

**Educational Psychologists' responses to a post-16 service-user film on their practice: a participatory research project**

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# **Educational Psychologists' responses to a post-16 service-user film on their practice: a participatory research project**

A film was made by a group of young people (YP) which aimed to inform educational psychologists (EPs) about how they would like EPs to work with them. A participatory research project was established with the YP which aimed to find out EPs' views on the film through two focus groups. EPs responded positively to the film; they valued hearing from YP and expressed feelings including pride and guilt. Interest was shown in plans for the distribution of the film and critical reflections on the representativeness of the film were made. Findings are discussed in relation to the current context for EP work in which there is a focus on gaining the voice of children and YP and on improving services through service-user feedback. The authors reflect on the strengths and limitations of using a participatory approach, considering challenges regarding methodological rigour and the opportunity research poses for widening participation.

Keywords: post-16; service-user feedback; educational psychology; participatory research

## **Introduction**

### ***Post-16 EP practice***

The role of educational psychologists was extended to working with young people up to the age of 25 years following the introduction of the Children and Families Act (Department for Education [DfE], 2014a) and the revised Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice (DfE and Department of Health [DoH], 2014). Previously, SEND legislation and guidance related to YP aged between birth

and 19 years old (Department for Education and Skills, 2001). The role of the EP working with the 16-25 age group can include supporting post-16 transition (Morris & Atkinson, 2018), providing educational psychological support in further education and university settings (Keegan & Murphy, 2018; Squires, 2018) and strategic early intervention approaches such as those aiming to improve transition to prevent young people becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) (Cockerill & Arnold, 2018). This has presented new opportunities and challenges to EPs, requiring the development and extension of EP skills and understanding in working with this older age group (Apter, Arnold & Hardy, 2018; Atkinson, Dunsmuir, Lang & Wright 2015; Morris & Atkinson, 2018).

Moreover, the introduction of the code of practice, with its focus on ensuring that the views of children and young people (CYP) are at the centre of our practice, has been seen as presenting an opportunity for EPs to reposition themselves on the basis of the moral principles underpinning our work, including autonomy and social justice. Promoting autonomy involves ensuring that YP's voices are heard through enabling CYP to advocate for themselves (Fox, 2015). Fox (2015) notes that advocacy and social justice are about addressing the process as well as the outcome; part of the social justice agenda is empowering CYP to have a voice. The Preparing for Adulthood Programme (Preparing for Adulthood, 2013) identifies four outcomes for young people (YP) - employment, independent living, community inclusion and good health - and highlights five areas that are important to improving the outcomes and life chances of YP, one of which is planning services together, which entails collaborating with and listening to YP.

### ***Listening to young people***

There has been a move within ideology and practice in the helping professions towards valuing clients' perspectives (Billington, 2006). A person-centred approach to finding out the views of CYP is advocated in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2014). Furthermore, ascertaining "the voice" of CYP has long been viewed as an important element of the EP role (Gersch, Holgate & Sigston, 1993; Ingram, 2013). An overview of the rationales and related critiques of "listening to children" has been outlined by Mannion (2007). An enlightenment rationale sees CYP as having something important to tell service providers. Such a rationale has been adopted when CYP are consulted as service users who can provide information on how services can be improved. This approach has been criticised, however, as the primary purpose is to improve the services that *professionals* deliver to CYP (Mannion, 2007, p.408). An empowerment rationale, on the other hand, has its basis in a rights agenda which positions CYP as a minority group whose rights and interests need to be addressed (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; DfE, 2014b). There are tensions inherent within such a view as CYP's rights relate to having their needs met as well as expressing an opinion on any matter concerning their welfare. Moreover, the notion of "listening" is closely bound up with issues of power, involving both hearing and responding (McLeod, 2007). The unequal power relationship can be evident when agendas regarding "listening to CYP" can be constructed by professionals which determine how and in what ways CYP participate (Hartas & Lindsay, 2011). A useful reframe, suggested by Mannion (2007) may be to shift the focus from simply 'listening to CYP' to improving the relations between CYP and professionals working with them. Similarly, Hartas and Lindsay (2011, p.131) note that the issue is not so much about participation but whether professionals "are genuinely attentive and responsive to young people's perspectives".

