

# The Stories Young People with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) Tell About Their Futures

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## Abstract

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A number of psychological perspectives have been offered to account for social, emotional, behavioural difficulties (SEBD) and the legislation and sociocultural context continues to depict a rather concerning trajectory for this group of young people. It appears that the views of children and young people with SEBD are discussed at length, but researched relatively little. Research that has sought their views has been predominantly retrospective in focus, with very little research encouraging them to look towards the future. In the small body of research that has asked young people with SEBD about the future, the psychological concept of 'possible selves' has been applied. The findings suggest that young people with SEBD lack agency, and are more pessimistic about their futures compared with their mainstream peers.

The current research drew on positive psychology in order to extend the literature and offer a more useful and optimistic way of conceptualising SEBD. Positive psychology places emphasis on: the future, strengths, resources and potential, and suggests that negative experiences can build positive qualities. It is therefore in direct opposition to a pre-occupation with risk. This research also draws on a social constructivist epistemology, placing the voice of the young person with SEBD at its centre. It seeks to better understand their experiences and accepts that meanings are varied and multiple.

This research employed a narrative methodology in an attempt to impose less structure, in order to seek the stories young people with SEBD tell about themselves in the future. Within the qualitative design, unstructured interviews were used in order to maximise the potential for capturing individual meaning. The Quality of Life (QoL) literature was drawn on to facilitate the young people's narratives, and the life path tool was used to structure their thinking. Eight young people were interviewed, across the school and home contexts.

Narrative Oriented Inquiry (NOI) was used to analyse the narratives; a *sjuzet-fabula* analysis was carried out to reconstruct the young people's stories, followed by a categorical-content analysis to explore themes relevant to the current research.

Finally, the tone of the young people's narratives were analysed to explore how they presented themes of potential and growth in their stories.

The findings indicate that when asked the right questions, young people with SEBD can identify a range of strengths and resources in their lives. Many of the young people also identified qualities that they had built as a result of earlier negative experiences. Overall, the young people's narratives are progressive in tone and reveal their hopes and aspirations for the future. A number of implications for future research and practice are identified but ultimately, by offering these young people the opportunity to tell their stories, this research permitted them a sense of agency over their lives and allowed them to focus on where they were going, rather than where they had been.

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## Table of Abbreviations

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ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
APA	American Psychiatric Association
BESD	Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties
BPS	British Psychological Society
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EBD	Emotional and Behaviour Difficulties
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
LA	Local Authority
MATVP	Multi-Agency Team for Vulnerable Pupils
NOI	Narrative Oriented Inquiry
PALS	Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
SALT	Speech and Language Therapist
SEAL	Social Emotional Aspects of Learning
SEBD	Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
SEBDA	Social Emotional Behavioural Difficulties Association
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SLCN	Speech, Language and Communication Needs
SpLD	Specific Learning Difficulties
TAs	Teaching Assistants
UK	United Kingdom
QoL	Quality of Life

## Chapter 1: Introduction

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Children with SEBD are usually the least empowered and liked group of students (Cefai & Cooper, 2009, p.39).

### **1.1 Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) legislation, policy and practice**

#### **1.1.1 Definitions adopted over time**

There are a number of discourses around the use of the term 'Behaviour, Emotional and Social difficulties' (BESD). In order to understand the current definition, it is useful to reflect on the way in which the phenomena has been conceptualised culturally and throughout history in the United Kingdom (UK). Various psychological perspectives have been offered to account for the phenomena and these have included behaviourist, ecosystemic and risk & resilience theories. Research carried out from these different perspectives has, in turn, contributed to the way in which BESD has been understood and discussed over time in the UK.

Cole and Knowles (2011) write that confusion over who young people with BESD are has existed for generations. Pre 1944 no real category for this group of young people existed, but the Education Act of 1944 brought with it the term 'maladjusted children', and the expectation that these young people's special educational needs should be provided for. In response a variety of provision emerged in the form of Residential Schools, Short Stay Schools and Off-Site Units. However whether the 'problem child' was 'cared for', 'punished', 'educated' or 'treated' often depended upon which individuals, in which agency, first took up the case (Cole, 2005, p.33).

In the 1981 Education Act the term 'maladjusted' was replaced with 'Emotional and Behaviour Difficulties' (EBD) and defined in the 1994 Code of Practice: 'Children with EBD are on a continuum. Their problems are clearer and greater than sporadic naughtiness or moodiness, and yet not so great as to be classed as mental illness (Department for Education (DfE, 1994a p.4).

Government policies written in the 1990s continued to focus on improving behaviour and raising academic standards (Coles & Knowles, 2011). The change in terminology came to reflect a broader shift in focus, from behaviour improvement to wellbeing. As we moved into the beginning of the twenty-first century more attention was paid to young people's wellbeing. The Government launched their *Every Child Matters* agenda (Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2003b), highlighting its commitment to the Social Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL). Consequently, schools were required to go beyond measurable standards and performance indicators, and become more engaged with the real world by helping to form academically, socially and emotionally literate young people (Cefai & Cooper, 2009, p. 16).

### **1.1.2 The current definition**

More recent legislative definitions go somewhat further in conveying the complexity that surrounds SEBD. The Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice (2001a) acknowledged that children and young people with SEBD can also experience mental health difficulties. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) (2000) defines mental health difficulties as a: 'clinically significant behavioral or psychological syndrome or pattern that occurs in an individual [which] is associated with present distress...or disability...or with a significant increased risk of suffering' (APA, 2000, p. xxi). The SEN Code of Practice (2001a) states that children and young people with SEBD may experience the following mental health difficulties: conduct disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), school phobia, self-harm and/or depression' (DfES, 2001a).

SEN legislation also acknowledges the 'cumulative effect' a number of factors can have on a young person's behaviour and/or emotional well-being (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, 2008). For example, it acknowledges that the definition can be applied to children and young people of varying ability, with higher rates of SEBD prevalent among children with other special educational needs (SEN). It explains that the relationships between SEBD and other SEN can make it difficult to identify the primary need (DCSF, 2008). For some, this means their behaviour 'frustrates' their access to the curriculum, and for others, their learning difficulties 'exacerbate' their

behaviour (DCSF, 2008). As well as 'within-child' factors, the role of 'external' factors is also acknowledged. The social risks outlined include: attachment and parenting, family difficulties, neglect and 'erratic discipline'. The prevalence of SEBD is reportedly higher among: those from deprived areas, males, and those from Black Caribbean, Mixed White and traveller backgrounds (DCSF, 2008).

Overall, there have been advances in legislation and policy surrounding SEBD. However the breadth of this imprecise concept (Thomas, 2005) and the way in which it is inconsistently assigned to a large group of children (Cole & Knowles, 2011) continues to be cause for concern.

### **1.1.3 Debate around the letter ordering used in the current definition**

Cole and Knowles (2011) dispute the government's current ordering of the letters 'BESD', reasoning that it might be more useful to draw attention to the social and emotional aspects by adopting the Scottish educationalist's ordering 'SEBD'. The writers suggest that the current ordering of the letters in England might encourage professionals to respond to the behaviour and discourage them from seeking to understand the social and emotional factors behind the behaviour (Cole & Knowles, 2011). The authors warn that, by responding to the behaviour without seeking its meaning, we risk blaming the child and viewing their behaviour as something we need to manage. I share the authors' stance on the current letter ordering and find that I am more successful in supporting young people with SEBD when I view the system around them as my focus for change, rather than their behaviour. Therefore, the decision was made to use the Scottish educationalist's letter ordering - SEBD - in the current research.

## **1.2 Prevalence of SEBD and the sociocultural context**

### **1.2.1 The national context**

Given the difficulties associated with defining SEBD, it is unsurprising that quantifying its prevalence proves to be a challenge. SEBD is known to be the second highest category of SEN, with 23% of children and young people with SEN identified as having SEBD (Cole & Knowles, 2011). In 2009, there were approximately 154,000 children and

young people with SEBD in the UK (DCSF, 2009), at least 13,000 of whom attended special schools (DCSF, 2009a). However Cole and Knowles (2011) state that this figure does not account for the 15,230 pupils attending Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) (Cole & Knowles, 2011, p.19-20).

In reality, there are thousands more disengaged, and often disruptive, children and young people not formally identified as having SEBD (Cole & Knowles, 2011). Instead they are likely to be labelled as having behavioural difficulties or simply as 'naughty'. Cole and Knowles (2011) predict that overall, approximately 3-6% of children and young people in England could be described as having SEBD, but accept that this figure is likely to be even higher if it is to include young people with mental health difficulties and those who may have a tendency to internalise rather than externalise their difficulties.

### **1.2.2 The motivation behind the current research**

Before I embarked on my Educational Psychology Doctoral training, I worked as a Teaching Assistant supporting young people with social emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) in primary, secondary and special school contexts. My experiences taught me that when we look beyond challenging behaviour, we find - without exception – children and young people with stories to tell. As a Trainee Educational Psychologist (EP) I found myself in a position to be able to present these young people's stories and acknowledge their pasts, their future aspirations and most importantly of all, their potential for growth. I believe that each young person with SEBD has a unique story to tell which, when told in their own words, has the potential to be exceptionally powerful in altering the way in which they are perceived.

