved. This was consistent with the study's aim to explore parental experience and voice, rather than to evaluate provision for individual diagnoses. While this choice allowed the research to focus deeply on the emotional and relational dimensions of parental experience, it also represents a limitation. By not differentiating between types of SEND, the research cannot fully address how systems adapt to meet the varied and often complex needs of young people across the SEND spectrum. As such, the findings offer insight into the parental experience of transition, but they do not provide a comprehensive account of how transitions operate for different categories of need.

This limitation also highlights a wider systemic consideration in that transitions for young people with SEND are not uniform, and the extent to which systems successfully adapt is influenced by both individual needs and institutional capacity. By focusing primarily on parental narratives, this research foregrounds the emotional and relational realities of transition, but it leaves space for future research to explore how systemic practices can better respond to the diversity of need. A study incorporating a larger, more demographically varied sample, or one that includes the perspectives of professionals and young people themselves, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how educational systems adapt across different developmental stages and levels of need.

Another consideration in the limitations of this research relates to the sharing of findings and the potential for member-checking. I made efforts to share each participant's respective Ipoem, to give them a representation of our interview. This allowed participants to see how their experiences had been represented and to receive feedback on their narratives. However, I did not formally conduct a process of member-checking, in which participants are invited to comment on or validate the analysis and interpretations during the research process.

This decision was made after careful reflection. While member-checking can enhance credibility in some qualitative approaches, its value in narrative and relational research is contested. Narratives are co-constructed and context-dependent, and participants may experience their stories differently over time or in different emotional states. Seeking validation of the final analysis could risk oversimplifying the findings or placing undue pressure on participants to

endorse an interpretation they might experience differently on another occasion. I also considered the emotional impact of re-engaging participants with potentially sensitive material, and I decided that sharing a summary of findings was a more ethically appropriate balance. By acknowledging this choice, I recognise that the absence of formal member-checking may limit the extent to which participants directly shaped the final interpretations.

5.11 Trustworthiness of the Research

There can be some judgement of qualitative research and its reliability and rigour. However, as indicated earlier, models have been produced to enhance the credibility of qualitative research, focusing on its trustworthiness rather than reliability and generalisability. It is not usual for qualitative research to have a goal centred around generalisation. Reliability and generalisability are rarely viewed as appropriate terms to use when gauging the trustworthiness of qualitative research as they are usually grounded in a positivist paradigm which suggests that research can be repeated and replicated. Creswell (2013), alternatively, advocates for qualitative research to be thick in description and to focus on the complexity of human experience rather than generalisation, which is what I hope I have achieved.

As much as I wanted to give agency to my participants as a researcher in order to privilege their voices, I have also acknowledged that achieving an impartial distance is an impossible feat, as I will have inevitably been involved in my participants' stories. They will have responded to the questions I asked and generated narratives they wanted me to hear. I therefore felt that Lincoln

and Guba (1985) framework which focuses on the areas of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability was more appropriate for quality assuring my research. Credibility focuses on the findings of research to ensure they match the participant's experiences; they are believable and are from the perspective of the participant. I attempted to support this by only using three interview questions to limit my involvement and by recording the interview to ensure the data was accurate. Each participant will also be given a copy of the I-Poem artefact and offered an opportunity to meet and discuss my interpretations. This has not happened yet due to the timescales of the study, but it is my intention to proceed with this during the coming weeks. However, I do feel that having the chance to speak with each participant prior to completing my research would have offered a richer insight into whether they felt I had acceptably captured and analysed their experiences and narratives.

Transferability ensures that the research and the data can be transferred and utilised in other contexts outside of my research. Transferability could also be considered in a similar way to generalisability. Within qualitative research the hope is that the researcher provides enough contextual detail for other researchers to determine whether the interpretations could be applied to their own context (Baxter and Eyles, 1997). This could be seen as problematic as other researchers might attempt to replicate my research, but the individual contexts would make this impossible. Rather, by documenting the process and the context of my research, it gives other researchers the opportunity to see if my conclusions would be appropriate for them to use in their own contexts. The research could also be transferred in other ways, for example the stories each participant told could provide further insight for practice.

Dependability involves ensuring the consistency and reliability of the research process over time. This is similar to reliability in quantitative research but in a qualitative context, considering whether the interpretations would be consistent if the study were to be repeated with the same participants and under similar conditions. I attempted to achieve this by documenting the research process in detail and keeping a journal to ensure I had a rich audit trail of my process. This was helpful throughout my research as it allowed me to go back and capture my thoughts and reflections during pivotal moments. This was particularly useful when I was analysing the data as I had written some notes and reflections on how I felt during the interview process and how I had attempted to enable my participant's agency.

The trustworthiness of this study was therefore evaluated using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework, focusing on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through the Listening Guide, which allowed for a detailed and systematic exploration of participants' voices, and through the inclusion of direct quotations to ground interpretations in the data. Reflexive journaling throughout the research process helped to ensure that emerging findings were shaped by participants' narratives rather than researcher bias, contributing to confirmability. Dependability was addressed by maintaining an audit trail, including documented decisions about coding, theme development, and methodological adaptations, allowing the research process to be traced and evaluated. Although the small, purposive sample limits transferability, rich, thick descriptions of participant experiences were provided to enable readers to judge the applicability of findings to other contexts. Overall,

attention to these trustworthiness criteria aimed to strengthen the rigour and transparency of the research, supporting the credibility and value of the insights generated.

5.12 Wider Systems

Systems theory offers a helpful frame for understanding the participants' experiences in this study, particularly where families moved between settings and tried to make sense of decisions made without them. Bronfenbrenner's model maps the layers they were navigating, though it does not explain why some patterns persist even when professionals recognise the strain they create, which is why a wider systemic reading is useful here (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Kelly, 2006). Pellegrini's account of applied systemic work adds that missing dimension by attending to patterned interaction, feedback and the pull toward stability in services under pressure (Pellegrini, 2009). These processes are not only relational. They sit within service design, funding and national programmes that shape everyday practice. Recent shifts toward Best Start Family Hubs, delivered through the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme, show how structural change can alter where relationships are formed and how parents meet transition (Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care, 2025).

The participants in this study spoke about feeling responsible for holding systems together and for carrying the consequences when professionals did not coordinate. These accounts point to patterns of interaction that endure even when they cause harm. Understanding those patterns means looking beyond descriptions of systems and into how they function in relationships. Dallos and Draper (2015) suggest that first order change keeps work within the existing frame, while

second order change asks for shifts in the assumptions that guide professional behaviour. A change of venue or a clearer letter may help in the moment, but the wider structure can remain intact.

The voices identified in this study show how participants responded to these systems. Sarah's account of silence and self reliance suggested a pattern in which professionals stepped back once things became difficult and the parent was expected to act. Leah's search for reassurance can be read as a response to uncertainty across settings and thin relational trust. Anna's account of disconnection pointed to the emotional impact of being left out of important processes despite sustained effort to remain involved. These are not isolated experiences. They signal systemic processes in which parents adapt to repeated disconnection. Burnham (2005) describes circularity in systemic thinking as attention to how each part of a system shapes and is shaped by another. In this study, the pattern was that parents absorbed emotional labour that was expected and often unacknowledged.

There are also constraints that make systemic work hard to sustain in education services. Pellegrini notes a pull toward within child explanations, a preference for technical fixes, and evidential cultures that value easily measured change, all of which can narrow attention to relationships and positioning (Pellegrini, 2009). His review suggests that although systemic practices are present, they are often partial and not named as such, which reduces their influence on routine decisions (Pellegrini, 2009). Taken together, this helps explain why the patterns seen here continue. The emotions described by participants were shaped by circular processes that

had become normal in the system. A systemic reading suggests that Educational Psychologists can contribute by holding reflexive work in consultation, by making interactional patterns visible, and by supporting second order shifts that rebalance participation in transition planning.

To support more meaningful change, Educational Psychologists may also need to reflect on their own role and the assumptions that sit behind it. Fredman (2004) invites systemic practitioners to notice how power circulates and whose accounts are privileged. Locating meetings in community settings such as Best Start Family Hubs can help to reduce institutional weight, though this will only matter if it forms part of a wider relational shift. Vetere and Dallos (2003) note that systems resist change when people inside them are not supported to think relationally about their part in maintaining the pattern. Second order change calls for shared reflection on why systems function as they do and a willingness to sit with discomfort when routine practices are challenged.

5.13 Conclusion

This study set out to explore how parents experience the transition from secondary school to Further Education (FE) of their children with recognised Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Using a relational, qualitative approach grounded in narrative approaches and the Listening Guide, the voices of three mothers were analysed to explore the emotional, practical, and systemic dimensions of this transition. What emerged was a narrative of isolation, uncertainty and emotional labour, and at times, profound exclusion, but also moments of insight, resilience, and reflective clarity.

I have identified six key narratives within the three parents' stories that have the potential to inform practice:

1. Parents can experience the transition to FE as an isolating time, with limited relational support.

2. The role of the parent seems confusing, undefined, and often diminished.

3. Communication during transitions has the power to alleviate or exacerbate emotional stress, making parents feel either connected or cut off.

4. During their child's transition to a post-16 setting parents can feel forced to accept a reduced role in their child's life, even if they are not emotionally prepared.

5. Collaboration between school, college, parents, and the young person seems exceptional, leaving parents to bridge gaps in fragmented systems.

6. Educational Psychologists are well placed to offer holistic, systemic, and emotional support during this time, drawing on frameworks such as: Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to understand the interplay between home, school, and college; Turner's concept of liminality to interpret the psychological ambiguity of transition; Erikson's theory of identity development to explore the emotional shifts experienced by both parents and young people.

These narratives contribute to a growing body of literature on post-16 transitions and SEND by offering a unique focus on the parental perspective, which can be overlooked in policy, practice and research. While policy frameworks like the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015) advocate for person-centred, coordinated transition planning, this study suggests that in practice, such collaboration is often absent. Moreover, the emotional labour that parents undertake during this period, including the act of stepping back from their advocacy role while still caring deeply, seems to remain invisible within most transition frameworks.

5.14 Final Reflections

Transitions are not just educational milestones; they are emotional journeys. This study makes clear that for parents of young people with SEND, the transition of their child to FE is a time of both loss and potential; a moment when old roles shift, and new ones remain undefined. If we are to truly support families, we must listen to their voices not only with professional interest, but with empathy and respect. Only then can the transition beyond school for young people be reframed as a shared process, rather than a solitary one for their parents, and as a result, the young people themselves.

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Appendices:

Appendix A: Ethics Approval Letter

Martin Pilkington
Registration number: 220110415
School of Education
Programme: DEdCPsy Doctor of Educational and Child Psychology

Dear Martin

PROJECT TITLE: What are the experiences of a parent/carer during the transition process for your child when they went from secondary school to Further Education?
APPLICATION: Reference Number 059799

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 29/05/2024 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 059799 (form submission date: 21/05/2024); (expected project end date: 15/05/2025).
- Participant information sheet 1136194 version 3 (21/05/2024).
- Participant information sheet 1136234 version 3 (21/05/2024).
- Participant consent form 1136195 version 4 (21/05/2024).
- Participant consent form 1136197 version 2 (24/04/2024).

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.

Appendix B: Ethics Application

The University Of Sheffield.

Application 059799

Section A: Applicant details

Date application started:
Thu 11 April 2024 at 13:42

First name:
Martin

Last name:
Pilkington

Email:
mdpilkington1@sheffield.ac.uk

Programme name:
DEdCPsy Doctor of Educational and Child Psychology

Module name:
TBC
Last updated:
17/04/2024

Department:
School of Education

Applying as:
Postgraduate research

Research project title:
1. What are the experiences of parent/carers of a child with a SEN during the transition from main school to a post-16 provider?