### ***Involving service user perspectives in service evaluation***

Evaluation has become increasingly important in the contexts of EP practice. Baxter and Frederickson (2005, p.98) suggest that there is a need for EP services to identify the CYP as a “customer who negotiates services and not just a client who receives them”. The importance of defining outcomes that are measurable has been stressed by Dunsmuir, Brown, Iyadurai and Monsen (2009). Lowther (2013) cites a number of researchers who have included user perceptions when evaluating EP work. However, these have mainly involved parental or teacher questionnaires, with a focus on outcomes, rather than on *how* the EP involvement was experienced. While outcomes are an important part of investigating EP impact, they are not the only part. Turner, Randall and Mohammed (2010) note that it is important to recognise that “experiences are as important as outcomes” (2010, p.315). The current study involves a film made by post-16 service users which highlights their experiences of EP involvement and which appears to place an emphasis on how the interaction with the EP made them feel.

### ***The development of a film sharing service users’ experiences***

On the Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at the University of East London involving service users in curriculum development and delivery is valued. A young person from a local all ability youth forum delivered a teaching session with trainee educational psychologists on working with YP aged 16-25 years. The forum creates films to share information and YP’s experiences. Within this teaching session an idea was generated - what if the forum could make a film to help EPs understand how best to work with YP? The forum followed up on this idea and commissioned the Educational Psychology Service of the borough in which it is based in to pay for the film. While the first author attended a planning session in which ideas for the film were

generated, the film was the work of the YP, communicating their experiences and suggestions through a fictionalised story of YP meeting with EPs. The film can be watched online (Our Time Youth Forum, 2018). Following the creation of the film the first author met with the forum members to discuss next steps. The YP expressed an interest in gaining feedback from EPs on the film.

### ***Participatory approaches with CYP***

Participatory approaches to research aim to go beyond listening to CYP by actively involving them in all aspects of research, from design to dissemination (Kellett, 2009). Participatory research promotes CYP's agency and as such its purpose is both transformative and emancipatory (Aldridge, 2016). Within participatory paradigms the aim is for CYP to become independent researchers who investigate subjects that hold value to them (Yardley, 2014). CYP participate in research in a range of ways and the factors which influence the amount and type of involvement they have has been explored through an ecological model (Gal, 2017).

The current study took a participatory approach. This developed organically as the YP attending the forum presented the first author of this paper with a question: "What do EPs think of the film we made?"

## **Methodology**

### ***Participatory approach***

This project adopted a participatory approach. The YP from the forum developed research skills and acted as co-researchers, working alongside the two authors of this article.

### *Co-researchers*

Forum members were asked if they wanted to participate in the project and all members gave their informed consent. This was gained through discussion, an information sheet and signing a consent form. In total the authors attended four forum sessions to plan and analyse the data. As the forum operates on a drop-in basis, the attendance at each session was different. Table 1 gives information about the co-researchers, including which sessions they attended. Of the six participants, three were involved in making the film. All were aware of the film and had watched it.

Table 1. Co-researcher information.

<b>Young person</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Involved in making the film</b>	<b>Sessions attended</b>
1	Female	25	British Bangladeshi	Yes	1
2	Male	23	British Bangladeshi	Yes	1
3	Male	19	British Bangladeshi	Yes	1, 3
4	Male	19	British Bangladeshi	No	1, 2, 3, 4
5	Male	20	British Bangladeshi	No	1, 2, 3, 4
6	Male	19	British Bangladeshi	No	2, 4

The forum is facilitated by two members of Local Authority staff, a Young People's Development Office and a Family Partnership Officer, who did not act as co-researchers but did help to facilitate the sessions. They were also involved in the development of the film.