### **1.2.3 Impact on educational attainment and future life prospects**

The negative outcomes associated with SEBD are well documented in the research, and include: learning difficulties, low educational attainment, school failure, lower life prospects and mental health difficulties later in life (Cefai & Cooper, 2009). The authors draw attention to the persistent relationship between socio-economic status and educational attainment, and suggest that young people with SEBD 'become victim

to a system that labels them as failures, and does not provide the academic, social or emotional support that they need' (Cefai & Cooper, 2009, p.48-49).

#### **1.2.4 The local context**

The LA commissioning this piece of research is a small outer-London borough. The LA provides five special provisions to reflect the needs of these children and young people, including three provisions attached to mainstream schools, designed to meet the needs of primary-aged pupils with a statement of SEBD. In exceptional circumstances, primary-aged pupils without a statement may be placed in the provision on an assessment basis, in accordance with the SEN Code of Practice (2001a).

There is one secondary provision designed to meet the needs of secondary-aged pupils with statements of SEBD. The provision is also available to young people without statements who are at risk of receiving a second permanent exclusion from their mainstream school. The provision offers assessment placement for children and young people over a short period of time, which can lead to the pupil accessing the provision on a permanent basis. Additionally, a Multi-Agency Team for Vulnerable Pupils (MATVP) provides a ten-week assessment service to young people at risk of exclusion and facilitates their successful reintegration into schools.

### **1.3 The importance of research with young people with SEBD**

#### **1.3.1 The voice of the child**

The importance of including the voice of the child/young person in research is now relatively well established in response to legislation such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the SEN Code of Practice (2001a), the Children Act (2004) and the guidelines 'Working Together: Giving Children and Young People a Say' (2004). Many advocate the importance of listening to children and young people with SEBD but, despite this, they continue to be under-represented in the research. A number of explanations have been offered to account for why this is the case, which often pertain to the difficulties this group of children and young people experience in articulating themselves. However, Hamill and Boyd (2002) comment that pupils perceived as

disruptive are actually found to be 'surprisingly articulate' when interviewed for research purposes. Davies (2005) points out that, until the views of these young people are listened to, it is likely that they will continue to have negative experiences. Davie, Upton and Varma (1996) suggest that listening to young people may 'hold the key to our understanding of the problem and its resolution' (Davie, Upton & Varma, 1996, p.7).

Listening to the views of children and young people with SEBD is particularly important if Cooper is right in his assertion that this group of young people are the 'least empowered and liked group of all' (Cooper, 2006, p.39). Furthermore, their views are likely to differ from the views of adults because the disparity between accounts offered by teachers and those offered by young people is well documented, particularly when the young people concerned have SEBD (Cefai & Cooper, 2009). Allan (1999) makes an important point when she writes that 'pupil voice needs to be seen as an essential part of the 'complex power/knowledge knot' to produce knowledge that is more of a dynamic interaction between professional discourses and pupil perceptions (Allan, 1999, p.1). Here, Allan is referring to broader philosophical debates within research of what constitutes reality, and suggests that multiple conflicting perspectives can provide a more illuminative account of an experience.

### **1.3.2 The need for the current research**

Young people with SEBD are an important group to research for a number of practical reasons pertaining to their future economic and social wellbeing. Definitions of SEBD have become far more comprehensive, and go somewhat further than earlier definitions in acknowledging its complexity. However despite such developments in understanding SEBD, the legislation and sociocultural context continues to depict a rather concerning trajectory for these young people as more at risk of: learning difficulties, low educational attainment, school failure, lower life prospects and mental health difficulties later in life (Cefai & Cooper, 2009).

Too often, researchers have sought the views of adults at the expense of children and young people. This has been especially true of research on SEBD, with the suggestion that it is even harder to elicit the views of this group. Many write persuasively on the

potential contribution this group can make to our understanding of SEBD, but it would appear that, whilst the views of young people with SEBD are discussed at length, they are researched relatively little. The current research adopts the position that we can learn from young people with SEBD and should seek to better understand their experiences without considering them 'impaired or invalid in some way' (Wise, 2000, p.144).

## Chapter 2: Overview of research with young people with SEBD

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The rest of the tapestry is not determined by what has been woven before. The weaver herself, blessed with knowledge and with freedom, can change – if not the material she must work with – the design of what comes next (Furman, 1998, p.22).

### 2.1 Exploratory literature review

The introduction outlined the way in which definitions of SEBD have evolved in line with legislation over time. The reader's attention was drawn to the paucity of research that places young people with SEBD at its centre by asking them about their experiences. Murray (2011) suggests that a literature review is a thesis writer's own version of the literature. Research exploring the views of young people with SEBD is a relatively new area and what follows is an attempt to tie the research body together into a logical order, highlighting gaps in the literature and conveying the way in which my thinking developed. The chapter ends with the rationale for the current research.

Changes in discourse around SEBD have influenced the focus of the research and the way in which it has been carried out. Developments in the area have taken place within broader changes in psychology. Over time various psychological theories have been offered to account for the phenomena, each offering its own insightful contributions. With this in mind, I was interested in seeking answers to the following questions - 'What has research that has sought the voice of children and young people with SEBD already found out?' and 'What theoretical orientations have proved useful to conceptualise such research?' I anticipated that the answers to these questions would help to identify how the current research could add to the existing literature.

An exploratory literature search was carried out in August 2011 in order to identify research that has sought the voice of the child/young person with SEBD. This helped to place the research in a theoretical context and facilitated a critical analysis of the existing literature in order to identify ways in which it could be extended. What begins as an overview of research that has sought the voice of young people with SEBD, gradually leads to a systematic review of a particular area of this research.

### **2.1.1 Research from a behaviourist perspective**

Initially opinion pieces were sought, as well as research papers. The Social Emotional Behavioural Difficulties Association (SEBDA) Journal 'Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties' was particularly useful. Each issue contains a foreword - an insightful opinion piece written by someone interested in this particular area. These opinion pieces, along with back issues of the journal proved to be a useful place from which to start exploring the research. However, the initial review revealed few studies that had sought the voice of the child/young person with SEBD in the UK. This reflects concerns raised by a number of authors in the area; 'the scarcity of research available in this area reflects the actual lack of attention given to the student voice, particularly those with SEBD' (Cefai & Cooper, 2009, p.39). Cefai and Cooper (2009) searched for research that had sought the voice of students with SEBD in Malta. They identified seven pieces of research, carried out in the last decade with secondary age students or adult retrospective accounts. The authors draw the following conclusions:

Students with SEBD...described their mainstream school experience as an unpleasant and unhappy one. Not only did they feel cheated by not receiving the support they needed in their learning and in their socio-emotional development, but they felt victimised and abused by a system that labelled them as deviant and failures, putting them even more at risk for social exclusion as young adults (Cefai & Cooper, 2009, p.49).

The young people attributed their difficulties to a combination of in-school and out-of-school factors, but the authors chose only to report on school-based factors. This is not uncommon in research with young people with SEBD, with the majority of research focusing on behaviour and learning in school. Questions such as: 'What did you like/dislike about school?' 'Tell me about your relationships in school' and 'What made you disengage?' are common. Consequently the following themes appear to emerge time and time again: poor relationships with teachers, victimisation by staff and peers, a sense of oppression and powerlessness, and unconnected learning experiences (Cefai & Cooper, 2009).

The historical context accounts for why much of the research, and particularly earlier research, emphasised school-based factors. Emphasis was placed on behaviour and

learning in school at the expense of how the young person's community, family, and personal background contributed to their difficulties. Cefai and Cooper (2009) suggest that this research served to promote effective learning and positive behaviour, questioning whose interests it really served; 'In the field, the emphasis too often remained on control and management rather than an attempt to understand and prevent perceived unacceptable behaviour' (Cole & Knowles, 2011, p. 36).

### **2.1.2 Alternative Theoretical Orientations**

A number of alternative theoretical orientations have been applied to young people with SEBD, and these include ecosystemic approaches (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) which allow for exploration of factors at the various levels of the child's system. Ecosystemic approaches capture the multi-faceted nature of these young people's experiences, but have tended to identify risk factors in young people with SEBD. Comparatively, strength-based approaches have sought to identify protective factors in their lives. In the paragraphs that follow, the application of these theories to young people with SEBD is discussed in detail, leading to a critical review of the possible contribution positive psychology can make to our understanding of young people with SEBD. Positive psychology falls within broader 'humanistic psychology', and is similar in orientation to solution-focused approaches, with its focus on potential and the future. However, the approach has the potential to offer something unique to our understanding of young people with SEBD, with its concept of post-traumatic growth (Boniwell, 2008).