Please provide details of how your project has been academically reviewed
• Supervisor feedback

Similar applications:
- not entered -

Section B: Basic information

Supervisor

Name	Email

Proposed project duration

Start date (of data collection):
Sat 1 June 2024

Anticipated end date (of project)
Thu 15 May 2025

3: Project code (where applicable)

Project externally funded?
No

Project code
- *not entered* -

Suitability

Takes place outside UK?
No

Involves NHS?
No

Health and/or social care human-interventional study?
No

ESRC funded?
No

Likely to lead to publication in a peer-reviewed journal?
No

Led by another UK institution?
No

Involves human tissue?
No

Clinical trial or a medical device study?
No

Involves social care services provided by a local authority?
No

Is social care research requiring review via the University Research Ethics Procedure
No

Involves adults who lack the capacity to consent?
No

Involves research on groups that are on the Home Office list of 'Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations?
No

Indicators of risk

Involves potentially vulnerable participants?
No
Involves potentially highly sensitive topics?
No

Section C: Summary of research

1. Aims & Objectives

The transition phase from secondary school to a post-16 setting has been documented as being an anxious time for both parents/carers and children, especially for those children where a SEN (Special Educational Need) has been identified but there isn't an EHCP (Education Health and Care Plan) in place. For parents, this can also be a confusing time where they are balancing allowing their child to have some agency and independence with their decision-making during this process but also wanting to become engaged with it and support them. Secondary schools also play a role here in supporting the child with their decision making as well but this can cause tensions between the parent/carer and the school as information at times isn't directed towards the parent/carer but towards the child, as they encourage the child to become more independent with their choices.

Aim: To find out how parents/carers experience this transition period if their child has an identified SEN but not an EHCP.

Objectives:

1. To recruit 3 individual parent/carers who have a child with an identified SEN and would have had their needs met through a SEN Support Plan and who has transitioned to a Further Educational setting within the past 3 years from a mainstream secondary school.

2. To conduct face-to-face semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions with them using a narrative methodology.

3. To learn about the experiences of the parents/carers during the transition process.

4. To learn about their role during this process and how it may have changed their identity as a parent of a child with a SEN.

5. To learn about how the parent/carer balanced the independence and agency of their child with the need to support them during this potentially difficult process.

2. Methodology

To explore my research question, I plan to use a narrative approach as my aim is to capture the experiences of parents/carers within a wider social and cultural context (Emerson & Frosh, 2004).

I will approach the Parent/Carer Forum at my Local Authority to send out the research advert to their mailing list of parents/carers from the local area; I feel this will be a way to ensure the participants are recruited in an impartial way as if I approached a Post-16/Further Educational setting to sent an invitation out on my behalf, I couldn't be sure that every parent would have had the opportunity to respond to it. The research advert will ask participants to email myself (via my university email address) if they would like additional information about their potential participation in my research. Participants will be emailed the link to the participant information and consent form before the interview. The email to participants will ask them to read through the information before deciding if they would like to participate; they will be advised that they can ask questions via email before deciding. After a participant has acknowledged that they would like to take part in the interview, they will receive a follow up email where they will be asked to reply with some convenient dates and times for the interview to take place.

The interview will take place at a neutral venue which is quiet and easy to access for the participant, this will be dictated by where each participant lives but could include a community centre, library, family hub or at the LA offices. It is preferable that interviews are face-to-face but if a participant would prefer to have it online then amendments can be made to use Google meet via my university email; this will be recorded.

The interview will last around 60-90 minutes depending on how much the participant wants to talk; the interview could also be shorter if it suited the participant. The researcher will work around the participants' schedule to ensure they are not inconvenienced with the scheduling of the interview. If an interview needs to be online then the researcher will organise it by sending an invitation link from Google meet to the participant's email address.

The participant will be informed that once the researcher has asked the set questions, follow up questions may also be asked. Each participant will be sent the consent form and information form when they register their interest in participating in the research; the research will ensure the consent form has been filled in and completed prior to the interview starting.

As each participant will be speaking about their experiences through the transition process, it can also be presumed that they will be discussing their child in some depth, this will mean that I will also be seeking the consent of the child of the participant to ensure they are happy to be discussed within the research; they will be made aware that any reference to them will be anonymised within the final research report.

The information and consent form will make it clear to the participant that the interview will be audio recorded via a dictaphone if face-to-face or recorded on Google meet if online. Each participant will be asked prior to the interview if they are still happy for the interview to be recorded; if they no longer agree to this then the interview will no longer go ahead. Each participant will also be informed that they can request for the interview to cease at any point and that they are under no obligation to answer every question, they can request to move on from one if needed.

The interviews will be transcribed verbatim (word for word) by the researched. The participants will be able to withdraw at any time up until April 2025, without giving any reason. After this date the research report will have been written which will make it difficult to remove their input. The transcripts will be analysed using The Listening Guide, which is both a method and methodology and it can be utilised as a process to guide analysis and collection of data (Gillian, 2017). A narrative approach has been used as it will allow me to gather stories around the experiences of the participants in an accessible and rich way (Rorty, 1989) and it will allow the parents the opportunity to be heard as a narrative approach gives a clear benefit to the storyteller and values their own understanding of the aspects they have experienced (Reissman, 2008). Participants names and any personal details mentioned in the interviews will all be changed in order to keep them anonymous.

I will meet with each participant after the interviews and after I have analysed the data to take any findings back to them and to present them with their I-poem, this is a piece of writing which helps the researcher to become as close as possible to the voice of the participant by focusing purely on any times they use the first-person pronoun 'I' within he interview to see how they position themselves, it also acts as a reminder to the participant of their experiences.

3. Personal Safety

Have you completed your departmental risk assessment procedures, if appropriate?

Not applicable

Raises personal safety issues?

No

As all contact with the participants prior to the interview will be carried out online, there are no physical safety risks. The interview will take place within a neutral venue where other members of staff from the venue will be present and close, I will also inform appropriate people of my whereabouts during this time and have a communication device on my person in case I have to call for additional help. Participants will also have access to my university email address only and no personal information. While there is a possibility that sensitive topics will be discussed, these do not carry the risk of psychological harm.

Section D: About the participants

1. Potential Participants

Potential participants will have the following criteria to take part in the research:

● Participants should have a child who has transitioned to a post-16 Further Education setting within the past three years to ensure the experience is still fresh and current.

● Participants should have a child who has a recognised SEN and would have had their needs met through a SEN Support Plan, which they have gained additional support for in their previous school, this is a document a setting would create to outline the additional needs of the child and what school staff will do to support them with it.

● The participant's child shouldn't have an EHCP as there is already a documented process for transition to a post-16 setting if a young person already has an EHCP.

2. Recruiting Potential Participants

Participants will be recruited through the Parent and Carer Forum within my local area and an invitation for participation will be co-constructed with my research tutor and a representative from the Parent and Carer Forum to ensure it is clear and correct, and accessible language has been used. The invitation will make clear the amount of time needed to take part and that participants will be recruited on a first come, first served basis to ensure transparency and equality of opportunity.

The invitation will be emailed out to parent members of the Forum on my behalf; it will also make clear that I will require consent from the young person as I anticipate they will also make up a big part of the interview and it is important, from an ethical point of view, that they have given permission for their parent/carers to speak about them; the parents/carers may want to discuss their child's additional need as well and their relationship and it is important that the child is happy with this to happen.

I feel that using the Parent and Carer Forum will be a good way to recruit participants as, from my previous experience of working with them, they are an active group who may feel comfortable speaking about their experiences as this may be something they have done previously. Ethically, I also feel that using the Parent and Carer Forum will be an appropriate means to gain participants as some parents may require some support if they speak about something particularly painful or emotionally triggering but they would have access to the Parent and Carer Forum counselling support if this happened. I did consider approaching the local Further Education Colleges in my Local Authority, but I felt the power dynamics of the SENDCo contacting the parents on my behalf might mean parents would not take part or that the SENDCo might only send the invitations to people they know will answer in a positive manner.

For those parents who request to take part after the 3 participants have been recruited, I will offer them a phone call to explain the reason why they are unable to take part and also they will be offered a conversation over the phone to discuss their experience so they feel listened to.

2.1. Advertising methods

Will the study be advertised using the volunteer lists for staff or students maintained by IT Services? No

- not entered -

3. Consent

Will informed consent be obtained from the participants? (i.e. the proposed process) Yes

When participants choose to participate in the study, they will have the option of clicking on a link provided via email that then redirects them to an online informed consent form via a Google form registered to my University account. On the informed consent form, they will be given the choice to either opt in or out of the study by indicating their decision on the checkbox. Participants who choose to opt out of the study will be thanked for their time while those who choose to proceed will be proceed on to a Google Form to complete the consent form.

Once consent is gained via the Google form, the researcher will save the forms on their secure University U Drive and erase it from their University account Google drive, where it will be automatically saved. These will be stored in a separate folder from other research data collected.

4. Payment

Will financial/in kind payments be offered to participants? No

5. Potential Harm to Participants

What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm/distress to the participants?

In accordance with the University's Preventing Harm in Research & Innovation (Safeguarding) Policy, consideration must be given to whether there may be other people present during the research, who may be affected by it (i.e., beyond the research participants and the research team), and what steps will be taken to minimise the risk of harm to these people. People who may be affected by this research activity could include family members or households of participants.

Having considered the above, we do not anticipate any physical harm to come to participants.

How will this be managed to ensure appropriate protection and well-being of the participants?

The interview with the participant will have a therapeutic aspect to it and allow the participant to explore their experiences of the transition period in a safe space. The participants will be recruited via the parent/carer forum which will enable them to seek emotional support from within the group if needed.

6. Potential harm to others who may be affected by the research activities

Which other people, if any, may be affected by the research activities, beyond the participants and the research team?

The child who went through the transition process may be affected by the research activities as the parent will be discussing them as part of the interview process. The child, who will be over the age of 16, will have to give their consent that they are happy for their parent to discuss them as part of the interview process.

What is the potential for harm to these people?

The child may get upset about some of the aspects discussed although it is more of a reflective opportunity for the parent to recount their experiences. The child will receive a copy of the information sheet prior to signing the consent form so they are aware of the aims of the research, and that there is no judgement on them as we carry out the research.

How will this be managed to ensure appropriate safeguarding of these people?

The child will be fully aware of the aims and objectives of the research before they give their consent for their parent to discuss them although the main aim is for the parent to discuss their own experiences so the research and interview will focus predominantly on the parent.

7. Reporting of safeguarding concerns or incidents

What arrangements will be in place for participants, and any other people external to the University who are involved in, or affected by, the research, to enable reporting of incidents or concerns?

The participants will be informed on the information sheet of the designated safeguarding contact and the University's safeguarding policy. Participants will be advised to report any concerns to the designated safeguarding contact (Claire Whiting) - who will then deal with the issue.

Who will be the Designated Safeguarding Contact(s)?

My research supervisor will act as my Designated Safeguarding contact - Claire Whiting

How will reported incidents or concerns be handled and escalated?

Any incidents or concerns will be dealt with in line with the University's safeguarding policy. The designated contact will be Claire Whiting, however if the incident requires further attention the head of department , Professor Rebecca Lawthorn and the Ethics lead, Dr Lauren Powell will be contacted whereby the incident will be dealt with accordingly.

Section E: Personal data

1. Use of personal data

Will any personal data be processed or accessed as part of the project?
Yes

Will any 'special category' personal data be processed or accessed as part of the project?
No

Provide the number of people whose personal data you expect to process or access.
3

2. Managing personal data

Which organisation(s) will act as data controller(s) of the personal data?
University of Sheffield only

Who will have access to the personal data?
I will have access to the data (researcher) as will be supervisor.

What measures, processes and/or agreements will be put in place to manage the personal data?
All data will be stored at the university U Drive which is encrypted. Data collection will be conducted online using Google Meet and the researcher will be in a private room. For interviews which take place online: Participants will be asked to turn their cameras off before the audio recording begins. All participants will be encouraged to find a quiet space to take part or use headphones to ensure others around them cannot hear what they or the researcher is saying. Recordings will automatically save onto the researcher's university Google Drive account. These will be transferred to the U drive as soon as possible following data collection and then erased from the university Google drive. Participant email addresses will not be shared with anyone other than the researcher and their supervisor. These email addresses will only be used for recruitment. Participants' personal information will be stored in a separate digital file from research data to ensure data remains anonymous. The researcher will check that no third-party apps have access to their University Google Drive account via this website: https://myaccount.google.com/permissions. The researcher will not sync or stream the contents of their University Google Drive account to other devices. Transcription of the recording will be completed as soon as possible after gathering the data. To protect the participants' identity, pseudonyms will be utilised for participants names and any places or personal information they disclose which could potentially identify them. Only the researcher and supervisor (if necessary) will have access to transcriptions. Participants will not be identified in any reports, publications or the write up of this work. Everything the participant shares with the researcher will be confidential unless they indicate that they or somebody else may be at risk of any harm. In this instance the designated safeguarding contact will be informed and university procedure followed. Participants will be informed of this in their information sheet before they consent to take part in the research.