### *Developing research skills*

Participatory research involves an educative element, in which the participants acting as co-researchers develop research skills (Groundwater-Smith, Dockett & Bottrell, 2015).

In total, there were four one-hour sessions to plan the research and analyse the data.

Table 2 outlines the focus of these sessions.

Table 2. Focus of forum sessions.

<b>Session</b>	<b>Focus of session</b>
1	Understanding the steps involved in planning and carrying out a research project. Film re-watched.
2	Devising research question. Planning data collection and data analysis.
3	Thematic analysis.
4	Thematic analysis, reflections and next steps.

In the first session, a poster was devised to inform the YP co-researchers about designing research. The following steps of planning and carrying out research were included:

- Aims
- Research questions
- How to find out?
- What does this tell us?
- Our findings
- Next steps

The second session focused on designing this research project, using the same steps as in the poster. The authors aimed for a careful balance of enabling the YP co-researchers to design the research while ensuring it was feasible and had



integrity. Within this session the approach to data analysis was also discussed and agreed.

### ***Ethical considerations***

Ethical approval was sought and gained from both the University and Local Authority connected to this research. A range of ethical considerations were taken in relation to this research project. Participatory research approaches aim to redress the power imbalance that is often present in more traditional approaches to research (McCartan, Schubotz & Murphy, 2012). Further, power imbalance is an aspect of working with YP. Therefore, the authors aimed to be transparent at each stage of the research, involving the YP in all decisions made. It was particularly important that the YP gave informed consent due to the demands involved in becoming co-researchers. Parental consent was not required as all YP were over 18 years old and had mental capacity.

When working with the co-researchers on how to design a research project ethical considerations were discussed, particularly at the ‘how to find out?’ stage. These included the importance of gaining informed consent from the participants, showing respect for views shared in the focus groups and how to maintain confidentiality. The authors were mindful that the research was asking adults (that is, local authority EPs) for feedback on a product of a group of YP. To ensure integrity of the study the participants needed to be able to honestly express their views on the film. Initially, forum members were keen to ask questions in the focus groups but then felt that EPs may not feel able to speak freely about the film if the creators of the film were present. Therefore, it was decided that the authors would lead the focus groups. The authors also considered the wellbeing of the co-researchers when analysing the focus group data, being aware that not all views on the film would be positive. The authors guided the

analysis to conceptualise more critical comments as questions rather than negative feedback.

### ***Research question***

The research question developed with the YP co-researchers was: “What do EPs think of the film?”

### ***Design***

A focus group design was chosen as the best fit for answering the research question as the YP co-researchers were interested in hearing EPs’ views on the film.

### ***Participants***

The participants in this project were EPs working in Educational Psychology Services in two Local Authorities, selected on a convenience basis. In one borough five EPs and one trainee EP chose to take part in a focus group. In the other borough six EPs and two trainee EPs took part in a focus group.

### ***Procedure***

The second author led both focus groups, with the first author attending the second focus group to support the facilitation.

Firstly, the EPs gave informed consent to take part in the research. The film was shown to the EPs. The author facilitating the groups showed the group of EPs the main question: “*What do EPs think of the film?*” and asked them to discuss this question. Follow up probes were also presented.

While the EPs discussed these questions, the facilitator created a graphic illustration of the discussion using pens and flip chart paper. As discussions finished, the facilitator checked the poster with the participants, asking if it was an accurate reflection of the discussion and making changes as requested. The first focus group lasted approximately 45 minutes and the second focus group lasted approximately 35 minutes.