### **2.1.3 A move towards ecosystemic understandings of SEBD**

Researchers have begun to embrace a more interactionist perspective of the difficulties experienced by this group of young people. Interactionist theories allow for explanation of the context of the behaviour, making reference to the systems within which an individual functions, and the way in which the different levels of the system interact to produce multiple factors that impact on behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This theoretical position is particularly helpful to our understanding of SEBD, given that time and time again young people with SEBD have been found to identify risk factors at the various levels of their system (Cole & Knowles, 2011). A number of researchers recognised the contribution a more interactionist ecosystemic approach could make to

better understanding SEBD, exemplified in the work of Wise (2000). Wise acknowledges that:

For many years those working in the education field have struggled with attempts to firstly find an appropriate all encompassing term for the behaviours being displayed by disturbing pupils, and secondly to better understand the nature of these behaviours using various theories and models of behaviour (Wise, 2000 p. 10-11).

In 2000, she published her findings in a book fittingly titled 'Listen to me!' Where she reported the outcomes of interviews with 36 pupils (aged between 12-16 years) attending one of two special schools for pupils with EBD. Wise used an unstructured informant style of interview and explored how the following broad areas contributed to the young people's difficulties: The history and nature of their difficulties, aspects of schooling, significant social, family or life-events, psychological or physical aspects of their difficulties and their behaviour in response. Wise, like those researchers before her, found that her participants identified a multitude of factors contributing to their difficulties, both from within-school and outside of school. She developed three broad categories influencing behaviour: factors in the school system, factors in the family and community system, and factors in the individual.

Factors in the school system included: transition to secondary school, relationships with teachers, not getting enough support, classroom discipline and low self-esteem in particular curriculum areas. Factors associated with the self included: being different, not being able to learn and blaming themselves. Factors associated with the family included: loss of parents through family breakdown or death, violence in the home, inappropriate role models and caring for a parent. Finally, factors associated with broader social experiences included: being in care, poverty, class, self-image and cultural expectations associated with being part of an unacceptable cultural group.

Like earlier researchers, Wise found that the young people identified factors outside of the school system, associated with their family, socioeconomic and sociocultural backgrounds. But unlike earlier researchers, Wise chose to discuss these factors alongside school factors, illustrating the interactive way in which they influence pupil behaviour. By doing so, she drew attention to the complex and individual nature of

young people's experience. Wise states that they each presented a unique combination of factors and 'To ignore any possible factors...would be to oversimplify the problem' (Wise, 2000, p. 101). Her research is one of, if not the most, comprehensive pieces of research that has sought the voice of young people with SEBD.

Wise (2000) carried out her study in response to the lack of research exploring the views of young people with SEBD. In particular Wise acknowledged the lack of research that had explored their views at the different levels of their system. Her research reflects a broader shift away from behaviourist conceptualisations of SEBD towards ecosystemic interactionist understanding that uncover the complex and multi-faceted nature of these young people's experiences. However, given the nature of the topic under exploration, the outcome of this research tends to be identification of further 'risk' factors experienced by young people with SEBD, in unique and often overwhelming combinations. The literature paints a rather bleak picture of the circumstances that these young people grow up in and suggests they lack the resources to cope. Cole and Knowles (2011) write that SEBD commonly develops in children who are subject to harmful risk factors, and they also lack resilience - the ability to bounce back from adversity (Cole & Knowles, 2011 p.65).

#### **2.1.4 A shift in focus, from risk to resilience: A strength-based approach**

Critically, as of yet, very little research has explored protective factors among young people with SEBD. Protective factors refer to assets or resources that moderate or diminish the effect of risk (Cefai, 2007). There is no research that has set out to directly ask young people with SEBD arguably the most important question of all - 'What has helped?' In the seven Maltese studies reviewed by Cefai and Cooper (2009), adults were able to identify resources in their retrospective accounts. For example, they warmed to those teachers that showed them care and understanding, and when they were given a second chance such as going to another school that addressed their needs, they developed a more positive view of school and learning, which in turn led to more positive view of themselves and their abilities (Cefai & Cooper, 2009).

Spiteri (2009) carried out a small-scale piece of qualitative research in Malta, which made use of a grounded theory methodology and explored the way in which attending an SEBD school had impacted on the self-perceptions of five young people as adults. Spiteri used a social constructionist approach and unstructured interviews to elicit the narratives of five men in their mid-thirties. The research made use of a life-course approach, incorporating both a retrospective and current focus. This piece of research is relevant because during the course of their narratives, the men identified a number of factors that they had come to view as 'strengths' as adults. One man recollected on how his Headteacher had been 'too strong for him' and stated that this had shown him he 'had choices'. Another described how joining the alternative provision had made him feel like he was 'one of a group' for the first time in his life. A third described the experience as 'an important aspect' of his life, with reference to the way in which the teachers had reinforced his sense of responsibility.

More recently O'Riordan (2011), acknowledged the poor post-school outcomes of young people with SEBD and carried out a piece of longitudinal research to explore what can be done to improve the help given to young people with SEBD post-school. She interviewed a total of 13 young people with SEBD, from a mainstream, special day, and residential special school a month before they were due to leave school. A life grid approach was employed to collect information about their histories and support networks. The young people were interviewed again during the year post-school and these interviews were combined with those of parents and other key professionals to form case studies. O'Riordan found that whilst most of the participants struggled in the year following their departure from school, some were effectively supported and thrived. Those who thrived were motivated by approval, praise and achievement in the eyes of supporters they valued, leading O'Riordan to emphasise the need for 'goodness of fit' between young people and those working with them.

#### **2.1.5 The need for a future-focus**

Within the literature reviewed, various theoretical approaches have been applied to account for SEBD as a phenomenon. Earlier research understood SEBD through young people's behaviour in school, with later research acknowledging the broader ecosystemic context and the interactive nature of their difficulties. However, much of

this research focused on identifying risk factors. Overall, I found that whilst researchers had sought the voice of young people with SEBD, much of the research that has been carried out *on* young people with SEBD has documented the negative outcomes, and much of the research that has been carried out *with* young people with SEBD has identified risk factors. Although this initially resulted in an over emphasis on risk, more recently researchers such as Spiteri (2009) and O’Riordan (2011) have started to explore what helps young people with SEBD. However, like the vast majority of the research, Spiteri (2009) encouraged participants to look back. Too often research has relied on adult retrospective accounts rather than seeking young people’s views. Where researchers have sought the views of young people with SEBD, they themselves have been asked to provide retrospective accounts with the focus of the research often earlier school experiences.

Significantly one of the participants in Spiteri’s (2009) research described a point in time at which his focus shifted from where he had come from to where he was going. Spiteri (2009) suggests that by shifting his focus from the past to the present and the future, this man allowed himself to ‘look at his identity through a different lens, no longer seeing himself as a victim of unfortunate circumstances’ (Spiteri, 2009, p.245). Within positive psychology there is significant body of literature evidencing the importance of focusing on the future. Overall the elective search confirmed how limited research that elicits the views of young people with SEBD is. It suggests that few researchers have sought to identify strengths and resources in these young people’s accounts, and those that have, have done so retrospectively. The search identified one particularly limited area of the literature - research that has sought the views of young people with SEBD in relation to their future.

#### **2.1.6 The focus of the systematic literature review**

In the current research, the decision was taken to limit the systematic literature review to research that has sought the views of young people with SEBD in relation to the future only. It is necessary to acknowledge that there is a wider body of useful research that has sought the views of young people with SEBD in relation to their past (or present), and that the decision to focus on the future rules this out of consideration in the current research. However, this research sought to build on pre-existing

research and to make a distinct contribution. It does this by acknowledging the outcome of the exploratory literature review, which identified a paucity of research that has sought the views of young people with SEBD with regard to their futures.

## **2.2 Systematic literature review**

In November 2011 a systematic literature review was carried out in order to identify any research that had sought the views of young people with SEBD with regard to their future. The databases PsycINFO and PsychARTICLES were searched for peer-reviewed research that has been carried out with adolescents (13-17 years) over the last ten years. A full account of the stages of the systematic literature review can be found in appendix I. From this literature review I identified two pieces of research relevant to the current research. Leedy (1989) views a literature review as an opportunity to 'look again at the literature...in...an area not necessarily identical with, but collateral to, your own area of study' (Leedy, 1989 p. 66). A hand search was carried out and extended into research that was not with young people with SEBD per se, but with groups of young people who would be considered to have significant overlap with those who fall into the category of SEBD. This included young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This expanded my view of the field, particularly around different theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches to researching vulnerable young people's views of the future.

### **2.2.1 The future college/work aspirations of PRU students**

Solomon and Rogers (2001) explored the perceptions of young people (13-16 years of age) attending a PRU in Lancashire, northwest England. The researchers sought the young people's views on their current circumstances, history and future prospects. The research comprised a mixed-methods design, with both quantitative and qualitative elements. The researchers sought demographic histories of the young people and administered questionnaires based on the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey (PALS) (Midgley et al. 1997). Interviews were also carried out with six young people and practitioners who worked with them. The young people were encouraged to reflect back on their experience of mainstream school, specifically on their relationships with teachers, their peers and the curriculum. They were asked to give an account of how

they had come to be at the PRU and, critically, were also asked about their future plans for college and work. Whilst the future-focus formed a relatively small part of this research design, Solomon and Rogers found that the young people presented as unworried and held unrealistic views of the future, and appeared to lack agency and choice over their futures.