Will all identifiable personal data in digital or physical format be destroyed within a defined period after the project has ended?
Yes

When will the identifiable personal data be destroyed?
The identifiable personal data will be destroyed when my university account ceases at the end of my programme of study (July 2025).

3. Third-party services

Will any external third-party services not provided by the University be used to process or access personal data during the project?
No

4. Security of computers, devices and software

Will personal data be processed or accessed on any computers or devices that are not managed by the University of Sheffield?
Yes

Will all computers and devices that are not managed by the University of Sheffield be secured in accordance with the IT Code of Connection?
Yes

Will any software not approved by the University of Sheffield be used to process or access data?
No

Will any software be written or developed in order to process or access the personal data?
No

Section F: Supporting documentation

Information & Consent

Participant information sheets relevant to project?
No

Consent forms relevant to project?
No

Additional Documentation

External Documentation

- not entered -

Section G: Declaration

Signed by:
- not entered -
Date signed:
- not entered -

Offical notes

- not entered -

Appendix 3A: Recruitment Poster

Research Participants Needed.

What are the experiences of parent/carers of a child with a SEN during their transition from main school to a post-16 provider?

To participate, you must have:

- A child who has a recognised SEN and would have had their needs met through a SEN Support Plan but not an EHCP.

- A child who has transitioned to a post-16 Further Education setting within the past three years.

If you match the criteria and would like to take part in an interview, or if you have any questions, please contact

Conducted by a Trainee Educational Psychologist from the University of Sheffield

Appendix 3B: Parent Consent Form

The University Of Sheffield.

What are the experiences of parent/carers of a child with a SEN during the transition from main school to a post-16 provider?

Consent Form

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 24/04/2024 or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include an interview with the research which will be audio recorded; the audio recording will then be transcribed and analysed.	☐	☐
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study before January 3rd, 2025; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	☐	☐
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	☐	☐
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	☐	☐

Name of participant [printed]   Signature   Date

Name of Researcher [printed]   Signature   Date

Appendix 3C: Child Consent Form

The University Of Sheffield.

What are the experiences of parent/carers of a child with a SEN during the transition from mainstream school to a post-16 provider?

Consent Form

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 25/04/2024 or the project has been fully explained to me by the researcher. (If you answer No to this question, please don't sign this form until you speak with your parent/carer and feel comfortable with what will happen).	☐	☐
I've had the chance to ask any questions I have about the project! 📞 ♂ Whether it's about what we're doing or why it's important. It's important to understand everything before we start.	☐	☐
I agree for my parent or carer to talk about me during the interview. This may involve discussing how I transitioned to my primary and secondary schools as well as my further educational setting, what emotions they feel I experienced and how I coped during these times. 🎈	☐	☐
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand that personal information like my name won't be shown to people outside the project! 🙂	☐	☐
I understand and agree that what my parent or carer says during their interview might be used in other documents and reports! 📝 But my name, or anything that identifies me, won't be used unless I ask for it to.	☐	☐
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree that any information about me mentioned during the interview can be used in the research project! 🖊 But they'll make sure nobody can figure out it's me from what they say.	☐	☐

Name of student [printed]   Signature   Date

Name of Researcher [printed]   Signature   Date

Appendix 3D: Parent Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

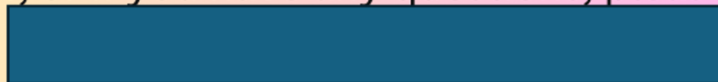**Research Title: What are the experiences of parents/carers of a child with a SEN during the transition from main school to a post-16 provider?**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

The Purpose of the research:

My name is Martin Pilkington, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist currently working for an Educational Psychology Service in a Local Authority, whilst completing doctoral studies at the University of Sheffield. As part of my Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology, I am conducting research into an area of interest which will be published as a thesis. I have chosen to focus on the experiences of parents/carers, whose child has an identified SEN (Special Educational Need) but not an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan), during the transition of their child from main school to a post-16 provider (a Further Educational setting).

My research aims to explore the experiences of parents/carers whose child has recently transitioned from secondary school to a Further Education setting and how it affected them. I have decided to focus on this area as my research shows that it can be a difficult and confusing time for parents/carers and having the opportunity to listen to your experiences would help me understand the process in more detail.

Why have I been Chosen?

The Parent/Carer forum sent out an invitation email on my behalf to identify any parents/carers who wanted to take part in my research and also had the appropriate requirements to take part, these being:

- Participants should have a child who has transitioned to a post-16 Further Education setting within the past three years.

- Participants should have a child who has a recognised SEN who at school would have had their needs met through a SEN Support Plan this is a document a setting creates to outline the additional needs of the child and what school staff will do to support them.

- The participant's child should not have an EHCP.

You have been selected because you meet the above requirements and have also expressed an interest to take part in the research project.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep, and be asked to sign a consent form, but you can still withdraw at any time up until January 2025 without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason for withdrawing. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact myself as the researcher (contact details are below). Participating in the research does not mean you are entering into any formal contract of employment.

What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?

You will initially sign a consent form before taking part in an interview which will last up to 90 minutes. This interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed, but your personal information will be anonymised. The interview will take place at a time and date convenient to you at a neutral location which could include a library, Local Authority office or community building; I will identify a location near you for you to consider. Unfortunately, it is not possible to pay travel expenses. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions about your experiences as a parent/carer during the transition period of your child from school to their Further Education setting. Although the focus on the research is on your experiences of the transition process of your child, you may make reference to the challenges your child faced and the support they obtained, during this time. Once the interview has ceased and the data has been analysed, you will be invited to a debrief to give your thoughts about my findings and to receive an 'I poem', this is a poem which identifies all the moments you referred to yourself in the first person during the interview and transfers them into a poem for you to keep. The topics covered within the interview will focus on your personal experiences during the transition period and you will be encouraged to reflect on how you felt, what happened and the process that was followed; the questions will be open-ended and allow you to go into as much detail as you wish.

I you wish to take part you will also have to sign a consent form to give approval of your involvement, and you must also get your child to sign a consent form to give their approval to be discussed during the interview; the interview won't be able to proceed without both consent forms being signed.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

If this was a particularly traumatic time for you then reflecting back on it may be an uncomfortable and upsetting thing to do and may require reflection on if this is something you want to do. I will provide a list of organisations that you can seek support from if you do find the interview upsetting. Support can also be sought from the Parent/Carer forum. I do not envisage the interview to cause any discomfort and you will be able to pause and stop the interview at any time.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will offer further insight into how parents/carers feel during the period their child makes the transition to college and could support schools and Further Education settings in reviewing their processes.

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

The audio recordings of your interviews will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

Will people know that I have taken part in this research?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be anonymised so you will not be identifiable within it. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications.

What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying in order to process your personal data is:"processing is necessary for the performance of a

task carried out in the public interest" (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.

What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

The data collected will be stored on a secure drive and will be destroyed once the research has completed (approximately September 2025). The results will be analysed and written up as part of my thesis, but all identifiable information will be anonymised. The completed thesis will be available within the public domain via an electronic document and shared with fellow trainees and tutors, and, hopefully, more widely through publication. I will record the interview on a voice recorder, and afterwards listen to them and type them up. Once the interview has been typed up, I will delete the recording and no one else will listen to them. When I type them up, I won't use your name, your child's name, the settings' names or any other identifiable information, instead I will use pseudonyms (not real names). All data will be destroyed immediately after completion of the project.

Who is the data controller?

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

Who has ethically reviewed this project?

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

What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research or report a concern or incident?

You should contact me if you wish to complain about any aspect of the research, including your
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e⬛⬛⬛),
w⬛⬛⬛of
E⬛⬛⬛
If⬛⬛⬛ut
how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.

Contact for further information

To ask any questions or to find out more about the project please contact:

Main Researcher:

⬛⬛⬛ - ⬛⬛⬛

Research Supervisor:

⬛⬛⬛

Appendix 3E: Child Information Sheet

What are the experiences of parents/carers of a child with a SEN during the transition from main school to a post-16 provider?

Information for Young People

Who am I?

My name is Martin Pilkington and I'm currently studying to become a qualified Educational Psychologist. As part of my course, I have to complete some research and I've decided to focus on the experiences of parents/carers of a young person, who has an identified SEN, during their transition from secondary school to their Further Education setting.

Project activities

The activity involves your parent/carer taking part in an interview, with me, where they will tell me about how they felt during your transition. I will ask them a series of questions about how the experience was for them and what they found difficult, rewarding and how it shaped their own idea of themselves.

As the activity will only involve your parent/carer answering questions, you don't need to be involved but it is important that you are aware of what is going to happen, and why, as it is very likely your parent/carer will talk about you during the interview.

It is also important to let you know that if you don't want them to take part in the research project and you do not wish to give your consent, then they won't take part. But to help you make an informed decision, I have put this information together, so you know what is going to happen and why. During the interview with your parent/carer, they may discuss you and make reference to the challenges you faced during the transition process and any support you received; the main focus of the research is of their experiences though.

Do my parents/carers have to take part?

If you don't want your parent/carer to take part, then they won't be able to.

Changing your mind

If you change your mind about your parent/carer taking part, you do not have to say why. You can email me at ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓

You can also speak to your parent or carer, who can let me know.

The main activities that will take place are as follows:

1. Consent/Permission

- You and your parent/carer will decide if you are both happy for them to be involved; if you are, they you will both sign a separate consent form which gives your parent/carer permission to speak about you during the interview.

2. Interview

- Your parent/carer will take part in an interview which will last between 60-90 minutes.
- The interview will either be in-person or online.
- I will ask them questions about how they felt during the transition process.
- Their answers will be audio recorded to be analysed by me afterwards.

4. Debrief

- Once I have finished analysing the interview, I will arrange to meet with your parent/carer again.
- We will speak about what I have found out and I will give them a poem about their experiences.

3. Analysis of the answers

- I will transcribe the interview, so I have it written down to analyse.
- Once it has been transcribed, the recording will be deleted.
- When I transcribe it, I will use different names so no one can identify you, or anyone else spoken about.

Risks from taking part.

Being spoken about

Feeling nervous or confused about what they might say

Not being able to take part

➢ I will make sure you can't be identified by not using your name.
➢ I will ask questions about how your parent/carer felt and not ask questions about you directly.
➢ The questions I ask will focus on your parent/carer's experiences during transition.

Filling in forms

It could be upsetting if it takes you a long time to fill out the consent form.

➢ I will make sure there is plenty of time to fill out the consent form.

Your parent/carer might talk about things which upset you.

You might need someone to speak with if you want your parent/carer to take part but it brings up some uncomfortable feelings for you.

➢ I will signpost you to some organisations you can speak with below.
➢ You will also have an adult at home to speak to

Consent

- You also need to fill in a consent form to show you are happy for your parent/carer to to take part.
- If you give consent for your parents/carers to part in this research, it will not mean you or they have a job with the University of Sheffield. It is not a legal agreement with the University.

Keeping things confidential

- I will keep all personal information about you safe.
- I might use your parent/carer's works in my report, but I will never use your name.

What are the good things about taking part?

- The project could help young people, parents/carers and schools work together in the future for transitions which could help parents/carers and young people have a better experience.

Recordings

- Everything I speak about with your parent/carer will be recorded on an audio recorded or on Google Meet. I will save recordings on my university Google Drive.
- I will transcribe the recordings and then delete the recordings.
- I will save the transcriptions on my Google Drive. Only I will be able to see what I save. I will delete these when I have written my reports.

Finding out more about taking part

1
•Read through this information sheet

2
•Discuss the project with me and if you're happy for your parent to proceed, complete a consent form - either online or as a paper copy.

3
•You and your parents/carers can email me for more information after the initial meeting.

4
•Email me or hand me your filled in consent form if you want your parents/carers to take part.