### ***Data Analysis***

A modified approach to thematic analysis was used, developed from the Braun and Clarke (2006) model. A common challenge of participatory research is involving co-researchers in data analysis and this can be put down to both a lack of interest in this aspect of the research and the complexity of approaches used (Coad & Evans, 2008). Adaptations were made to involve the YP co-researchers as much as they wanted to be and felt able to be involved. For example, the co-researchers chose not to watch or listen to the focus groups because of how long this would take. Instead they chose to hear and look at the main points from the groups. The approach to analysis employed for this project involved the following steps:

- (1) The focus group facilitator created a graphic illustration of the focus group discussions during the focus group. The posters created were checked during the focus groups by the participants.
- (2) Both authors watched and listened to the focus groups to ensure familiarity with the data
- (3) In a forum session the two posters were presented to the co-researchers and elaborated on verbally by the authors. The guide to stages of research was reviewed to re-familiarise the co-researchers. As co-researchers discussed the

main ideas that they initially identified from the posters the authors noted these down, using the co-researchers' words, on post-it notes. The ideas (or initial codes) on the post-it notes were then grouped by the co-researchers into themes.

- (4) The two authors drafted names of the themes and ensured that sub-themes reflected all points made on the two posters. This was done separately by the two authors who then met to compare and combine their analyses.
- (5) In the final forum session a draft thematic map was presented by the authors. This was edited by the co-researchers to create a thematic map.
- (6) The authors re-listened to the focus groups to identify quotes reflective of each theme. The thematic map was finalised to remove duplication of subthemes (Figure 1).

### ***Trustworthiness of analysis***

Factors relating to credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability were considered to ensure trustworthiness of the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 2019). Credibility was aimed for by involving co-researchers at each stage of the study to ensure fidelity to the participatory design. Triangulation of the analysis through the contributions of the researchers (independently and together), co-researchers and member checking with EP participants also contributed to the credibility of the analysis. Transparency regarding the methodology and the reflexive approach taken ensured dependability of the data. The involvement of multiple individuals with different perspectives in the analysis helped to make the findings confirmable. Transferability of the findings was not a specific aim of the study, although carrying out focus groups in two Local Authorities aimed to gain a broader range of perspectives than may have

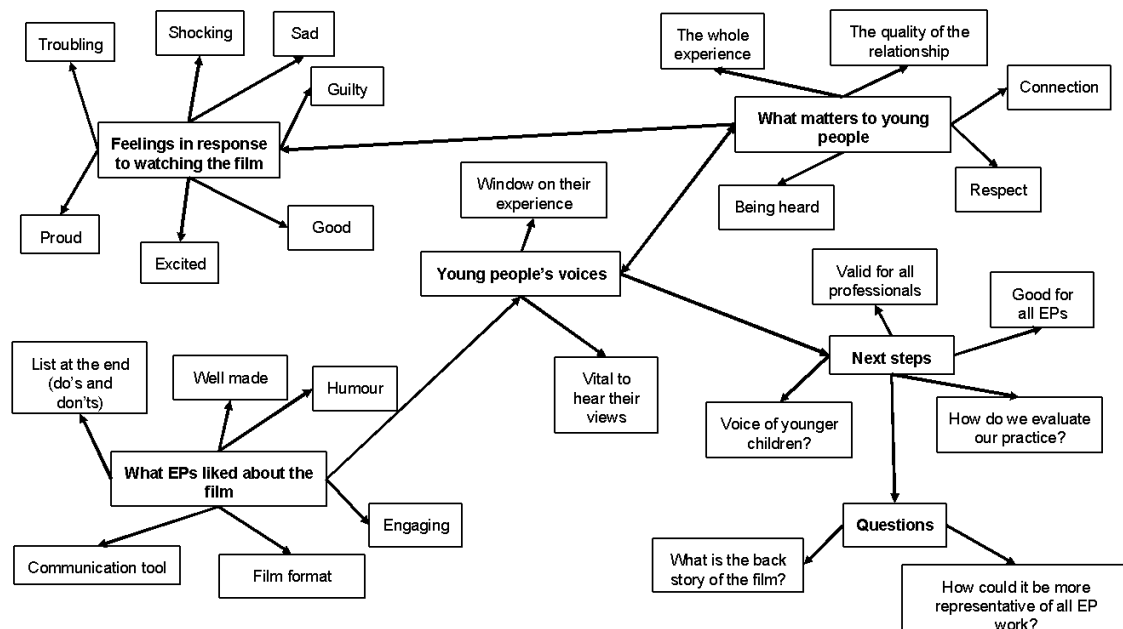
been found in just one. The researchers and co-researchers would encourage other EPs and young people to view the film and develop their own views on it.