### **2.2.2 The future selves of young people from deprived communities**

Kloep, Hendry, Gardner and Seage (2010) explored the future selves of eleven (16-18 year old) young people from two deprived mining communities in south Wales. The researchers employed a case study design and used the theoretical framework of 'Possible selves' (Markus & Nurius, 1986) to explore these young people's view of themselves in the future. Markus, Nurius (1987) write that possible selves are manifestations of enduring goals, aspirations, motives, fears and threats. In particular the researchers sought to explore the potential risk and protective factors that contributed to the young people's stories of the future. The researchers gathered their accounts via semi-structured interviews and the structure of the interview drew on the theoretical framework of possible selves. The young people were asked to describe a 'typical' and an 'ideal' day in their lives and these were categorised into one of three conceptions of the self in the future: positive, negative and impossible (unrealistic) future selves.

The findings indicated that although some of the young people felt their socio-economic environments constrained and limited their futures, others felt their circumstances presented future possibilities. The following resources were identified: being good at something, having a mentor, having ambitions to move away, a motivation to achieve not just for themselves but also for others. However, whilst some young people were able to construct positive future selves despite significant adversity, others perceived themselves as having no resources to change their situation for a positive future. Kloep, Hendry, Gardner and Seage (2010) conclude that these risk and protective factors work in unique combinations for each individual in creating upward or downward developmental trajectories.

### **2.2.3 The future selves of PRU students**

The psychological concept of possible selves was also used by Mainwaring and Hallam (2010) who sought to explore the hopes and aspirations of 41 young people. 25 of them attended a mainstream school in outer London and the remaining 16 attended a PRU in inner London. The researchers used semi-structured interviews to elicit the data and found that students from the mainstream school were more likely to offer positive possible selves than those from the PRU. Overall the PRU attendees were found to have fragile positive selves and to be more pessimistic about their future prospects. The authors report that of the 11 PRU attendees who were able to offer positive possible selves, eight showed no awareness that difficulties might occur and five appeared to have no clear vision of themselves in the future. The authors suggest that previous experience may account for this preoccupation with negative possible selves and a lack of internalisation of positive future options.

### **2.3 The rationale for the current research**

A discourse of deficits provides continuing escalating difficulties, whereas a discourse of competence, strength and resilience promotes the amplification of those very qualities (Wagner & Watkins, 2005, p.6).

The vast majority of research has encouraged respondents with SEBD to focus on the past. Within positive psychology there is significant body of literature evidencing the importance of focusing on the future, and it is important to explore how these young people conceptualise the possibilities that lie ahead of them when they are still young. Solomon and Rogers (2001) found that young people attending PRUs lacked agency and choice in their plans for college and work in the future. Kloep, Hendry Gardner and Seage (2010) identified various protective and risk factors that contribute to disadvantaged young people's views of their future. Mainwaring and Hallam (2010) found that PRU attendees had fragile positive selves and were more pessimistic about their futures. Within the few pieces of research that have asked young people from PRUs and disadvantaged backgrounds about their futures, the concept of possible selves has been the primary method applied.

This research aimed to extend the existing research by understanding this issue in a different way to previous researchers. I was interested in exploring whether we can uncover richer narratives about how young people with SEBD view themselves in the future by seeking to impose less structure onto their accounts. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zibler (1998) proposed that individuals know or discover themselves, as well as reveal themselves, in the stories that they tell. Cefai and Cooper (2009) write that 'If individual narratives are foregrounded and given authentic expression, then wider understanding of children who struggle can be developed' (Cefai & Cooper, 2009, p. 32).

Cole and Knowles (2011) write that 'the unusual development histories of nearly all children with BESD will have influenced their thoughts, beliefs, how they interpret the world around them and how they behave' (Cole & Knowles, 2011, p.46). Therefore this research drew on a narrative methodology to impose less structure onto the young people's accounts and seek the 'stories' they tell about themselves in the future. In 1942, Pepper introduced the term 'contextualism' to indicate that, to be understood, events need to be located spatially and temporally in a context. The research drew on a life story approach to contextualise the young people's stories and explore the transactional nature of their experience over time.

### **2.3.1 Theoretical orientation: The value of Positive psychology**

Within the literature reviewed, much of the research that has been carried out *on* young people with SEBD document the negative outcomes, and much of the research that has been carried out *with* young people with SEBD has identified risk factors. Essentially researchers have focused too heavily on risk factors 'what went wrong' at the expense of protective factors 'what helped?' portraying a rather deterministic picture of the prospects for young people with SEBD. More recently, a small number of researchers have identified protective factors, however not enough research has been carried out with this disempowered group to seek out positives and strengths. Wise (2000) writes that 'decisions need to be made regarding where the focus of change should be and these decisions are closely linked to the various theories of behaviour that have been proposed over the years' (Wise, 2000, p. 10).

This research acknowledged the potential positive psychology could offer in understanding the experiences of young people with SEBD. Positive psychology is ‘the scientific study of optimal human functioning [that] aims to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive’ (Boniwell, 2008, p.1). Positive psychologists believe that mainstream psychology has been too concerned with the negative aspects of human life, emphasising individuals shortcomings rather than potential (Boniwell, 2008, p. 3).

The application of positive psychology to the area of young people with SEBD may at first appear unusual, particularly given that positive psychology is usually concerned with normal and flourishing lives as opposed to lives that are in need of help (Boniwell, 2008, p. 4). But with its focus on strengths, growth and potential, it is in direct opposition to a pre-occupation with risk and deficits and particularly relevant to future-oriented research. Cole and Knowles (2011) comment that the positive psychology approach, with its humanistic underpinnings, compliments much of what practitioners in educational settings are striving towards in their work with young people with SEBD. Furthermore they point out the similarities between children’s basic needs outlined in the Government’s Green Paper *Every Child Matters* Five Key Outcomes (DfES, 2003b), and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943: 1954). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) write that through positive psychology, psychologists will learn how to build the qualities that help individuals and communities not only to endure and survive but to flourish (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Therefore positive psychology is the theoretical approach most akin to what this piece of research is trying to achieve, and could be considered a useful and optimistic way of conceptualising SEBD.

Of particular relevance to the current research is the stance positive psychology takes towards negative experiences and the concept of post-traumatic growth; the potential earlier negative experiences have to trigger an upward psychological spiral (Boniwell, 2008). Rather than ignoring the presence of negative experiences, positive psychology accepts that they are part of life and can actually build qualities. In order to extend the current research literature, this research aimed to go beyond identifying risks and deficits and sought to identify evidence of strengths, potential and growth in the

stories that young people with SEBD tell about their futures. Given that they are likely to have encountered negative experiences in their lives, this research was particularly interested in how they identify any qualities that they have built up as a result of earlier exposure to risk.

### **2.3.2 Potential contribution to practice**

We know that young people with SEBD are at an increased risk of negative outcomes in the future, but we currently know very little about how they conceptualise their futures. Nor do we know enough about their strengths and resources. Strengths are considered to be helpful traits within the individual and resources are considered to be helpful factors within their system. This research aimed to contribute to the literature by adopting a narrative methodology and future-focused, strength-based approach. Fundamentally, it aimed to gain a rich insight into the way in which young people with SEBD construct their futures and to present the varied and multiple narratives. Punch (2005) writes that it is important to identify a problem that will benefit the individuals being studied, and will be meaningful for others beside the researcher. It was hoped that this research would have implications for the ways in which young people with SEBD can be supported to grow and thrive in the future. For example, by facilitating understanding of the type of future-oriented therapeutic work that could be helpful. Finally, I hoped that taking part in this research would be a positive experience for the young people and leave them with a sense of agency towards their future.

### **2.3.3 Research questions**

The research is presented through a positive psychology lens, which shaped the questions posed and the way in which the data was collected and analysed. Boniwell (2008) acknowledges that one criticism of positive psychology is that 'it aims to improve too many things, often without knowing exactly what the connections between them are' (Boniwell, 2008, p.107). This research avoided this by being clear that it aimed to explore the stories that young people with SEBD tell about their future. In particular it sought to answer the following questions:

RQ 1. What strengths and resources do they identify as factors that have helped them?

RQ 2. How do they describe any qualities that they have built as a result of earlier negative experiences?

RQ 3. How do they present themes of potential and growth in their stories of the future?

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

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This chapter outlines the methodological design of the current research. The research techniques used to elicit the young people's stories are introduced, potential ethical issues are outlined, and the broader philosophical position taken in this research is stated.

### **3.1 Purpose**

Research can fulfill various purposes. Robson (2002) distinguishes between exploratory, descriptive, explanatory and emancipatory research, and states that the purpose of exploratory research is to seek new insights and assess phenomena in a new light (Robson, 2002 p. 59). The purpose of the current research was informed by the systematic literature review, which revealed a lack of research eliciting the voice of young people with SEBD. Of the small body of research that had sought the voice of young people with SEBD, much had focused on a singular aspect of their experiences - school, at the expense of exploring their experiences in a more holistic and integrated way. The literature review also highlighted that previous research had focused on their past experiences. Therefore this research sets out to explore the stories young people with SEBD tell about their futures, and is best described as exploratory research.