Where to go if you need to speak to someone?

- If you feel that you need to speak with someone at any point before, during or after the interview, you could contact the following organisations:
- Kooth (https://www.kooth.com/) – mental health support
- Step2 (https://www.step2.org.uk/) – mental health support
- Barnados – (https://www.barnardos.org.uk/get-support/support-for-parents-and-carers/mental-health) – mental health and emotional wellbeing support

Appendix 3F: Data Management Plan

Data Management Plan:

Section 1: Summary of Digital Outputs and Digital Technologies

The research project will record and analyse an interview with adult participants about their experiences of going through the transition process with their child from secondary school to a further education setting. The data from the interview will be transcribed and analysed ensuring every piece of personal information is anonymised. The data will be interpreted and written up into my thesis which will be accessible after completion, although all information alluding to any participant will be anonymised to ensure they cannot be identified.

Section 2: Technical Methodology

2a: Standards and Formats

All interviews will be recorded and stored in uncompressed WAV format (LPCM-encoded, two channel, 44100 samples per second, 16 bits per sample). The interviews will last 60 to 90mins each, this will amount to roughly 360 minutes of recordings from across all three participants. The WAV files will be used for transcription, and analysis.

2b: Hardware and Software

The audio recordings from the interview will be recorded using a Dictaphone, this will provide the necessary quality to clearly record my questions and the participant's response. The underlying data will be stored initially on my university secured drive so I am able to access it and listen to it as I transcribe it. As soon as the transcription is complete and has been checked, I will delete the recording. No one else, other than myself, will have access to the recording and only I will listen to it.

Section 3: Technical Support and Relevant Experience

No external technical support is required as I will only need the use of a Dictaphone to record the interview; this will be tested prior to the interview starting to ensure it works appropriately. I will also have a spare Dictaphone to use in case of any technical issues.

Section 4: Preservation, Sustainability and Use

4a: Preserving Your Data

The data will be uploaded to my university secure drive after the interview has finished and the recording on the Dictaphone will be deleted. The interview will be transcribed and anonymised within a few days of being saved to my secure drive and once I'm happy I have captured it accurately on my transcription document, I will delete the recording.

Appendix 4A: Anna's Interview Transcript

So my first question to you is, can you just tell me from your from your perspective, your experience of going through that transition period from lower school, key-stage four to college?

(2.55)

Oh, OK, OK. (.) Well, I guess I'll start just by saying that (.), you know, I've been through quite a lot myself with mental health and whatnot (.). So I'm fine, (.) I'm fine and I'm happy to talk about things. But just to make you aware that, you know, there's quite a lot of things in my life which I've had to deal with. And I've tried my best to give my boy, you know, the best amount of support that he can possibly have. (.)

mm

So my boy, I won't say his name. I know you said he's going to be anonymised, but I'll, I'll just refer to him as my boy, make it a bit simpler. He (.), we knew from a young age that he was maybe going to struggle in school. You know, he had some difficulties when he was in primary school, just with his concentration and learning, you know. I think he found it quite hard to be in the classroom, but we felt it was important that he went to mainstream school.

(4.00)

We thought he had to go into mainstream school and not maybe having to fight for other things for him would be better, just make things less stressful and less anxious for everybody, especially him.

mm

But, you know, he made a lot of friends when he was in primary school and he had a lot of support from his teachers and he was happy, I tell you, he was really happy when he was there. I felt, I felt good. (.) I felt things were going well in primary school. (.) And, you know, I guess we're talking about transitioning here and it was actually me and his dad who spent a lot of time when he was at nursery, we spent a lot of time thinking about his primary school and where we think he should go. And (.) we went to a lot of transition days and, you know, these kind of things at the primary schools. And I found one school that just ticked all the boxes, it wasn't his nursery school, it was another school that was maybe *smaller*, it had a much *smaller* class size, a much *smaller* school. (.)

(5.11)

mm

 And I just felt, you know, this is nice (.), this is good for him (.), he will have a lot of *support* here from the teachers and the teaching assistants and it just felt like the right place for him. (3)So, you know, I took that lead in (.) trying to get him that school and it was fine when he got there (1), we walked every day to that school and he was just so happy walking to school with me every morning.

mm

(5.46)

And I think looking back that was a really happy time for us (2). But anyway, sorry, so we went to that one and I was very much in control of that transition, I felt I had a lot of power,

a lot of say, you know. I know that it's not all in my control but I just felt that it was me, not him so much, but me that was maybe making the decision for him.

Ok

And, you know, it's a lot of responsibility because you want to get the right school for your child so they are nice and happy and supported. And school was great, school was really good. (3)

(6.30)

We went after primary school, we went to look at secondary schools in year 6 and I tell you I was a bag of nerves, I was very, *very* worried because I just knew that that was a really big jump for him to go from primary to secondary. (.) And he had lots of support in primary school and he had his own support plan that they'd written for him and they had lots of information about him and how he likes to learn (.) and who his favourite people are, that kind of thing. (2) So we had things we could *take* to secondary school and I knew that if they (.) could do something similar then he would be great.

(7.16)

So we spent a lot of time again going to the transition events and the transition days and we looked at lots of different secondary schools and (2) nothing was perfect, there was not a *perfect* secondary school for him. We didn't think that existed, you know, you can't have the same primary school experience as you can in secondary school, I don't think, unless it's just a much smaller school but I don't think they exist that much. (2) We knew we had to make some compromises and I had to make some compromises of my own, *so* I looked around lots of them and we were maybe looking for not the perfect one but the one that

had the *least* bad things about it (smiles), you know, the ones that maybe we could have the compromise on.

(8.03)

So I looked at maybe *five* different primary schools *with* him , you know, we looked at primary schools together but I didn't think he really understood what was happening then whereas now, you know, when we looked at secondary schools (.) he's 11, there's a lot more things happening and I felt like he was a lot more *engaged* or *interested* in where he was going. And *I* felt he had more *influence* in the *decision* but maybe (2), thinking about it (2), maybe it was his *friends* who had more influence over him where he was going to go because he really wanted to go where his friends were going.

(8.46)

And I knew that the school maybe some of them were going was not the best school for him, so there was a bit of difficulty with maybe some *challenge* between us. So yeah (1), we went to these schools and I felt, I felt I had, again, a lot of control, I felt that was shared between me and my boy, but definitely a lot more, a lot more control, I felt like, you know, I had a say in this (.) situation. And it was good, it was okay. I was *worried*, I was, (2) you know, a little bit (.) scared maybe, scared for him, but (1) we made that choice of the secondary school together and at least (.) we had some say.

(9.57)

So he went there and I felt it was never plain sailing, it was ups and downs. There was a couple of times where maybe I was pushing for them to give him more support (3), but I didn't want him to go into the bottom sets all the time because I felt that would maybe not

give him the best experience of some of the behaviour in the school. But (.) we were trying

(.) to compromise again, I was trying to make the best decisions *for* him so that he could

(1), yeah, have a good experience at school. And *I* wanted him to have good grades, *I*

wanted him to come out of school with a future, with something that he could do, but I

didn't want to be pushy, and I think that's important, I did not want to *push* him and make

him unhappy.

(10.41)

So, I, you know, I was a *vocal* parent, I really tried to make sure he was supported.(2) But I

didn't, we never got to EHCP. (1) I heard about them from my friends, I heard about them

from other parents, but I never pushed it that hard with school because (1) he was (1)

struggling with his learning, but not *enough* to maybe need one, he just needed, you know,

his work to be made smaller or his work to be more *accessible*. And I wanted his work to be

accessible for him as well, and I think that happened, I think he got what he wanted, but

there was never a perfect time there, never a perfect year, very much up and down, but he

got to the end. (3)

(11.41)

Now, when you've asked me these questions about transition to further education or to

college, you know [yes well] my boy has gone to college now. (2) Yeah (2), I felt maybe *less*

part of it (1). I felt maybe (3) he was maybe given more support in school to make his *own*

decisions. We took him to some colleges(1), we were part of that and we *wanted* to be part

of that, but it never felt like we had the *say*, it never felt like it was up to *us* about where he

was going to go. And I think it is interesting what you said about thinking about transition

from nursery to primary school (1) and now further education from secondary school, and that's so *different*.

(12.44)

I know he's *older*, and he is maybe better able to make that decision, but he's still my boy, he's still a young boy, (2) and it's hard, I think, to let go. I find that hard to let go. (3) But *he* made that decision with *me* a little bit, but it was more about him choosing his college. So, yeah, he chose that college. (4)

(13.22)

School were very more part of that process, I feel. I feel school (1) maybe didn't involve us as much as maybe we'd have liked to have been involved. I think he had different sessions at school, maybe, where people from different colleges came in to speak to them, or (2) he had conversations with pastoral staff about college and where he wanted to go. I think they were filling in forms, I don't know or getting his feedback about what he wanted to do. (1)And (1) I didn't receive those, I was never fed back then. And I did feel a little bit out of it (1). I felt I was not (2) being allowed into that conversation sometimes with school, and they were talking to him (1) behind my back, maybe. It just feels a little bit like that.

(14.25)

I *know* I am a protective parent, I am very much *interested* in my child and want the best for them, so maybe I'm a bit of a *different* parent to some, but (1) it was hard. It was hard to *not* feel like it was just on me, that my role was gone a little bit, and it was now *less* for me and *more* for him and more for school. (2) Maybe I am selfish, I don't know, but it was (1) difficult at that time.

(15.01)

Yes, school was good, school was fine with him, I feel they supported him, but maybe I would have liked them to speak to me more (.) and to help me take more of a lead on it (1). And I think schools (2), or his school was trying to *push* independence on him, on most children, they wanted (.) them to be more independent, (.) and I can see why.

(15.39)

If he's going to go to college, then a lot of it is on him being independent and showing that he's an adult, but (1) he was 15 making these decisions and having these conversations, so that's still for me, still young, but (.) I think that's what school were trying to do, so it's okay.

(16.03)

The transition to college, (3) I (1) don't know many college staff members, I don't know many of them, I don't go into college, (.) I've been in there for *one* day to look around and I have not spoken to anybody since then. (1) He likes it, I have to trust him, I have to trust that things are *happening* for him, that should be happening, and the support is in place, and he is enjoying his subjects, he's(.) doing more vocational subjects.

(16.35)

Yeah, he (.) speaks about happily, but (.) I (.) feel (.) distant, I feel distant from the college, and I like that he is independent (1), but I don't know if I am, (2) yeah (1) I don't know if I'm, understanding myself, maybe I haven't thought about that much, but thinking about it now, maybe I do miss having an input or having a say in his life like I *used* to,

(17.24)

which is sad for me, but I think it's good for him. (2)

Okay, thank you. How did you feel about the support your child received during the transition from secondary school to their next setting?

(2) That's a difficult one to (.) think about, there's a lot happening that I didn't maybe realise was happening, there's a lot happening.

(18.19)

I feel college. (1) I feel conflicted (.) I feel college is good for him and he is happier at college than he was at secondary school. He (.)is (.) finishing or he's completing subjects he could not do at secondary school (.) they didn't offer them, but I know transition is the focus of this, I'm sorry I keep talking about subjects, or I keep talking about things away from transition, but (1) my experience is (3) I will be glad maybe in five years (1) that he was given independence (1) for the transition. I will maybe look back on that with more happiness and more positivity (.) because I will see that it's helped him become the man he is at that point in time.

(19.38)

Maybe if I was (.)smothering him(.) would he be reliant more on me than himself? I think as a parent you would like your child to prosper and to do well and maybe that wouldn't happen if they were not given the space to do so. (2) But now I still feel (1) *uncertain*, I feel unsure. (2)I would like to know more about his college, I would like to know more about the support he's getting (.) I would like to see that he has *someone* at college who has his back that I can see every day.