## Findings and Discussion

The data analysis resulted in a thematic map which aimed to answer the question:

“What do EPs think of the film?”

Figure 1. Thematic map.



### *Theme 1: Feelings in response to watching the film*

EPs in both services experienced a range of feelings in response to watching the film and these are captured within the first theme. The feelings expressed were labelled as subthemes which broadly fall under positive and negative feelings. The most prominent feelings shared related to the subthemes of ‘sad’, ‘guilty’, ‘shocking’ and ‘troubling’. Participants reflected on becoming shocked when seeing the ‘less good EP’; “*I stopped laughing because I thought they must have experienced this*” causing them to reflect “*that’s a bit shocking then isn’t it*”. EPs found hearing about these experiences

troubling, stating *“that would be our worst nightmare, if we made anyone feel like that”*.

There appeared to be a perception of a gap between what the YP appeared to be expressing regarding how they would like EPs to work with them and what the EPs themselves felt able to provide within their wider constraints: *“It made me feel a little bit sad...yes, there are some times with certain pieces of work that do lend themselves to ongoing support... but often we are time-limited.”* Feelings of guilt appeared to be experienced when EP participants recognised minor aspects of their own behaviour in the depiction of the ‘less good EP’, relating to time management and offering young people a drink: *“With the guilt, I’ve certainly been late before, yeah, it wasn’t my fault, but, as they say, always be on time...”*; *“a little bit of the guilt with looking at the watch...I thought I’m pretty sure I’ve done that”*; *“I feel quite guilty because if I was seeing someone in school I probably wouldn’t be anywhere near a kitchen”*.

The EPs also commented that they experienced some positive emotions on watching the film that are captured in the subthemes of ‘proud’, ‘excited’ and ‘good’. The film appeared to excite EPs as it was seen to offer new possibilities: *“It makes me feel really excited, actually, about other ways we might involve young people in our service delivery”*. EPs felt pleased that YP knew what they did, as they assumed that the profession isn’t widely understood: *“I sort of felt a little proud that they knew what our profession was”*. More generally, the film enabled EPs to feel good about their work, stating for example *“it was quite reassuring”*.

The negative emotions elicited in the EPs by watching the film may be due to discomfort caused by experiencing cognitive dissonance, where a person’s behaviour may conflict with beliefs that are integral to their self-identity (Festinger, 1962). Such emotions may also be due to EPs viewing their practice as having moral underpinnings

(Fox, 2015) and that some important core values were contradicted in the practice of the ‘less good’ EP depicted on screen. The emotional response captured in this theme could reflect that the EPs consider their practice as a ‘passionate endeavour’ (Wilson, 2018), reflecting their ethical commitment and the care they feel towards the YP with whom they work.

### ***Theme 2: What matters to young people***

The EP participants valued hearing what matters to YP and this was captured in the second theme. Within the subtheme ‘the whole experience’ EPs reflected that more than just a meeting was important to YP, that they value what happens before and after as well: *“One thing that came across was involving them in the process, asking ‘If there’s anything you don’t understand, please ask’ or checking back... did you get the report, what did you think about it, how are things going, I’ll see you in the next meeting... ongoing support.”*

The subthemes of ‘the quality of the relationship’ and ‘connection’ highlighted that EPs felt YP valued rapport with professionals. The connection was felt to be more important than what activities are done together: *“Everything they seemed to be saying was about the how not the what...how what they valued was delivered, not what was delivered”*. EPs discussed the emphasis YP placed on relationships, and what a good quality relationship is like for them: *“It’s interesting that their recommendations were about relationships. Their focus wasn’t on ‘Get me the best support’. I just want this person to be friendly and approachable and keeps me in mind”*.