### **3.2 Ontological and epistemological position**

Within psychology there are different ways of knowing things, referred to as 'worldviews', which are broad orientations about the world and the nature of research (Creswell, 2009). Worldviews are also referred to as paradigms (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) or epistemologies and ontologies (Crotty, 1998). Differences in worldview fall within two main traditions - positivist and social constructionist. Robson (1997) comments that these two opposing worldviews 'continue to engage in sporadic warfare', but essentially they vary in how they view: reality (ontology), the creation of knowledge (epistemology) and ways of carrying out research (methodology) (Matthews, 2003). In

order to establish one's own ontological and epistemological position, the researcher must ask themselves 'What can we know?' (ontology) and 'How can we know it?' (epistemology). The answers to these questions frame a researcher's view of what they are studying, and determine the way in which they carry out the research.

Given that there are different ways of knowing things in psychology, it follows that there are different ways of knowing about SEBD as a phenomenon. A number of psychological and theoretical perspectives have been offered to account for SEBD, which has led psychologists to come to understand it from a number of different perspectives. The following paragraphs explain how my own worldview has informed the way in which this research was carried out.

### **3.2.1 The Positivist worldview**

Ontologically, positivists believe that there is a truth to be sought, about which we can make direct statements that correspond to the real world (Matthews, 2003). More recently, the post-positivism movement has challenged the notion of an absolute truth, but remains similar to traditional positivism in its acceptance that cause probably determines effect. According to post-positivists, there are laws that govern the world, which need to be tested in order for us to understand it. Methodologically, the knowledge that develops through a post-positivist lens is based upon careful observation and measurement of an objective reality. This objective reality is reduced into a set of hypotheses, from which researchers develop true statements to explain causal relationships. Consequently, the accepted approach to post-positivist research is experimental in nature and typical of quantitative research. In recent years however, psychology as a discipline has accepted that it is often helpful to take a different position and embrace an alternative worldview.

### **3.2.2 The social-constructivist worldview**

Social constructivism is fundamentally different from positivism in its ontological premise. Social constructivists dismiss the idea that there is one objective truth - one reality. Instead, they advocate that human beings seek understanding of the world in which they live by constructing subjective meanings of their experiences, which results in multiple interpreted realities (Creswell, 2009). A social constructivist researcher

strives to make sense of, or interpret, the meanings others have about the world. They accept that these meanings will be varied and multiple (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and are interested in capturing the complexity in views rather than narrowing views into categories (Creswell, 2009). Critically, social constructivists place importance on the way in which meanings are formed, and suggest this occurs through interaction with others, within a social and cultural context at a particular point in history (Creswell, 2009). Particular emphasis is placed on collecting data in context because, in subscribing to this worldview, researchers accept that we are all born into a world of meaning bestowed upon us by our culture (Crotty, 1998).

Epistemologically, social constructivists believe that there is an interactive link between the knower (participant) and the would-be knower (researcher). Researchers position themselves within the research and recognise that their interpretation is shaped by their own personal, cultural and historical experiences. Finally, advocates of this worldview accept that multiple views of an issue can emerge, whereby the readers, the participants, and the researcher each develop their own interpretation of the research.

### **3.2.3 The worldview of the current research**

The current research subscribes to a social-constructivist worldview. Ontologically, it was anticipated that each young person would construct their future selves differently, based on their own subjective experience. Each would have their own story to tell, resulting in multiple stories, each equally valid. In the Introduction and Literature Review attention was drawn to the various social and cultural discourses around SEBD that have emerged over time. Young people may come to understand themselves, in part, through these discourses, given that they provide the social, cultural and historical backdrop to their experiences. Epistemologically, I accepted that the young people - 'the knowers' - would co-construct their stories with me - 'the would-be knower', and that my own background would inform the research.

### **3.3 Establishing trustworthiness, validity and reflexivity**

#### **3.3.1 Trustworthiness**

The criteria for judging a qualitative study differs from quantitative, therefore because this research is firmly rooted in qualitative methods it sets aside notions of reliability and generalisability. Qualitative researchers accept that their position in the research is subjective and rather than trying to reduce it, they acknowledge this subjectivity and reflect on it instead. Therefore qualitative research is often evaluated by its 'trustworthiness', defined by Stiles (1999) as:

'How well can readers trust the methods to have adequately exposed the investigator's ideas to empirical observations and how well can they trust the interpretations to improve people's understanding of the phenomena that was investigated' (Stiles, 1999, p.100).

#### **3.3.2 Validity**

Yardley (2008) explains that it is important to make a judgment about how trustworthy and useful a piece of research is - how well it has been carried out - in order to evaluate its 'validity'. Creswell and Miller (2000) write that research can be deemed valid when the findings are accurate from the multiple perspectives of the researcher, the participants and readers. The authors suggest that the concept of validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

#### **3.3.3 Reflexivity**

In order for the reader to establish whether the findings are accurate, the researcher must ensure that they make their position in the research explicit. Creswell (2009) suggests that qualitative researchers interpret data through an 'inescapable personal lens' at a particular socio-political moment in history, which is why it is necessary for researchers to critique their own position in the research. This can be achieved via a process of 'reflexivity'. Reflexivity is described by Fox, Martin and Green (2007), who write that to engage in reflexive practice, qualitative researchers need to understand how their position as a researcher affects their research and how the research in turn, affects their position as a researcher. Reflexivity differs from reflection, whereas

reflection usually takes place after an event, reflexivity requires the researcher to reflect on the process as they move through it. I was aware that my own bias shaped my interpretation and that it was necessary for me to critique my own position within the research. It was also necessary for me to convey my relationship to the research to the reader, by engaging in reflexive practice. Table 3.1 illustrates practices carried out during the research process to ensure that the end result was a reflexive, valid and ultimately trustworthy piece of research.

*Table 3.1 Validity practices carried out in the current research*

<i>Validity Outcome</i>	<i>Validity Practice</i>
The research is sensitive to the theoretical, empirical and socio-cultural context of the young people	A thorough literature review was carried out and the researcher remained open to complexity and alternative interpretations throughout the analysis
The research builds upon, rather than 're-discovers' previous findings	Regular reflection was paid to the potential impact and importance of the research
The research findings are credible	The researcher demonstrated sustained engagement with the data
The research can be interpreted by others beyond the researcher and it is clear that the findings have emerged from the analysis, rather than pre-conceived beliefs	The researcher's academic tutor reviewed the accuracy of the analysis by posing questions to ensure that it was sufficiently supported by the data
The basis for interpretation is clear and the research has external validity	'Rich' and 'thick' descriptions have been included, along with any discrepant information in order to provide sufficient evidence of the analysis

*Adapted from Yardley (2008)*

### **3.4 Research design**

The social constructivist worldview and explorative purpose of this research informed the choice of design. The research aims to elicit the multiple ways in which young people with SEBD make sense of the future, and a qualitative design was considered most appropriate for capturing such data. Qualitative research design is characterised by the presentation of a situation in all of its complexity and a focus on individual meaning. It allows researchers to explore phenomena in 'creative' and 'literary ways' (Creswell, 2009), is useful when there is little existing research on a topic (Creswell, 2009), and permits the exploration of new topics through the opportunity to engage with participants to create new understandings (Camic, Rhodes & Yardley, 2003).

### **3.5 The Interview**

#### **3.5.1 The guided nature of the interview**

Interviews were chosen as the method of data collection, in keeping with the exploratory purpose and qualitative design of the research. Grebenik and Moser (1962) advise researchers to consider the various types of interview available to them, to ensure the interview chosen is the most appropriate for producing the information required. The choice of interview used in the current research was informed by Wise (2000) who allowed her respondents to respond freely by drawing on the informant-style interview (Powney & Watts, 1987). The informant style interview is characterised by the identification of a number of broad areas for discussion, rather than pre-set fixed questions.

Unstructured interviews were used in the current research, to maximise the potential for capturing individual meaning and variation across stories. The unstructured nature of the interview allowed me to clarify issues in a way that would not have been possible had a more structured interview been used. It also permitted the young people the freedom to tell their stories in their own way, facilitating the co-construction of deeper and richer data. With reference to unstructured interviews, Bell

(1999) suggests using a guided or focused interview, whereby the researcher develops a loose framework to ensure crucial topics are considered. A guided interview also avoids some of the problems associated with entirely unstructured interviews. Wise (2000) identified 'broad areas for discussion' in her research, in order to make the interviews as accessible as possible. The current research drew on the Quality of Life (QoL) literature (Rapley, 2003) to identify broad areas for discussion in the interviews. Fox (2013) defines quality of life as a 'general feelings of well-being, feelings of positive social involvement, and opportunities to achieve personal potential' (Fox, 2013, p.2). Given its emphasis on wellbeing and potential, the QoL literature was considered an appropriate body of research on which to draw, because it reflects the broader positive psychology orientation of this research. QoL is seen to consist of a number of areas:

- Physical wellbeing
- Emotional wellbeing
- Self-determination
- Interpersonal relationships
- Social inclusion
- Personal development
- Material wellbeing
- Rights and privacy

These areas were drawn upon if the young people required some prompting in establishing their narratives about their futures. Therefore the interview technique used in the current research is best described as an unstructured but guided interview. Table 3.2 provides examples of how the QoL literature facilitated the interviews. In particular, it illustrates how the young people's educational progress (which is seen as part of personal development) was explored in their stories

*Table 3.2 Examples of how the QoL literature informed the interviews*

Area: Educational progress	
<i>Interview</i>	<i>Questions asked</i>
Tommy	C: Yeah. Is college on the cards then, is that your plan?
Sarah	C: How did you figure out that college and catering would be the best way to do that?
Kieran	C: How are you going to get there then? What are your next steps?
Jamie	C: So you are planning to study childcare and then go back and do this apprenticeship, because it will look better on your CV. What do you need?
Gemma	C:...and you think that going to college and doing some kind of course there will help?
James	C: Will you still be at school or will you have finished then?
Emma	C: And why do you want to go to Uni?
Paige	C: What do you plan on doing when you finish school?