(20.25)

When I took him to primary school, we would see the teachers every day. (1) In the morning I'd take him there, they'd come out, say hello, we could tell them anything that was on our mind and then pick them up and the same thing then we'd have regular parents evenings or drop-in evenings where we could look at the work (1) we could speak to the teacher, voice any concerns, see how they're doing(1) from an academic perspective (1) but also from their happiness as well. And that was good. (2)

(21.07)

But college, I don't know anybody from college. (.) I don't know anybody from college. I see names on forms, I see names on sheets of paper or on the website but I've maybe met *one* person *properly* at the beginning when we were looking around and since then I don't know anyone. I would never go into college to see his work or to speak to (.) staff about him because that would embarrass him and I don't want to embarrass him(1). It's not normal at college for (.) mums and dads to do that so (.) I don't want to be that parent but I do feel *distant*. I do feel distant from his education. (2)

(21.58)

And his education makes up such a big part of him. (1) His subjects is something he loves but I feel like it's all a big secret that I *cannot* uncover, I cannot get in there to find out what he's doing day to day. (1) Maybe that isn't normal to want to do that but I would like to be more involved and to know him (1) educationally better. I have to *accept* that.

(22.30)

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced during the transition and how did you overcome them?

(2) I would like to see more involvement (1), more involvement with the parents for college. More involvement from parents for the *selection* of college (.) and to know what school are doing at school to help them (.) go to college. Any information gathered, any data gathered from their perspective should be shared with parents so we know what is going through the minds of our children. There's some things (.) he will tell school and not me and vice versa (.) but I think it should come to the parents. *We* should be told more from school about what is happening with that transition.

(23.28)

We should hear *more* from college about what they are doing to *support* the child or *support* my son and how he is getting on, (1) especially if he needs more support. That support is so important to him and I *feel* he's getting it but I'm only hearing that from *his* perspective. I can't see it, I can't understand how he's doing. I can't *access* that part of him.

(24.03)

I'm sorry, (2) that was a lot to speak about (3). I think I need to go (.) and think about this more. I think I need to go away and think about this(.) because there's maybe more than I realised about this transition thing. I've really enjoyed answering these questions (2) but I think I need more things to think about. Yeah, is that okay?

Of course, thank you.

Appendix 4B: Anna's I Poem

Anna's I-Poem

I guess I'll start just by saying that

I've been through quite a lot myself

I'm fine

I'm happy to talk about things

I've tried my best to give my boy the best amount of support

I felt

I felt good

I felt things were going well

I took that lead

I felt I had a lot of power

I felt that it was me

I was a bag of nerves

I was very, very worried

I knew that was a really big jump

I knew we had to make some compromises

I looked around lots of them

I felt I had control

I felt that was shared between me and my boy

I was worried

I was scared maybe

I felt I had a say

I wanted him to have good grades

I wanted him to come out of school with a future

I didn't want to be pushy

I think that's important

I did not want to push him

I was a vocal parent

I really tried to make sure he was supported

I didn't push that hard

I think he got what he wanted

I felt maybe less part of it

I felt maybe he was given more support in school

I took him to some colleges

I wanted to be part of that

I felt I was not being allowed into that conversation

I know I am a protective parent

I am very much interested in my child

I want the best for them

I found that hard to let go

I think it's good for him

I feel conflicted

I feel college is good for him

I feel uncertain

I feel unsure

I would like to know more

I would like to see more involvement

I think it should come to the parents

I feel he's getting support

I can't see it

I can't understand how he's doing

I can't access that part of him

I think I need to go

I think I need to think about this more

I've really enjoyed answering these questions

I think I need more things to think about

Appendix 4C: Anna's Contrapuntal Voices

Anna

Voices of possibility and of regret
- He's coping well now
- His future is in his hands
- I like that I can see him doing well
- I wish the support was in place
- I'd like to have been involved more

Voices of anxiety, reassurance, emotional imbalance.
- I was a bag of nerves
- I think it's good for him
- I have to trust him
- I feel uncertain

Voices of optimism and of confusion
- We didn't know who to turn to.
- I wish someone was there to help us.
- Things worked out in the end.

Voices of control, letting go, powerlessness, fear, reflection.
- I felt like I had a lot of power
- I was a vocal parent
- Maybe I was smothering him
- I think it's good for him

Appendix 5A: Sarah's Interview Transcript

Can you just tell me from your from your perspective, your experience of going through that transition period from lower school, key-stage four to college?

Yeah, of course. (.) I'll try and give you as much information as I can remember. There was lots of things going on then, but it was quite recent. It was only just over a year ago now, I think, so I can remember quite a lot of it. (.) So yeah (.), my son has a special educational need, and he's been supported a lot in his time at school, and he had a really good secondary school SENDCo. He was really kind to him and really supported his needs,

(1:27)

and we thought they were brilliant. We really loved them. We loved the teaching staff. We loved the SENCO. Yeah, just everyone there was really, really lovely, and I'll be honest, the transition was great. It was really good. I think he probably outgrew school. He probably outgrew everything about school at that point in time where he was a young adult making his way in the world. He was trying his best at school, and he was getting lots of support, but we just felt like it was great.

(2.28)

We had a really good SENCO who looked after the special educational needs, and they let us go into the school and then took us through on an evening, took us through all the different options for him. It wasn't just for him. It was for all the children. I think all the children had additional needs. We were all invited to go in, and the SENCO did a really good presentation where they just looked at all the different colleges and what was, yeah,

the courses that they offered as well, and the kind of grades that they would offer them. Not offer them, sorry. The grades that the children would need or the young adults would need or my son would need to get on, and they really, really put them on in a clear way. It was very clear, very, very clear.

(3:15)

So we looked at them with the SENCO during this presentation evening, and there was a couple of colleges that he really liked, the sound of, that he wanted to go and look at, and the SENCO gave us the open day information, and we went along to that. We looked at the colleges, and we felt that the colleges were good. One he really loved, that's the one he went to luckily. I just felt like I knew what to expect from going to these colleges, and I knew what questions to ask as well because the SENCO had told us lots of things to say beforehand, and it was, yeah, it was really good.

(4:14)

Okay, thank you. How did you feel about the support your child received during the transition from secondary school to their next setting?

I was worried. I can't lie, I *was* worried. I wanted him to settle in and to get into the college environment and to feel happy there, and I was just worried that he might not do that. I was worried a little bit, but I was also very happy, and I think relieved as well that he had found a college that he wanted to go to, and when he went there, he seemed to settle in very quickly. He made friends very quickly, I should say, and some of his friends from school went up, but not all of them. Some of them stayed in the sixth form at the school, but he wanted a fresh start, and I think he wanted to be independent, and I think we also knew

that they only have courses at his school that maybe he couldn't get the grades for, and college had lots of different qualifications. He likes media, and he wanted to do one where he could make media, and I think at the school there was not much making of media. It was very written, book-based. So yeah, when he went to college, he settled in quickly with his friends. He made some friends there as well, and his course was really fun, and I think he just learnt things very quickly because it was very new for him and very exciting. He was using cameras, making little films and things, and then coming home and showing me the things that he'd made. He'd made a magazine, like he's already making lots of different media. He's really good. Because he seems like he's enjoying it, and it makes me feel happy that he's doing something he loves.

(5:44)

I don't know if he's going to do it as a job in the future, but for what he's doing now, it's really, really great. So yeah, I'd say I felt mainly worried, but happy. I know it's not really an emotion, but I felt, I just felt supported. I felt really supported from the school. I miss that SENDCo, because they were like really, really nice, and they knew him well. They knew him really well. I'll tell you what, I can talk to you about my son for a little bit, but he's got really bad stress. School probably wasn't his favourite place to be, because I think he had some teachers in the past who maybe weren't very nice to him, but I think you always get those people in schools, don't you, who just, maybe they get out of the wrong side of bed on the wrong kind of morning, and then they're a bit angry. I think sometimes he did get told off when he first started. But yeah, as he got into Year 8 and Year 9, he became really quite

scared of school, and lots of stress. He wouldn't want to go to school, but he just didn't like sitting down for a long time in the school.

(7:13)

He hated sitting in a chair, and the plastic chairs for a long time. He hated it if there was lots of people around him. So school wasn't his best place to be. So I think, yeah, with the anxieties and the stresses that he had, he needed to be around people who knew him, and his SENDCo *definitely* knew him really well, and his SENECo made sure all his teachers knew him as well, and that they were informed, I guess, about him and his condition, how he felt. And then once that happened, and all the teachers knew about how to make him feel good, and be positive around him and that, I think school changed to be a different place for him. But he still can't sit in a chair for a long time (laughs), so I don't think he's done as well as maybe he could have done at school, because of just not finding it a really good place to be.

(9.17)

But at college, he's very hands-on, very practical, and he seems to be enjoying that where he can make things, and not have to be kind of stuck in a chair just doing lots of reading and lots of writing and things. He's really doing lots of different things. And I think that's really playing to his strengths now. But yeah, we knew that there were things about him that would mean he didn't like school very much, but through college, he's doing really well there.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced during the transition and how did you overcome them?

Umm(.) we didn't know what we were doing really (laughs). (1) We helped him a bit with applying. We did a little bit of looking online and applying to the colleges they wanted to go to. I think he did most of that with his SENCO. His SENCO helped him put that all together and things, and when we were at home giving him support, we took him to the open days. But I think that first meeting that we had with a presentation from the SENCO about the different colleges that they could go to, that was really eye-opening I think for us.

(10:50)

We were not really sure what to expect before that. So, we can't thank him enough for doing that for us, because it really made us feel like we were involved and we knew what was happening, and I wanted to be involved. And I was really happy that we weren't just kind of turning up with no idea what was going on. We were given all the facts about what happened, how to do it, how to apply. And we helped him a bit with that, but the SENCO did loads of work for that. And I felt, I remember that I did feel like, is he going above and beyond here? You know what I mean? Should I be doing more to help him? But then I thought, you know, education, school can take on that role of helping him with his education, and I'll take on the role of helping him at home, and I thought that was quite a nice, clear way of doing it. And then we of course took him to his open days and we looked around them with him, and we met the SENCO of the other colleges and their SEN team and that. And that also made us feel pretty happy, because we could see the people that he was talking to and getting support from. And funnily enough, he's not

(12:18)

missed a single day of college since he started. His attendance got better at school as he

went on, but yeah, college, he's not missed a single day. He loves it. He loves going on the

bus. He loves, you know, seeing his mates, getting his dinner by himself and that. I think he

just feels really independent. And I think he needed that. So yeah, we kind of knew what to

do at the start. We let school do a lot of the paperwork and things with him, and we just

kept asking questions and kept on taking him to the places. And it was making him feel like

we were interested, because we really were. So that's kind of where we were at with it.

Can you think about or go through your own experience during that process and reflect on

it in comparison to how you felt during other transition from nursery to primary school and

primary school to secondary school, how different it was in the transitions as to post-16?

Oh, blimey. Yeah, it was very, very different looking back. Of course, we chose his nursery

and that, and it was a nursery attached to his primary school, and it was near our home.

We were in a catchment area for it. So yeah, we chose that one. He was young, wasn't he?

So he didn't have much say in that. But he was, yeah, we chose the best one we thought

was for him, the best school for him. I remember that one. I remember feeling like pretty,

oh, I don't know. I was pretty emotional, I think, when he went to school for the first time.

(14:24)

I like going to nursery. I remember the staff being so lovely and you knew them really well.

And then, you know, going to primary school, just felt like my baby's getting older, and he's

not my baby anymore. He's going to school with all these big kids. So I remember feeling

very sad that he went to that one. But yeah, I think there was support from the nursery staff

and the school about doing that. There was transition days and kind of things like that

where you go in and sit with the reception staff and that, and get used to that school building. So I felt from my experience, I was sad because he was getting older but I felt happy because I was part of choosing it for him and we chose the best one for him. For secondary school, yeah, we got some support from primary school about the different schools he could go to for his secondary school. So we had a look around them all when he was in year five. Actually, yeah, looking back, we went around the schools in year five, first of all, and then looked back at them during the start of year six.

(15:47)

I remember some of the secondary school staff asking, like, oh, you're here early, aren't you? But I think we just thought it was good for him to see what different schools are like at that point. And maybe it was for us as well, probably more for us, just to get an idea of the area and what they're like inside it. At this point, he was, you know, he was enjoying school more than he probably would have done when he went to secondary school, but he still was, you know, he would still be panicking and things about going to school. But that got more as he went into secondary school. And then, yeah, in year six, we went to look around all the secondary schools, and it felt a lot more real. In fact, I remember the secondary schools feeling really big because it was, you know, it felt like it was close. And maybe I felt a little bit panicky about him going to a big school with lots of big kids. I remember there was lots of children from the school helping out on those transition days, and some of them probably in year seven.