The EP participants also expressed the view that what appeared to matter to the YP was how professionals interact with them. This was summarised through the subthemes of ‘respect’, shown for example by remembering YP’s names and sending

them reports, and the subtheme of ‘being heard’, which was felt to be the central message of the film (see theme 3).. The following quote captures both subthemes:

*It made me think about positioning and power and giving space to really explore that young person and to meet with that young person on an equal kind of playing field, really, in terms of sharing interests and having a mutual understanding of what we like and it made me really think about how power is played out and how young people experience that.*

The apparent focus by the young people on the *process* of their involvement with the EP reflects the view put forward by Fox (2015) that advocacy and social justice are about addressing the process as well as the outcome. Participants noted that the YP valued the ‘before and after’ as well as meeting with an EP. Anecdotally, the authors have found that EPs and trainee EPs discuss how time pressures and workload can limit the involvement they have with CYP. The indication that young people would like EPs to focus not just on the individual meeting with them is consistent with practice frameworks that advocate for cycles of involvement (Woolfson, Boyle & Kelly, 2017). The feelings of guilt and sadness expressed by EPs (theme 1) suggest that EPs would also like to be able to work differently with young people. The participants in this study noted that the relationship seemed to be where YP place most value on their interactions with EPs. This supports Mannion’s (2007) view that professionals should shift the focus from ‘listening’ to improving relationships overall between YP and professionals. The importance of relationships is widely discussed in EP practice; for example, Beaver (2011) suggests that effectively building rapport is likely to be the most important factor in determining the success of a piece of EP work. Moreover, Billington (2009) stresses the importance of a focus on finding out about the



experiences of CYP in our work which may be achieved through the quality of the relationships which we share with CYP.

### ***Theme 3: Young people's voices***

The value of hearing CYP's voices formed theme three and was central to the EPs' discussions; it is integral to other themes identified from the data (themes 2, 4 and 6).

The first subtheme within the theme was 'window on their experience' which illustrated that participants felt that the film gave them insight into YP's experiences: "*it felt like a real window into their experience*". Within the second subtheme of 'vital to hear their views' EPs reflected on how important it is to hear CYP's voice and that this is often missing: "*It's what we don't really hear as EPs. We might get a judgement from a school or a family but to hear from a young person who's been through it is so important*".

The emphasis placed on CYP's voices by EPs is perhaps unsurprising as this is a central discourse in EP practice (Gersch, Holgate & Sigston, 1993; Ingram, 2013).

When working with the post-16 age group particular emphasis is placed on the importance of hearing young people's voices. For example, further education colleges have been found to place particular importance on YP and parent voice when reflecting on how best to support students with SEND (Keegan & Murphy, 2018). The Preparing for Adulthood agenda encourages professionals to go a step further with the message 'develop a shared vision' (DfE & DoH, 2014), thus moving beyond hearing voices to planning futures together.

#### ***Theme 4: What EPs liked about the film***

The EP participants showed an appreciation for the film within theme 4, identifying many elements of the film that they liked; these elements formed six subthemes. One subtheme was related to the film being ‘well made’ with the EPs being impressed with the production: *“technically the video was...really smooth”*. The subtheme ‘engaging’ summarises how EPs experienced the film, for example describing it as *“interesting”* and *“powerful”*. The use of film was seen as an effective ‘communication tool’ as it enabled EPs to *“hear their voice and see their voice”*. Participants discussed the added value of the ‘film format’, when compared to other methods of hearing YP’s voices: *“to see it on a video, perhaps it wouldn’t have come across if it was written down”*. Within the focus groups there was a significant focus on the tone of the film which was captured in the subtheme of ‘humour’. Participants felt that humour was used effectively to share experiences, including negative ones: *“it had an important message that was delivered gently with good humour”*. The ‘dos and don’ts’ were appreciated, being described as a *“helpful list to have”*.