### **3.5.2 Considerations when interviewing young people with SEBD**

There are a number of criticisms associated with qualitative research, and interviewing in particular. In the past some have doubted the value of using interviews with children, suggesting that their accounts are ‘inaccurate’, particularly those displaying

challenging behaviour (Lubbe, 1986). In the current research, the underlying ontological premise means that the notion of accuracy is set aside and replaced by that of multiple realities. Nevertheless, the following points were considered to ensure the interviews were accessible to the young people:

The relationship between behaviour difficulties and difficulties in reading and writing is well established (Cole & Knowles, 2011). It was possible that some of the young people interviewed in the current research would have poor literacy skills, therefore a data collection technique which required oral - rather than written – responses was chosen to avoid disempowerment. However, even oral data collection techniques pose barriers for some participants. Interviews require participants to articulate their thoughts and as Creswell (2009) writes, not all people are equally articulate and perceptive. Research exploring the link between SEBD and speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) suggests that it is not uncommon for young people with SEBD to experience difficulties in the following areas: clarity and fluency of speech, expressive and receptive language and/or functional and social use of language (Cole & Knowles, 2011). Consequently young people with SEBD may lack confidence and competence in expressing their views (Cefai & Cooper, 2009), and require support to articulate their views clearly and effectively. A number of researchers offer valuable advice on ways to engage young people with SEBD in the research process and this was drawn on when designing the interview. Hapner and Imel (2002) suggest that active listening, empathy and probing can help them to engage in self-reflection and express their thoughts effectively, while Grieg and Taylor (2007) encourage researchers to reflect beyond the young person's capabilities, and consider their level of interest and concentration in the task.

### **3.5.3 The life path tool**

The concerns associated with using interviews with young people with SEBD have been outlined. The current research employed an unstructured interview design, therefore it was important to make this as accessible as possible. Many writers advocate giving children creative tools to have their voices heard (Grieg & Taylor, 2007). The interview technique was informed by O'Riordan (2011), who used a life grid to elicit the

retrospective accounts of young people with SEBD on their experiences of leaving school:

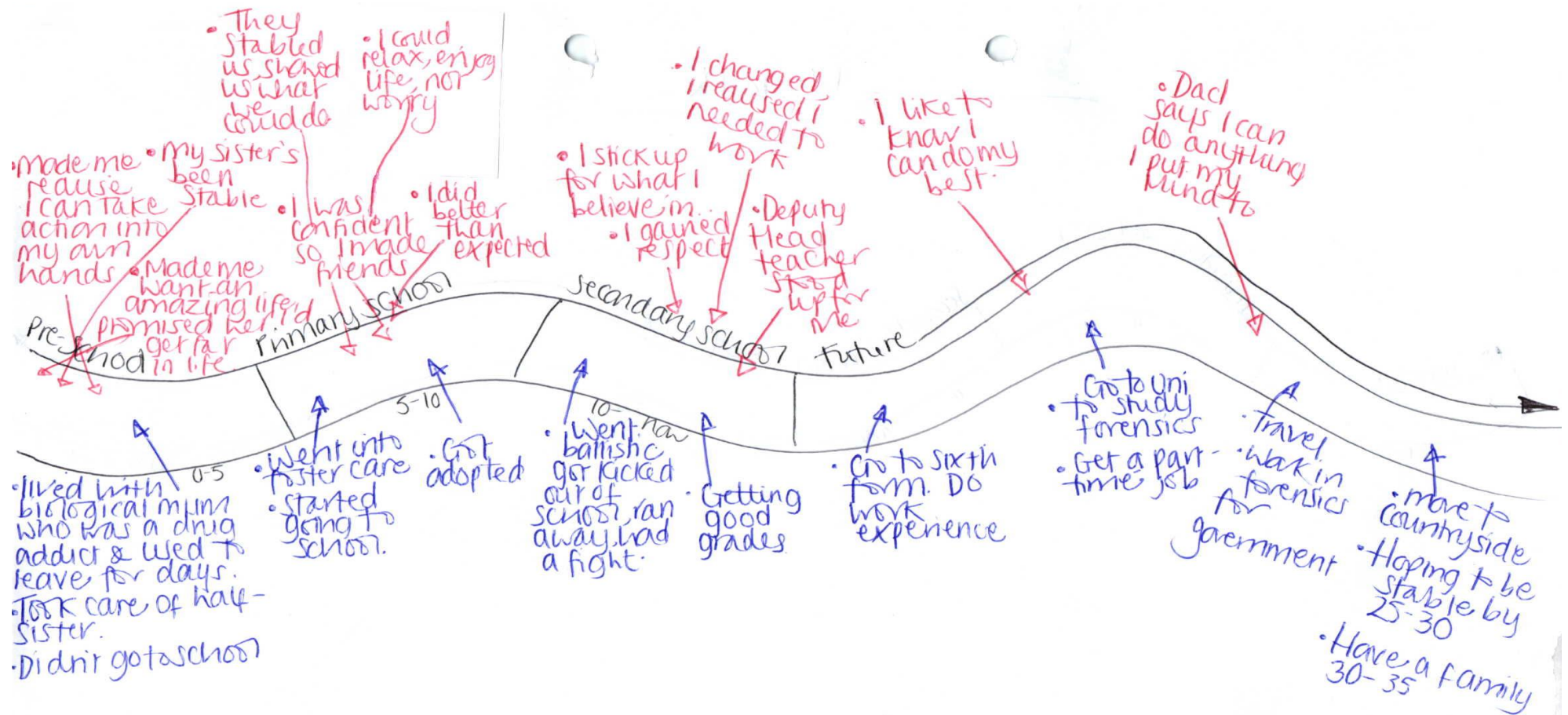
*Figure 3.1 O’Riordan (2011) life grid*

	Home	School	Other
Preschool years			
Primary school years			
Secondary school years			
The Future			

O’Riordan (2011) found that the life grid helped to structure the participant’s thinking during the interview, which was helpful given that many of them had difficult and/or chaotic stories to tell. Wilson, Cunningham-Burley, Bancroft and Backett-Milburn and Masters (2007) highlight that life grids remove the need for direct questioning which allows participants to raise difficult issues in their own time. As well as being a sensitive approach to exploring difficult experiences, life history lines are also a useful method of encouraging young people to reflect on what has helped them through these events and can be used to map support networks (O’Riordan, 2011). The life grid was adapted in the current research to provide the participants with a visual prompt.

The life path was included in this research to help the young people structure their thinking. It provided a shared focus and may have gone some way in reducing the intensity of the interview for the young people taking part. It also proved to be a useful way of capturing the content of their stories and facilitating the interview. Age ranges were added to the life path to help structure the participant’s thinking. The school, home and other categories used by O’Riordan (2011) were not used in the current research, to avoid imposing my meaning onto the young people’s stories. Figure 3.2 illustrates how the life path was used to facilitate Emma’s narrative. Key life events were recorded in blue and strengths and resources were recorded in red.

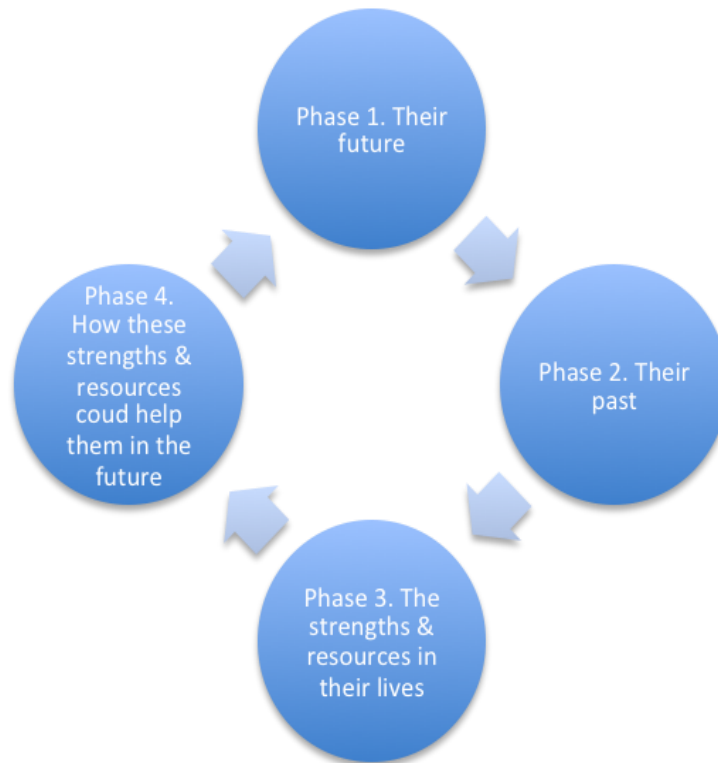
Figure 3.2 Emma's annotated life path



### 3.5.4 The four phases of the interview

Figure 3.3 Illustrates the areas the young people were encouraged to explore at each stage of the interview.