(16:57)

But, you know, they look big. They looked *really* big in comparison to him. So I remember feeling a bit worried about what the year 11s would look like. But we went to all the schools together, and then we came home and we spoke about each one. And we chose the best one, what we thought was the best one for him. And he had a say in that as well, because it was one that his mates were going to. He was going to that one. He wanted to go to that one. So that was *interesting*. But, yeah, that experience was, I felt, well, do you know what? I felt, I think, looking back, I felt overwhelmed. Because there was so much choice. There's a lot of secondary schools. All of them weren't perfect. And I knew that the one I chose would have a really big impact on him and his life. And I knew that was going to be a big responsibility on my part to make sure that the school he went to was the right school for him.

(18:20)

school for him. And him being more independent with his college choice, actually, that took, do you know what? That's funny. That took that off me. I remember, I didn't feel as overwhelmed about his college, I think because he's a bit older, but also because he'd chosen it. And he'd chosen the college that he thought was right for him, with the support of his SENDCo in that. But that made me, yeah, that made me realise that maybe I wasn't as overwhelmed about his college choices because he was getting that support from his SENDCo at school. But, yeah, in comparison to them all, I've always felt worried, but I felt less worried about our college and I felt like it was all under control. All our job was to do was to take him to these open days, you know, go to these presentation events with his SENDCo and ask questions.

(19:38)

So for us it was being given those opportunities to ask questions and being given those opportunities to listen to information. I found those things really helpful. I really liked, yeah, the way that the school handled it. It really made me feel part of it a little bit. You know, it made me feel part of it, but it gave him a lot of independence to do it himself as well. You know, I think if he was left by himself, if he was left to us and the family to do it, well, I think I would have told him to stay at school. And, you know, he knows his teaching stuff at school. A lot of his mates are going to be there.

(20:27)

It's near our house. All those things make me think it's the best place for him. But actually, me having a bit of a back seat, if you will, in this, made me realise, yeah, he made the choice that's good for him. And I've not had any kind of pushiness in it, you know. I've not been pushing him to go in a certain way. He's done it himself. He's chosen the one himself. And, you know, that's the right thing for him to do.

Can you think of anything that would have made the experience better for you?

Oh, I don't know. I don't know. I know, I think, do you know what? I think if, no, I can't think of anything. What I was going to say is, you know, what would have made it better if the college staff would have spent more time with him before he joined the college. But, you know, they probably saw him enough, I think. Well, I think they saw him more than what other people thought. So, I do feel, I do feel he got, yeah, I feel like he got a good experience. I did get a good experience from it all but I think I'll never feel fully happy as I miss being the parent and mothering him like I used to but I think all mothers go through

something like this. I think about him leaving home in the future and that fills me with

sadness (3). Sorry (.) I think they went above and beyond. I think, you know, all the staff

went above and beyond, both from his secondary school to his college. Everyone was

there. Everyone was there to help him.

(22:46)

And everyone played their part in making him feel, like, supported. And I felt really

supported in it. And they all were, yeah, they all played their part. I think the SENCO from

the secondary school gave loads of information to him, to the SENCO, or the support

workers at the college. And they had all the information they needed about him from, you

know, what worked with getting him into school and what helped him to, you know, gain his

lessons and that. So, I felt like information between the two places was passed really well.

No one from the college ever went into school, but, you know, we went into college. So,

that was good as well. We got to see the college a couple of times. We went in one for the

opening evening, and then we went in another time on a Saturday, I think it was, to see it

again. And we met with the support staff from that then as well.

(24:09)

Yeah. Yeah. He was nervous about, you know, meeting all these people because it's a lot of

busy places. But they showed him that the SEN area he could access, which is like a quiet

space. And he was allowed to go there whenever he liked. And do you know what? At

college, they're not as like angry. So, if he needs a bit of quiet time, he just gets up and

walks out of his classroom or gives like a little wave to the teacher and he goes to it.

Whereas in school, sometimes some teachers will make a big deal about him leaving the

room to get a little bit of space. So, college is maybe treating him more like an adult, you know? And that's why he likes going there because he can wear his own clothes and he can be an adult. And that was during that transition bit, that's what they told him, that he'll be an adult there and he can call them by their first names. And I think there's that information that made him feel, yeah, like this is the place for me.

(25:31)

And me being there with him, I could see why he wanted to go. And that made me feel like, you know, part of it as well because here he was going to a place where they're going to look after him and they know him. So, yeah, I really felt like he went to the right place for him and a place where he was going to get supported but maybe able to learn in different ways and you can learn in a way that's more suited to him as an adult. Yeah, I guess it's that word experience, isn't it? My experience of him going through that is good. Everything's worked out well. Everything's worked out really well. And I can't praise his old school enough for how they helped him get here because without them I don't think, like I said, I would have put him back into his school and gone into sixth form there.

(27:02)

But I don't think it would have been happy and I think maybe they'd be fighting the same battles. So the fact he's gone somewhere different that he's chosen for a fresh start, yeah, that is actually really good. A fresh start does everyone wonders, doesn't it?

Yeah

Appendix 5B: Sarah's I Poem

Sarah's I Poem

I was worried

I can't lie

I wanted him

I was worried

I was happy

I think relieved

I think he probably

I miss that SENDCo

I felt supported

I felt really supported

I think I would have

I remember

I didn't feel as overwhelmed

I found those things

I really liked

I think if he

I would have told him

I've not had any

I don't know

I felt really supported

I remember

I remember feeling

I was sad

I felt happy

Appendix 5C: Sarah's Contrapuntal Voices

Sarah

Voices of worry and of relief
- *I was worried, I can't lie I was worried.*
- *I think he settled in very quickly.*
- *He made friends very quickly.*
- *We didn't know what was going to happen.*

Voices of loss and growth
- *I'll never feel truly happy*
- *I miss being the parent and mothering him like I used to*
- *He's doing really well there*
- *He seems to be enjoying himself*
- *He's making things now which he enjoys.*

Voices of support and independence
- *I miss that SENDCo*
- *They were so nice, really nice.*
- *They knew him well*
- *He wanted a fresh start*
- *He wanted to be independent.*

Voices of optimism and of confusion
- *He's doing so well. I can't quite believe it.*
- *The course is brilliant and he's so engaged*
- *Why weren't these things put in place earlier?*
- *I wasn't sure what the process was.*

Appendix 6A: Leah's Interview Transcript

Can you just tell me from your from your perspective, your experience of going through that transition period from lower school, key-stage four to college?

Yes. I'm very happy to tell you about that. Where to begin? Wow. I brought some notes, so I brought some notes along, so I might look at these if that's okay.

That's fine.

Yeah, there's a lot that happened in what felt like a short space of time, but I don't know. (.) When you think back on these things, (.) sometimes they're better than you expected, I guess, and sometimes they're worse. I don't know how I feel about this at the moment, but maybe when we're talking about it, it will give me some chance to open, to consider some things a bit differently (2).

Okay, so my child, they were in primary school, and during primary school, they really had a nice time. They seemed to make lots of friends, but they couldn't write very well. I had lots of parent's evenings where the teachers would tell me that maybe they lack a bit of confidence (.), or they're finding the work more difficult (.) than other students. So I had an idea that maybe, academically, they were not like their peers (.). I didn't see it at home. (1) I saw a really chatty, confident child who just seemed happy all the time, so I didn't see any difference. I couldn't see the child that they would tell me about in primary school.(1)

They had some challenges along the way. They definitely did (laughs), and things became more evident. They were finding it difficult to write and to spell (.), and their reading as well was quite hard. So they were getting extra support in school, and they were really trying their best. (1) I'm always proud of them, but I'm so proud of how they just tried to not be too hard

on themselves about how they were doing in school. They had lots of intervention sessions, and there was lots of support, which I think made them stand out a little bit.

It wasn't enough for the teachers, though. It wasn't enough to do anything about it for an ECHP (1). So we didn't go down that road. We looked at what we could do at home to support them and what school could do to support them. (.) So that was that. They had the support in school, but their writing just wasn't coming on. We got to Year 6, and we realised that they were going to struggle in secondary school (1), so we had to choose a good secondary school for them. So we looked at lots and lots of secondary schools, and one that really stood out was one where we had a good feel for it.

There was something about the staff and the environment. We couldn't quite put our finger on it, but it just felt like a good school (.) that would support them. They had a good SEN department, and we were just really taken with that school (.). I felt that transition was good, I know that's what you're looking at. We had some say in it. We had some control in it, and we looked at all the different places with them. It was great. It was so different to the primary school, where they didn't really know what was happening when we went to that one, when they went from nursery to primary school. But from primary to secondary school, everybody was involved, and it just felt really good (.).

It felt like we'd all chosen the right school for them, and they had the right support when they were there. It was difficult, that transition process. (1) It was really hard, mainly because they were growing up, and moving from primary to secondary is such a big jump. You're never sure how they're going to cope (.), and because they had some difficulties with their writing and their reading still a little bit, we felt like they would struggle with that jump up from

primary to secondary school. I think we realised as well that it's very different going to a secondary school. Going to a primary school, we'd take them in the mornings, and the teachers would be there every morning by the door, and you could tell them anything you're worried about, which I think they loved (laughs). You could tell them any concerns you have, you could arrange a meeting with the headteacher quickly if you needed to, or the SENCO. People felt very accessible, and I found that transition into secondary school, we weren't part of the drop-offs anymore (1). It wasn't the done thing to pop into school to have a quick chat with staff, and we didn't know who the staff members were to speak to (1). They had so many teachers and sometimes had different teachers for the same subject. We rarely saw them all and didn't know names of all his teachers. Luckily, the SENCO became a really good point of contact, and they had a form tutor, but we just found it really difficult to know who to speak to, and to have any relationships, apart from mainly with the SENCO (1). So yeah, that transition was fine in the end, it was difficult, but fine, (.) and he still struggled with his writing. We never got a dyslexia diagnosis, but we think it probably is dyslexia. School did some tests, but they never had it fully confirmed. They just had some suspicions (.), I think, or had some concerns, but we didn't pursue a dyslexia test, but we think it was that. But he never met the criteria to get anything extra, to get any EHCPs, he didn't meet the criteria, that's what school said. Because he wasn't low enough with his results (1).

And we did apply for one, thinking he might need some support, we did it as a family, but it didn't go through. So at least we knew, we knew that he was not having the right support at that time and he needed more. Yeah, so we got to the end of secondary school, and he'd come a long way, a really long way when I think about it from how he was when he first

started there (1). Academically, you know, (.) he'd got grades that he could be proud of, and that would allow him to go to a college, which we were all so happy and proud of him for that. It was, you know, that was a really stressful time for everybody, but he had lots of support during his time there, and with his exams, one of his teachers, one of the staff members read him the questions and helped him. Or prompted him, I think it was, or did something during the exams to help him to get them, to do them. I should know all these things but it's hard to remember everything. And we were, yeah, we were happy with how he did in school, but they didn't have a sixth form. So he had to have another transition, and that was a really difficult time for him. I wish they had a sixth form (laughs).

So he had to have another transition at that point. We'd have loved him to stay at that school, loved him to have another couple of years at that school, but the way it worked out, he didn't have that. So instead, he's gone to college now. I think that was, that's been difficult. You know, he was 16 when he left school, but he's still our baby. He's still, I don't see him as being a young man enough. No, he is. He is a young man. But I think with his support needs, I'm not ready to kind of let go of him just yet and see him as being a full adult.

Just because I know that he is vulnerable at times, and I want him to do well. But as a parent, it's hard to accept, I think, that you're becoming a bit more in the distance, I think. Or a bit more, less prominent would be, maybe that's the word I'm trying to look for, in his life. Which is, you know, that's me, that's my, that's my cross to bear (laughs). It all goes very fast when you look back. Sorry, love, sorry.

It's fine, take your time.