Therefore, it seems that the medium of film was valued by participants as a way of hearing from YP. Eckhoff (2017) argues that our understanding of children’s art as a social practice and means of communication should be extended to include expression through digital media such as film making. The positive reception to the use of film suggests that a move away from more traditional approaches to gaining feedback, such as filling in forms, may be well received. Howarth (2016) identified that CYP engaged well with sharing their views and experiences through an app; the current study found that EPs engaged well with receiving feedback through visual means as well.

### ***Theme 5: Questions***

EPs showed curiosity about the film, asking a number of questions which are included in the subthemes ‘what is the back story of the film?’ and ‘how could it be more representative of EP work?’. Relating to the back story of the film, participants were interested to know how it came about and were intrigued by the YP: *“it would be really nice to know a little bit about the contributors, the people who made the video”*.

Participants queried the representativeness of the film, for example noting that EPs don’t see young people in their offices: *“There was the idea, like, of the EP being in the room and then there’s people waiting outside like a doctor’s surgery. They come in one at a time and something happens in the room. It’s not really what, what we do”*.

However, the participants reflected that this is the YP’s perception of what EPs do.

In her research that involved creating an app to gain feedback from CYP, Howarth (2016) also identified that CYP can be confused by the EP role, with EPs being mixed up with other professionals. More broadly, the profession of Educational Psychology has grappled with this issue for many years, finding the role hard to both define internally and share with others (e.g. Cameron, 2006; Farrell et al, 2006; Wood, 1998).

### ***Theme 6: Next steps***

The excitement that participants expressed (theme 1) seemed to fuel discussions around what could happen next in relation to the film. Within the ‘next steps’ theme there were four subthemes. Two of the subthemes, ‘valid for all professionals’ and ‘good for all EPs’ related to distribution of the film. Participants suggested that it would be beneficial for all EPs to see: *“when people are training to become educational psychologists they could show it in the context of agency and participation”*; *“I think all EPs would*

*appreciate seeing it*”, as well as other professionals working with CYP – “*any person in health working with a young person*”. Another subtheme related to widening participation: ‘voice of younger children?’. Participants would value hearing the experiences of younger CYP in a similar way: “*I’d be really interested to see a video with younger children as well, and maybe even older, it would be quite illuminating.*”

In the second subtheme, ‘how do we evaluate our practice?’, participants considered methods of evaluation and the approaches used to engage with CYP: “*Maybe think about our own evaluation of children and young people’s experiences...and the questions we are asking them. I started thinking, would the questions that we ask them get these...suggestions or ways to improve our practice...I’m not sure whether it would, so it was really useful watching this.*” Also within the evaluation subtheme EPs reflected on their practice, wondering about how they currently work with the older age range: “*Do we need to be thinking differently about how we work with young people who are 18 plus?*” Working in post-16 is a significant and recent development in Educational Psychology (Atkinson, Dunsmuir, Lang & Wright, 2015) and EPs in this study appear to be reflecting on how they can best work with this age group. Examples of innovative approaches to working with the post-16 age group are being increasingly shared (e.g. Atkinson, Hyde & Kelly, 2018). This study illustrates that EPs are working reflexively to consider *how* they work with the post-16 age group in addition to reviewing the nature of the work carried out, putting into action the messages the film has communicated to them.

### ***Reflections on the strengths and limitations of the participatory approach***

A participatory design was appropriate for this research as it enabled the YP to answer a question they generated themselves. It was also a good fit for the piece of work in question, which related to empowering YP and hearing their views. On reflection, a design that included further iterations of the research would have been more appropriate, such as action research or participatory action research. This is because a number of questions and suggested further actions were among the findings.