*Figure 3.3 The four phases of the interview*



#### ***Phase 1. Eliciting their narratives about the future***

In the first phase of the interview the life path, along with the areas identified from the QoL literature were drawn upon to encourage the young people to explore their futures. The participants were encouraged to reflect on their future first, so that these narratives were elicited in their purest form, and the more sensitive stories of their past could be addressed later in the interview. The following extract from Jamie's transcript illustrates how the life path was used to facilitate the young people's future stories:

*C: So let's start you at twenty years old then (gestures to life path) and I want you to imagine that far in the future. Tell me what your life will be like at twenty.*

See appendix II for examples of how the life path was used to facilitate the future stories of the other young people.

### ***Phase 2. Eliciting their narratives about the past***

During the second phase of the interview, the young people were encouraged to use the life path to identify significant memories about their lives. In this phase of the research, the young people were encouraged to begin at the start of the life path labeled '0-5' and, as in all phases, they could offer as much or as little information as they felt comfortable with. No information about their pasts was elicited before interviewing them, because the research sought the meaning they gave to their past, and not the meanings of professionals who had worked with them. The purpose of gathering their narratives about their pasts was two-fold; first, it provided a context for their stories of the future. Secondly, it helped prepare them for the third phase of the interview – where they were encouraged to reflect on what had helped them in their lives. The following extract from Gemma's transcript provides an example of how the life path was used to facilitate the young people's past story:

*C: So if I put 0-5, 5-10 (gestures to life path). Oh and then we've got 10-15 there. Can you tell me about your life here (gestures to life path). Were you always living here?*

See appendix III for examples of how the life path was used to facilitate the past stories of the other young people.

### ***Phase 3. Identifying the strengths & resources in their lives***

In the third phase of the interview, the young people were encouraged to identify factors that had helped them get through the life events they had described in the second phase of the interview. This part of the interview focused on identifying strengths and resources in the young people's lives. The following extract from James' transcript provides an example of how the life path was used to encourage the young people to identify any strengths and resources that had helped them in the past:

*C: During that time - when you were really young before primary school. What things helped you and helped you cope with life?...It could be things about you or things about other people...*

See appendix IV for examples of how the life path was used with the other young people to encourage them to identify strengths and resources in their lives.

#### ***Phase 4. Exploring how these strengths and resources could help them in the future***

Finally, in the fourth phase of the interview the young people were encouraged to reflect on how the strengths and resources drawn on in the past could help them in the future. The following extract from Sarah's transcript illustrates how the life path was used to encourage the young people to consider how their strengths and resources could help them in the future:

*C: How might having people like your cousins - people who help you with your behaviour and keep you in check and all of that - how might that help you in the future?*

See appendix V for examples of how the life path was used to encourage the other young people to consider how their strengths and resources could help them in the future.

### **3.6 Participants**

#### **3.6.1 Identifying settings for the research**

The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants (or sites) that will best help the researcher answer the research question. Secondary-aged pupils were sought because it was decided that this group would be most able to think meaningfully about their futures. Therefore the participants in this research were a purposive sample of secondary-aged pupils with SEBD from within the LA commissioning the research. Given the lack of homogeneity among the group assigned the label 'SEBD', it is important to be clear how SEBD was defined in the current research. Meetings were held with representatives in the LA to identify provision available to young people with SEBD in the borough. Through these discussions, two potential settings for the research were identified. Therefore, the current research made use of an opportunity sample of young people in receipt of specialist provision for SEBD.

### **3.6.2 Provision A**

Provision A is part of a broader service for secondary age pupils with SEBD within the LA, and meets the needs of young people:

- With statements, whose main presenting need is SEBD;
- Without statements, who have received a second permanent exclusion (or, in some circumstances - a first permanent exclusion). These pupils are placed at Provision A on an assessment placement and require a statement to receive this specialist input long-term.

It is located on a small independent site and has five classrooms. A small team of dedicated Teachers and Teaching Assistants (TAs) support young people in groups of no more than five. The young people also access a Learning Mentor, a Speech and Language Therapist (SALT), other counseling and specialist teaching as required – such as those children with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD). In addition, each young person is allocated a Key Worker, who acts as their primary point of contact and support. At the far end of the building there is a large room where the young people eat their lunch and play table football during break and lunchtimes. There is also a school hall and an outdoor area where they play football. They remain on the roll of a mainstream school but attend provision A if they require a longer-term special provision.

### **3.6.3 Provision B**

Provision B is designed for young people with SEBD at risk of permanent exclusion. It is located on a small independent site in the borough and is reminiscent of a large school hall. There are tables and sofas for the young people to use, but often staff travel to meet young people in their mainstream school or home. Young people are referred by their schools, with parental consent, and the Multi-Agency Team for Vulnerable Pupils (MATVP) carry out assessment and intervention over a ten-week period. The MATVP work with staff at the young people's mainstream schools to develop a plan for support and interventions. Ultimately the aim of this intervention is to prevent permanent exclusion and for young people to continue to access their education at

their mainstream school. Occasionally the outcomes of the assessment and intervention may indicate that they require a long-term placement in a more specialist setting, such as provision A.

#### **3.6.4 The participants in the current research**

Thirteen young people consented to take part in the research, but their attendance and the timetabled exam preparation meant that eight were interviewed. Five of the participants were female and three were male. The young people varied in age from fourteen to sixteen years of age, five attended provision A and three attended provision B.

### **3.7 Ethics**

This research aimed to address the imbalance in research, by seeking to present the views of young people with SEBD. However, it is important to take heed of why, in the past, researchers have not carried out research with children and young people. MacDonald and Greggans (2008) suggest three reasons for why interviewing children and young people has been largely avoided. First, researchers may view children and young people as having under-developed capabilities which makes them unable to recall credible accounts of their experiences. Second, researchers may feel uncomfortable and lack the skills and language needed to interview children. Third, researcher may be put off because accessing children as research subjects requires 'wading through' many layers of gatekeepers. These issues become even more pertinent in relation to carrying out research with young people with SEBD.

In order to carry out this research, I was required to apply to the University Ethics Committee for approval (see appendix VI). This provided a useful platform from which to begin contemplating these issues, which needed to be identified early and addressed proactively. This research adheres to the ethical principles outlined in the British Psychological Society's (BPS) Code of Human Research (2010), the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (2012) and the University Ethics Guidelines, including: respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons, scientific value, social responsibility, maximising benefit and minimising

harm wherever possible. The research aimed to go beyond 'minimising harm' by empowering and giving agency and voice to a group who are currently disempowered in research.

### **3.7.1 Gaining permission from gatekeepers**

The issue of access was significant in this research. I required permission from multiple gatekeepers; the University Ethics Board, various stakeholders in the commissioning Local Authority (LA), the service providers i.e. Heads of units, staff working within the services, parents/carers, and the young people themselves. I also had to rely on some gatekeepers to gain permission from other gatekeepers on my behalf. At first this appeared to be a somewhat daunting task but, as Creswell (2009) writes, we can view gatekeepers as obstacles or we can view them as people with whom we need to negotiate. I found the topics suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) helpful when structuring my preliminary discussions with gatekeepers to leave them feeling informed. This included: why the site had been chosen for the study, what activities would occur at the site during the research, measures to ensure the study would not be disruptive and clarity on what the gatekeepers would gain from the study. After approaching the gatekeepers, permission was given to approach the young people. However consideration was needed as to how easy it would be to recruit them and whether or not they would be willing to take part.

### **3.7.2 Gaining informed consent from participants in Provision A**

Patton (2002) discusses how easily power can be abused and cautions that participants can be coerced into participating. The subtleties and pressures surrounding 'informed' consent were given due consideration. It was important that the young people knew what their involvement in the research would entail and understood that they did not have to take part. The participants were an opportunity sample of young people available and willing to meet with me. I met with the young people informally on a one-to-one basis in order to introduce my research. Sarantakos (2005) highlights the importance of the researcher and the researched having a shared understanding of the purpose of the research, therefore the aims, purpose and research questions were shared with the young people. They were also informed that the research could be published and their rights to withdraw were explained.

Alderson and Morrow's (2004) advice was followed and the young people were given age-appropriate information sheets which explained what would happen if they took part (see appendix VII). Once they had had the opportunity to ask any questions, they were encouraged to take the information sheet home to re-read, to reflect on whether they wanted to take part and to discuss it with their parents/carers. The young people were also given a parent/carer information sheet and asked to share this with their families (see appendix VIII). Following these discussions, I contacted the parents to introduce the research and inform them of what it would entail. Subsequently, all parents/carers provided verbal consent for their child to take part in the research.