So yeah, so the transition. The transition started, kind of, I think it started in year 10. Where he came home from school one day, and was saying, it was near the end of year 10, saying that he's been asked to think about colleges, or places to go after school, when he finishes school in year 11. And that got some of the cogs whirring with him. Where he was interested in different places. We felt a bit lost at that point. There wasn't any real guidance, I think, from school that we'd received as parents. We were a bit blindsided by this and I wish we had some warning. So, we weren't really sure what, well, I wasn't really sure what the colleges were like, where they were. We're not from the area, I didn't grow up in this area, so I don't know.

It's not like, you know, he could go to the college I went to, or, you know, this felt very alien to me. I also went to sixth form in my school so I didn't have any experience of college life. And I felt, yeah, to kind of, to place that burden on him in year 10. Maybe burden's the wrong word, but to place that on him, without talking to us about it first, I felt that wasn't the right way to do it. I would have liked there to have been, some parents meeting, or something that involved us from an earlier point. But anyway, they dropped those seeds. I think it was in a PSHE lesson, they started to, you know, they started to talk about the transition. And, very briefly, very briefly with him.

But it was still happening in his head, and he was aware that there would be another transition, and it maybe made it a bit real for him, and definitely for us. But we parked that, we didn't talk about that too much, because there was a lot going on. And then he got into year 11, and then the exams were the main focal point in getting his grades. For those, it became the most important thing. But in the background, there was lots of talk at school

about colleges and places he could go to do his next qualification. He has got an additional need, that his writing and reading levels have always been low, and he's always struggled to do those things. So we thought, well presumed, I presumed, that there would be a meeting with the SENDCo to talk about colleges, or to talk about, you know, him, how he's doing. But that didn't happen.

I had to initiate that with SENDCo. But it kind of felt like school were balancing him being a young adult and making his own decisions. And they were prioritising that over us getting involved with it. And I just remember him saying, he came home from school one day and said, I'm going to this college, because someone had come in from the college to talk to him about it at an assembly. And it was a college I had never heard of before, a college I'd never gone to, really. And yeah, I think now, I think, you know, I think, you know, and yeah, I'm thinking now, I'm thinking back to how involved I was during primary school, the choice of nursery, it was all me, and then the choice of secondary school, he was part of that, and then now college, I don't feel like I'm part of that at all.

So I've been pushed back more and more as it's gone on. And I feel it's good for him to be able to make his own decisions and choose his own colleges. But I would have liked to have done that with him. I would like to have been more a part of that. But yeah, it didn't happen that way. So he chose this college, he came home from school saying he was going to this college, and he was really excited about it. Then he had to apply to the college and do this kind of thing. But I contacted the SENCO at this point because I just felt a bit lost.

I didn't know what was happening, I didn't know what grades he would need, what courses he would do, how they would support him. And he was adamant he was going there, so there

was no stopping him. So I thought if this is where he wants to go, and I'm not feeling involved, I'm going to contact school, I'm going to become involved. By being proactive. So I contacted the SENCO. The SENCO held a meeting with me, and I just spoke about this college, and I spoke about my concerns. And that meeting was actually *really* helpful. It was only 20 minutes, but I left there feeling like I had a plan, and I knew more. It just felt like this should happen with every child, let alone anyone with an SEN. And I just felt like this was the right thing to do. As I say this should happen with every child, let alone anyone with an SEN.

But yeah, all she did was took me onto the college's website, and navigated that with me, and showed me the open days, and then showed me some of the support, and then some of the information that she knew she told me about this college. So I just left that meeting and I had a date for an opening that I'd written down on my calendar we could make, because it was in a few weeks' time after that and I knew the names of the SENCOs. There was a few at the college. I knew some of the courses that they offered. And the grades he would need. I had a better idea about the options that he could access. So we had almost a plan A and plan B and a plan C for this college (laughs). If you've got these grades, you can do these courses. If you've got these grades, you can do these courses. And those grades, you can do that course. And that just felt like things were becoming *clearer*. And I think I was a bit anxious before that meeting, but after that meeting, I didn't feel as anxious, and I think that showed with him as well.

And even though he's 16, I think he quite liked me getting more involved. When I mentioned the open day and said to him that I would like to come along to that, he seemed happy and was, I think, maybe *relieved* that we were taking him seriously. That, yeah, that we were going

to go with him. I think if I was a 16-year-old going to go around the college, I would have liked my parents to be there as well, or a parent to be there, just so you have some support. Even though we're not very cool (laughs). So I went with him to this open day to look around it. And I think it helped that he was so adamant about this college. He was so sure that this college was for him. And it made that decision process very easy, because we weren't having to compare lots of different colleges. We were looking at this one.

He got a feel straight away that it was the perfect place for him. The courses that he wanted to do were there. It was a Level 2 course or a Level 3 course, depending on what happened. And look at me talking about levels (laughs). I mean, that's so different to how it was. Sorry, anyway. We had the open day. We looked around the open day around the college. And it was just great seeing the staff members and speaking to the SEN department about the support that he may get with his writing, putting faces to names. I left that open day just feeling like (2) *relieved*. Relieved and a lot more at ease with what was going to happen. And I think he did as well. But for me, I was certainly very much more at ease with the process and at ease with the college he was going to go to. And there was a really clear path. And it seemed to increase his motivation at school and at home to want to learn. And it seemed to (2) Yeah, it made me feel a lot happier.

I did find it difficult to (1) When I was at the open day, they were telling me things like, the child is the main focal point. Or the young adult, sorry, is the main focal point. Any information gets passed to them, which they can pass on to us. And that felt like another step removed from us. We're no longer (1) Even the information gatherers, we're now just (1) You know, in the background, it's about him and what happens there. So I realised that

secondary school was another step back for us in terms of seeing people. Like college was going to be an even further step back for us and we would be less involved in education. But I would still hold people to account if they're not going to support him like they say they would be. So yeah, that was it. He got his results at the college for a course he wanted to do. We got an induction pack sent home. And he started college.

And it is, as I thought it was going to be, we are very hands-off. And I can see that's going to benefit him in the future for having more independence. But it's difficult and I find it difficult to let go of being his parent. You know, his mum. Which sounds a bit pathetic really. Yeah, I wouldn't... I think it's a difficulty. I look back at pictures of him as a baby or as a young child and how reliant he was on me. And now he's this age and less reliant on me. Or where he *thinks* he's less reliant on me. That comes with some good things.

I'm going off topic here, but sorry.

It's fine, please carry on.

But yeah, it's made (1) It's made him (1) It's made me realise that it's hard to let go. I find it hard to let go.

Could you tell me a bit about that transition process or your experience of the transition when he went into college initially and how you experienced that transition?

Yeah, I think it's a difficult question. Initially. Sorry, you did ask about college specifically, didn't you?

Yes but tell me what ever you feel you need to.

Sorry. I went on a bit of a tangent then. So, I... Yeah, I wanted to leave him alone when he started college. I didn't want to meddle. I was aware that having a parent take you to school or pick you up or be around you at that age is probably not very cool for a teenager (laughs). So, I didn't want to meddle. I let him go into college by himself. He caught the bus by himself. He was more than capable of catching a bus. But it was no longer a school bus. It was a public bus. And there's some things out of your control there a bit more. He was going out to buy his own lunch. Sometimes he'd use the cafe in college. Sometimes he'd go into town and get himself some lunch. But I didn't ever meddle. He got himself a job. Yeah, he was (2) I think college has been really good for him. But I just wanted at the start to make sure that he was going to access that okay. I was well aware of his difficulties with writing and reading. And I didn't want that to be a barrier for him enjoying college.

But I also didn't want him to feel like I was making him stand out more. And getting support in college for those things they can maybe make you feel very different to your friends. And I didn't want him to feel different. I wanted him to...I wanted him to feel supported. But yeah, but not in a way where he would...he'll be away from his peers or feel very different from his peers. But I still thought it was important that I went in to speak to someone. And I didn't tell him I did this until afterward. But I contacted the college. And I got their...their SENCO's email details and contacted them. And I arranged to...They wanted to have a telephone conversation but I thought I wanted to go and speak to them first of all and see them just sort of form a relationship I thought or even attempt to. So I went in to college and I made sure that he wasn't there. Or that he wouldn't know I was there. And I met with the SENCO. And I

just spoke to him, spoke to her about some of the concerns I had with him from secondary school.

I wanted to check what information they had been given from secondary school. And I always wanted to double check the kind of support he was going to offer when he was there. That they were going to offer when he was there. So I (2) There was a lot of information they had from secondary school which was a relief to me. Because I didn't want all the good work they had done to be ignored. And she had a folder, she pulled out loads of information about him. (.) Which was great. We looked through that. And then we were speaking about what worked, what I felt had worked for him at secondary school. When it came to him getting support and building that relationship with him. And then she told me about the support they were putting in place for him. And yeah, they (.) I think they were balancing my anxieties with him getting support. They were trying to make sure that we were both feeling supported. (.) But yeah, that they weren't going to mollycoddle him. And that, yeah, that I get that. I get why they did that.

So he, yeah, they told me they were putting things like he would be in a group where there would be an additional teacher there who would support him. Not one-to-one. But they would support with that. And that they would have he would have access to a lot of support. He would have access to extra sessions or an extra session a week where his reading and writing would be supported by someone within the SEN department. And I tried to make sure that he was happy with that as well. (1) And that if they could speak to him about the support to make sure that he was on board with that. (1) And then they said they had done so already but they would do that again. So that meeting was was very, again, very good. But, yeah, I

think what struck me from telling you these things is that I had to take the lead on both of those. On the things I feel benefited him the most. (1) Benefited me the most. The things I feel benefited me the most. Which were the conversation with the SENCO at the college and then the conversation with the SENCO at the college (.) about the support he'd get. I had to organize those. And it was on me to to do those things. I think that's a bit frustrating.

(.) They seem very obvious things to do. If you've got a child who's got an additional need or has some needs some support why wouldn't you tell the parents?(.) Why wouldn't you keep parents informed or why wouldn't you do that? I find that very difficult to understand or, yeah, understand why they wouldn't do that. But that's what happened anyway. But, yeah, the transition after that was good. I think he was he was happy. I was happy.

Could you tell me about maybe any emotions that you experienced during that transition period between post-16 to college?

Oh, certainly, yeah. There was a lot of a lot of emotions, I think, going around at once. I was feeling happy. So, if I was going to go through my emotions they would be very up and down. So I was probably I think my main emotion

would have been feeling quite anxious on his behalf. Initially. And then frustration. I feel I felt frustrated a lot of the time. Maybe I wasn't included. I couldn't work out what I can see now. Because he's really benefited from that. And I think because college was his decision and he chose to go there maybe it made him feel strong with that decision and empowered by it. Maybe it made him feel like it was the right thing to do because he'd chosen it.

And I hadn't forced it. Yeah, I felt frustrated. I wasn't maybe part of that process more than I would like to have been. So, yeah. Anxious. Frustrated. I never felt angry. I never felt sad. I think it was anxious and frustrated were probably the two main emotions that I felt. But now I'm feeling positive. I'm feeling a lot more positive about how he's doing. And I don't know and I don't meddle, I don't go into college for any more meetings. I let him do his thing. I let him enjoy it.

And he's doing so well. I think he is getting the support he needs which is really good. He's always going to have difficulties with his reading and writing, but he's at college. That's brilliant. And who knows where he'll go next. Oh, yeah. If he goes to university, I don't know what I'll do then. Will I have any say in that? Will I even know he's gone to university? Or which university he's gone to after all this? Frustration and anxiety are the two main emotions. But now positivity. I feel positive and I feel optimistic about the future.

How do you feel that transition process are you as a person? How has that impacted upon you, would you say, as a person?