The project aimed to enable the co-researchers to choose their level of involvement in the research and to make it possible for the co-researchers to be involved in all decisions. This meant that the co-researchers chose which forum sessions to attend. Table 1 shows that only two co-researchers attended all four sessions. This meant that co-researchers were at points making decisions about the research without having full involvement in previous stages of the project.

The participatory design of the study meant that approaches to data collection and analysis needed to be adapted to be accessible for the co-researchers and were therefore less rigorous than more common approaches. For example, analysis of the data from the focus groups began ‘in the moment’ during the focus groups with graphic illustration, rather than the researchers familiarising themselves with the data by listening to and transcribing the groups’ responses. The authors reflected that this approach to data collection, while enabling the participation of the YP in data analysis, may have meant that not all the views expressed by the participants were recorded.

The focus groups were in the boroughs in which the authors work; this could have influenced contributions by participants, feeling they needed to respond in a positive way. Additionally, the participants knew that the co-researchers would be taking part in data analysis and so may have given positive feedback for this reason as

well. However, as EPs are practised in giving and receiving constructive feedback it is believed that while the participants may have spoken in a considered way, it was not overly biased.

The importance of researcher reflexivity was discussed and considered by the authors throughout the process of the research. The authors were aware that there may have been unconscious bias on their part through their ongoing investment with the YP and with the film, and this remains a potential limitation of the research.

The research was small scale, involving only two focus groups with a total of 13 participants in geographically nearby areas. While this means that detailed information on the participants' views was able to be gained, it limits the extent to which findings can be generalised. It is appreciated that other EPs may well have very different answers to the question: 'What do EPs think of the film?'

### ***Implications for practice***

The interest the EP participants showed in the film suggests that it is a valuable medium of sharing the views and experiences of CYP. The film is available online for EPs and others to watch (Our Time Youth Forum, 2018). It is hoped that EP services and training courses will view and discuss the film. The film has been shared at a professional conference and a local screening of it is also being planned. An implication arising from this study relates to how the medium of film which shows service-user perspectives can provide a powerful stimulus for professional reflection on practice. A useful future focus would be on creating opportunities for the medium of film to be used more widely to listen to CYP. This could be part of a wider range of evaluation approaches used by EPSs that involve dialogue between EPs and CYP.

The process of watching the film and thinking together about their responses to it appeared to provide the EP participants with opportunities for reflection on action; an opportunity to revisit their own experiences of working with this age-group and to further analyse them in order to enhance practice (Schön,1987). Moreover, the opportunity to consider the YP's perspective, as shown in the film, appeared to enable critical self-reflection on the part of the EPs; this involves both questioning and analysing one's own assumptions and presuppositions in order to extract deeper meaning from one's experiences (Mezirow, 1990).

### ***Conclusion***

The extension of the role of EPs to working with YP up to the age of 25 is an important development for the profession around which there is discussion regarding new understandings and skills which may be required (Apter et al., 2018; Atkinson et al., 2015). The Preparing for Adulthood guidance (DfE & DoH, 2014) suggests five good practice elements which include developing a shared vision and planning services together. Such guidance encourages professionals to go beyond hearing YP's voices to planning futures together.

This piece of participatory research aimed to find out the views of EPs in two LAs in response to viewing a post-16 service-user film which gave the YPs' perspectives on how they would like EPs to work with them. The film offered the EP participants new ways of hearing about the experiences of YP from the service-users themselves. It provides a model that sets out how the YP would like to be treated by professionals; as such, it was part of an empowerment process, enabling the YP to advocate for themselves (Fox, 2015).

The shift in perspective from ‘listening to children and young people’ to more fundamentally improving the relations between YP and the professionals who work with them has been reflected in the findings relating to ‘what matters to YP’ as well as in the participatory approach to the research project itself. The paper suggests that there is a need for ongoing critical reflection on the part of EPs on how to work in ways which are collaborative, empower YP to effect change and shape professional practice through the sharing of views and experiences.



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