Wow. That's a question. It's made me think about who I am a bit more, I think. I'm a parent. I'm his parent and I love him and want to protect him. It's really Interesting because I now feel I'm still a parent. I'm still his parent. I will always be his parent. But am I less of a parent now? I think I've put so much energy and effort into fighting for him and fighting to get him support and fighting for him that I just became my whole aim was to be a parent for him and everything else came second. It's taken me a little while to understand or accept that I can be

more than that. That I haven't got to just be his parent. I can Be me. I can have friends. I can go out. And Maybe before I would see those things as being quite selfish whereas now because there's less pressure on me because that pressure's been taken off Again probably from this experience of this transition that now I can be something a bit different than being a parent to him that I can have friends again. I had friends but I can see them more without feeling guilty. I'm doing more hours at work which just means more money which that's a good thing as well. I'm enjoying work more So maybe I needed to accept that he was grown up and this transition if I was more involved I was more involved at college I don't know if that would be healthy for me. Maybe it's a good thing That I was less involved. Maybe it's a good thing that I

Was he was more involved and that he could take more ownership of that. And I think our relationship is funny. We've always got on really well but now now I'm probably less mothering of him and obviously love him and care for him but we have more fun there's more (Laughs) and we do more things together So maybe I need to look at that relationship I mean I need to look at my own relationship with who I am maybe. I think it's happened already But yeah I'm not just I'm not just a parent who's fighting for their son all the time but I'm now a parent who's I'm now a parent who's

letting their son Become more independent become more who he wants to be That's quite big that feels big but also Feels not good and I would love him to stay at home forever and be around me forever but I know that isn't going to happen and maybe maybe this distancing if that's what you want to call it this distancing of my involvement in his life or in his education but in that part of his life was a good thing because maybe it makes me more accepting that things aren't always going to be like this and that things yeah when they do when he does leave home I will be more prepared for that because I haven't been yeah it hasn't been as quick it's been a gradual process of accepting that he can move on and do his own thing to be independent that's very that's really interesting for me to say that that's something I haven't accepted or I haven't spoke about that's a really that's a really interesting thing Something yeah I hadn't spoken about that to anyone I hadn't even thought of that before That yeah maybe it's a good thing the transition wasn't as involving I wasn't as involved in it maybe that's a good thing it's going to make it easier isn't it when he moves out of home whenever that will be it will still be very hard but I will know that he can make his own decisions Well Okay I hadn't thought that properly before maybe there's some good things yeah there are some good things I've always thought I've maybe always think about the negatives so this is a good thing there's a silver lining to come out of this Yes something to something to think about something to ponder a bit more after this I think But yeah is that okay

Appendix 6B: Leah's I Poem

Leah's I-Poem:

I had to lead on both of those.

I had to organize those.

I think that's a bit frustrating.

I find that very difficult to understand.

I couldn't work out what I can see now.

I left that meeting just feeling like

I was happy.

I was happy.

I think that's a bit frustrating.

I had to organize those.

I think it's a good thing that I was less involved.

I think it makes it easier.

I had to organize those.

I think that's a bit frustrating.

I couldn't work out what I can see now.

I feel positive.

I feel optimistic about the future.

I can be more than that.

I can have friends.

I can go out.

I can have more money.

I'm enjoying work more.

I'm now a parent who's

letting their son

Become more independent.

I know that he can make his own decisions.

I hadn't spoken about that to anyone

I hadn't even thought of that before

I haven't been as quick

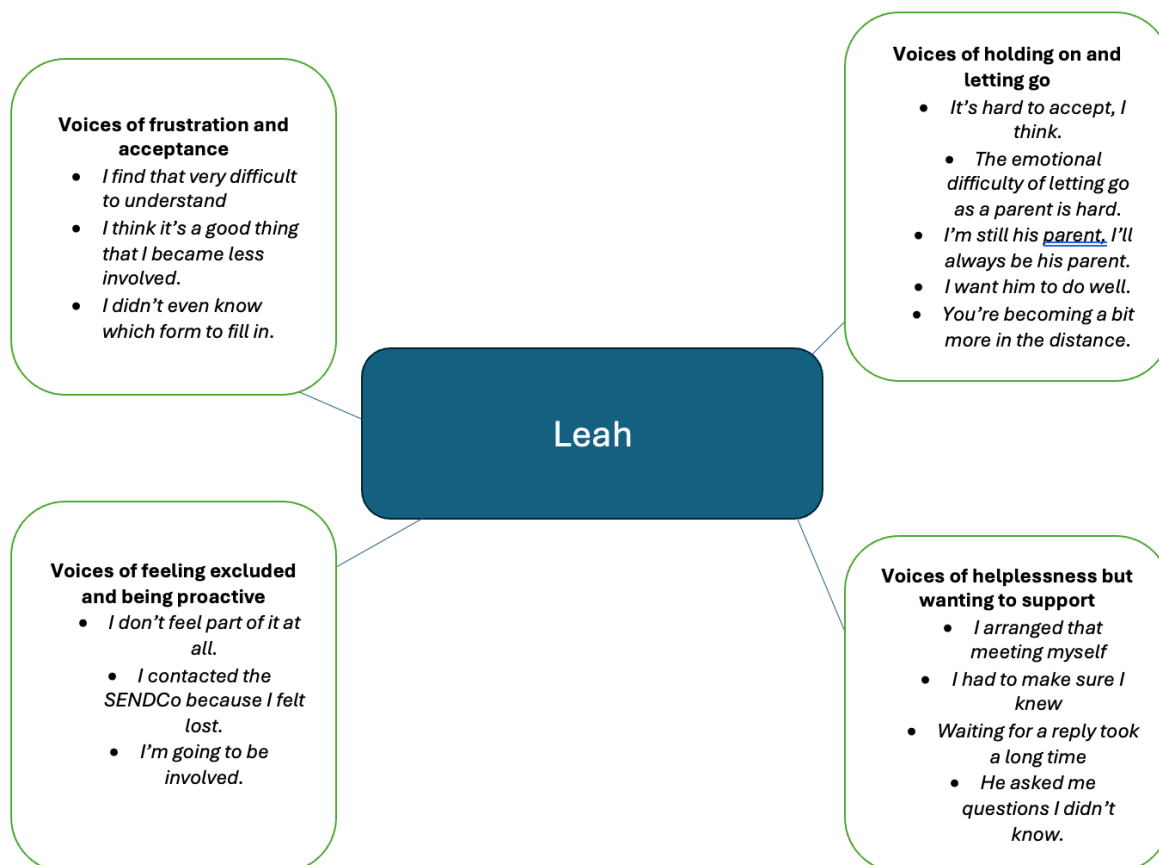I will know that he can make his own decisions

I hadn't thought that properly before.

I always think about the negatives.

I think there's a silver lining.

I think there's something to ponder more.

Appendix 6C: Leah's Contrapuntal Voices

Voices of frustration and acceptance
- *I find that very difficult to understand*
- *I think it's a good thing that I became less involved.*
- *I didn't even know which form to fill in.*

Voices of holding on and letting go
- *It's hard to accept, I think.*
  - *The emotional difficulty of letting go as a parent is hard.*
- *I'm still his <u>parent,</u> I'll always be his parent.*
- *I want him to do well.*
- *You're becoming a bit more in the distance.*

Leah

Voices of feeling excluded and being proactive
- *I don't feel part of it at all.*
  - *I contacted the SENDCo because I felt lost.*
  - *I'm going to be involved.*

Voices of helplessness but wanting to support
- *I arranged that meeting myself*
- *I had to make sure I knew*
- *Waiting for a reply took a long time*
- *He asked me questions I didn't know.*

Appendix 7: Example of Analysed Transcript

Can you just tell me from your from your perspective, your experience of going through that transition period from lower school, key-stage four to college?

Yeah, of course. (.) I'll try and give you as much information as I can remember. There was lots of things going on then, but it was quite recent. It was only just over a year ago now, I think, so I can remember quite a lot of it. (.) So yeah (.), my son has a special educational need, and he's been supported a lot in his time at school, and he had a really good secondary school SENDCo. He was really kind to him and really supported his needs,

(1:27)

and we thought they were brilliant. We really loved them. We loved the teaching staff. We loved the SENCO. Yeah, just everyone there was really, really lovely, and I'll be honest, the transition was great. It was really good. I think he probably outgrew school. He probably outgrew everything about school at that point in time where he was a young adult making his way in the world. He was trying his best at school, and he was getting lots of support, but we just felt like it was great.

(2.28)

We had a really good SENCO who looked after the special educational needs, and they let us go into the school and then took us through on an evening, took us through all the different options for him. It wasn't just for him. It was for all the children. I think all the children had additional needs. We were all invited to go in, and the SENCO did a really good presentation where they just looked at all the different colleges and what was, yeah, the courses that they offered as well, and the kind of grades that they

The speaker establishes context here and attempts to recall some significant events, keenness to ensure it is an honest account but also reflective that she may not remember it all.

Kindness seem an important attribute for her for her child's teaching staff.
I wonder if her identify is entwined with being a parent of a child with a SEND?

Strong emotional connection to teaching staff which may have brought security and a feeling of support.

Emotional support seems to come first, not reflection of specific practical aspects they implemented.

Multiple voices present here with gratitude for support and acknowledgment of natural developmental change.

Confidence and clarity conveyed through support systems put in place by school staff, reassurance evident as well as some collaborative practices.

She seems keen to work with the school for the benefit of her child, I wonder if this gave her additional strength and security working collaboratively?

would offer them. Not offer them, sorry. The grades that the children would need or the young adults would need or my son would need to get on, and they really, really put them on in a clear way. It was very clear, very, very clear.
(3:15)
So we looked at them with the SENCO during this presentation evening, and there was a couple of colleges that he really liked, the sound of, that he wanted to go and look at, and the SENCO gave us the open day information, and we went along to that. We looked at the colleges, and we felt that the colleges were good. One he really loved, that's the one he went to luckily. I just felt like I knew what to expect from going to these colleges, and I knew what questions to ask as well because the SENCO had told us lots of things to say beforehand, and it was, yeah, it was really good.
(4:14)
Okay, thank you. How did you feel about the support your child received during the transition from secondary school to their next setting?
I was worried. I can't lie, I *was* worried. I wanted him to settle in and to get into the college environment and to feel happy there, and I was just worried that he might not do that. I was worried a little bit, but I was also very happy, and I think relieved as well that he had found a college that he wanted to go to, and when he went there, he seemed to settle in very quickly. He made friends very quickly, I should say, and some of his friends from school went up, but not all of them. Some of them stayed in the sixth form at the school, but he wanted a fresh start, and I think he wanted to be independent, and I think we also knew that they only have courses at his school that maybe he

Reference to feelings during the process, it seems important that there is a positive emotional connection before considering if it's the right setting.

Clear juxtaposition of emotional ambivalence and reflective insight. The voice of vulnerability and the voice of growth emerge together.

Settled in with his friends quickly, speed and security?

I wonder if seeing her child share his experiences and successes at college made her think back to his experiences at primary school where he would do the same thing?

Reference to happiness and connected to the feelings and emotions of her child.

Reflection on future ambitions, could this have increased the pressure she was feeling? She wants to get it right for him.

couldn't get the grades for, and college had lots of different qualifications. He likes media, and he wanted to do one where he could make media, and I think at the school there was not much making of media. It was very written, book-based. So yeah, when he went to college, he settled in quickly with his friends. He made some friends there as well, and his course was really fun, and I think he just learnt things very quickly because it was very new for him and very exciting. He was using cameras, making little films and things, and then coming home and showing me the things that he'd made. He'd made a magazine, like he's already making lots of different media. He's really good. Because he seems like he's enjoying it, and it makes me feel happy that he's doing something he loves. (5:44)

I don't know if he's going to do it as a job in the future, but for what he's doing now, it's really, really great. So yeah, I'd say I felt mainly worried, but happy. I know it's not really an emotion, but I felt, I just felt supported. I felt really supported from the school. I miss that SENDCo, because they were like really, really nice, and they knew him well. They knew him really well. I'll tell you what, I can talk to you about my son for a little bit, but he's got really bad stress. School probably wasn't his favourite place to be, because I think he had some teachers in the past who maybe weren't very nice to him, but I think you always get those people in schools, don't you, who just, maybe they get out of the wrong side of bed on the wrong kind of morning, and then they're a bit angry. I think sometimes he did get told off when he first started. But yeah, as he got into Year 8 and Year 9, he became really quite scared of school, and lots of

A deep sense of loss, reliance, and retrospective sadness surfaces here. "I" as advocate and witness.

The negative experiences of school could bring a sense of guilt and helplessness?

The participant recognises the developmental match between college environment and son's needs – a moment of fulfilment and hope.
I wonder if the lack of agency being experienced here by the child impacted on their experiences within school.

stress. He wouldn't want to go to school, but he just didn't like sitting down for a long time in the school.	