### **3.7.3 Gaining informed consent from participants in provision B**

It was not possible to gain consent in the same way in provision B, because the young people had complex timetables that meant they were educated across sites. Instead, I wrote to the young people and their parents/carers and sent them the information sheets and consent form (see appendix IX). A week later, their parents/carers were contacted and asked whether the young person had shown an interest in taking part. If they had, and their parents/carers were also happy to give their consent, we agreed on a time for me to meet the young person and carry out the interview. They were asked whether they would prefer this to happen in their homes, Provision B or their mainstream school. All three young people from provision B asked to be interviewed at home. When I met the young people for the first time in their homes, I obtained their fully informed consent before beginning the interviews. Clearly there were a range of subtleties around issues of recruiting young people for research and careful consideration was given to ensure their anonymity.

### **3.7.4 Anonymity and confidentiality**

The young people were informed that the research was not confidential because it would go into the public domain, but they were reassured that their stories would remain anonymous. They were also informed that the LA in which the research was commissioned would not be named in the research, because of the small data sample. The young people were encouraged to create their own pseudonyms to reinforce their understanding of anonymity and afford them some agency in the process.

Considerable thought also needed to be given to the location of the interviews within Provision A, as pupils frequently left the classroom and it was important to ensure participant confidentiality was protected *during* the interviews, as well as afterwards.

### **3.7.5 Respect, power and ownership**

Mayall (1999) discusses the impact of social norms and social desirability in research, drawing attention to the way in which children and young people are taught to listen, respect and obey adults. Mayall (1999) suggests that saying 'no' can be considered to be rude or disobeying. Issues of power had to be addressed in the research, given my position as a researcher from the LA. Many authors have argued that it is better to talk to participants 'on their own turf' (Warr, 2004), and Woodgate (2001) advises 'gradual entry to the field' to build and reduce power imbalances. I spent three days in provision A getting to know the young people by supporting them in lessons. It was important to be clear about the purpose of my presence from the start. I explained that I was hoping to interview some of them for a piece of research that I was carrying out, but wanted to spend time getting to know them first. More importantly, this gave them the opportunity to get to know me, and allowed me to share information about myself – including the fact that I used to work in a similar provision and am also a student. Similar conversations were had with the young people from provision B before carrying out the interviews with them in their homes. However this may not, in itself, be sufficient to empower, as there are many other factors, both positive and negative, which influence power dynamics.

Cole and Knowles (2011) suggest that, given their past experiences, such young people can be very suspicious of adults attempts to get close to them, therefore it is the responsibility of the researcher to recognise this and respond to them appropriately (MacDonald & Greggans, 2008). Wetton and Williams (2000) advise adopting a non-hierarchical, facilitative and reflexive approach to encourage young people to participate in research. In the current research, the young people were told they had been asked to take part because they had the potential to contribute to the knowledge base and help other young people in the future. Rogers (2000) advice on building and maintaining relationships through calm and respectful language was also of use; Rogers recommends not rushing instructions, using pauses to good effect and

permitting free speech. Having a sense of humour, declaring one's own ignorance and being oneself also helped to balance the power dynamic (MacDonald & Greggans, 2008 p.3129). Children and young people also communicate through their non-verbal communication. I was sensitive to the young people's behaviour and body language during the interviews, always giving them a way out if they needed it because consent has many grey areas (MacDonald & Greggans, 2008). This information was simply used to facilitate the interview and was not used in the analysis.

Interviewing in qualitative research is increasingly considered a form of moral enquiry (Kvale, 1996). As such, interviewers need to consider how the interview will improve the human situation - as well as enhance scientific knowledge – and the participants should benefit from the research. It was hoped that the interview, though not designed to be therapeutic, would be a positive experience for those that took part, particularly given its inherent strength-based and future-oriented focus. Additionally participants in provision A were given £3 tuck shop voucher after their interviews, as a way of thanking them for their involvement. They accepted their voucher gratefully, although somewhat surprised because they were not led to expect to receive a voucher when they agreed to take part and were only told after taking part. Participants in provision B did not receive vouchers because they were interviewed in their homes, but were thanked for their involvement.

### **3.8 Procedure**

Knowing that unexpected chaos is part and parcel of qualitative research, will equip researchers with skills fundamental for balancing the wellbeing of all those involved with the quality of the research process (MacDonald & Greggans, 2008, p.3123).

### **3.8.1 Procedure for interviews in provision A**

The five interviews in provision A were carried out on three separate occasions in June 2012. In practice, we were interrupted numerous times, but the risk of being interrupted was minimised by interviewing first thing in the mornings, mid-week, when the unit was most settled.

### **3.8.2 Procedure for interviews in provision B**

The three interviews with the young people from provision B were carried out on three separate occasions in July-August 2012. The LA home visiting procedures were followed. The reality of interviewing young people in their homes was that we were still interrupted, but this time by family members. In one interview the young person's mother joined us. The young person was asked whether they were happy to have the interview in that room or whether there was another room they would rather we sat in. The decision to stay in the same room as their mother was based on the young person's verbal and non-verbal response, which indicated that they were happy to carry out the interview in their mother's presence. As the interview progressed, it became apparent that her presence helped, rather than hindered, the interview process. In fact, it was entirely appropriate for her to stay in the room as her presence reassured the young person and facilitated their participation. Irwin and Johnson (2005) reason that a parent's presence at interview can provide 'scaffolding' that enhances the young person's account. In other instances, interruptions from family members were found to 'break the ice' and provided the young people with some 'light relief'.

### **3.8.3 Data Protection**

The young people's names were replaced with pseudonyms during transcription (see appendix X). The transcribed interviews and tapes were stored securely for the duration of the research, after which time they will be destroyed.

## Chapter 4: Analysis

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### 4.1 The Field of narrative psychology

Narrative analysis forms part of the broader field of 'narrative psychology', which is based on the premise that people tell stories about their lives, real or imaginary, exceptional or ordinary (Bruner, 1986). Narrative psychology is concerned with self and identity, and proposes that we live through the stories that we, and others, tell about us (Murray, 2008). This ability to think narratively and to shape and be shaped through stories is the way in which we make sense of our reality (Hiles & Cermak, 2008). The term 'storied self' is used to refer to the way in which we create 'self' using narratives to explain what has happened or is happening to us:

Narrative pervades our everyday life. We are born into a narrative world, live our lives through narrative and afterwards are described in terms of narrative (Murray, 2008, p. 111).

Hiles and Cermak (2008) compare narrative analysis to other qualitative methods in psychology, describing it as the 'new kid on the block'. They acknowledge that there has been a 'narrative turn' in psychology and that interest in 'stories' has a relatively long history in the field. The roots of narrative psychology can be seen in the work of Freud, Adler and Jung, then later in the work of Allport (1937), Buhler (1933), Dollard (1935), and more recently in the work of Sarbin (1986), Bruner (1986), Mishler (1986), Polkinghorne (1988) and McAdams (1993). What these psychologists share is an interest in researching people's stories, in personal truths rather than historical truths (Hiles & Cermak, 2008).

#### 4.1.1 Differentiating Narrative Analysis from Narrative Therapy

Narrative is a broad approach that is applied in a variety of ways across disciplines and within disciplines. Within psychology, the narrative approach has been drawn on heavily in health psychology, with researchers such as Crossley and Murray arguing that narrative is a means of making sense of the disruption of illness and providing order when there is no order (Murray, 2008). In psychology, narrative is not only used

as an approach to research, but is also an approach to therapy. The two are relatively distinct, which is why it is important to distinguish one from the other; narrative therapy is a form of therapy that encourages the client to explore their narrative resources, with the ultimate goal of helping them to produce alternative and more empowering stories about their lives. Narrative analysis differs in that it is an approach to research and analysis of data, sometimes referred to as narrative research or narrative inquiry. Narrative analysis asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives. These stories are then retold, or re-storied, to form a final narrative, which combines views from both the participants' and the researcher's life (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The current piece of research employs narrative as an approach to research and analysis and is not concerned with narrative as an approach to therapy.

#### **4.1.2 Narrative analysis**

Narrative analysis is used across a number of disciplines, some of which have their origins in linguistics and sociology, others in psychology. Narrative analysis is approached in different ways, dependent on the researcher's discipline of study; in sociolinguistics narrative analysis focuses specifically on the structure and format of the language, whereas in psychology narrative analysis is applied in order to understand how an individual thinks and feels about specific aspects of their life (Howitt, 2010). Howitt (2010) also argues that within psychology, narrative analysis is still too young a field for agreement to have emerged about what it is and how it is done. This, coupled with the cross-disciplinary interest in narrative analysis as an approach, has resulted in a large number of possible techniques for carrying out a narrative analysis.

Approaches to narrative analysis range from collecting stories and categorising them according to genre, through to more in-depth analysis that requires the researcher to break the stories down and analyse the sense-making process (Hiles & Cermak, 2008). Howitt (2010) describes the field of narrative analysis as a 'current state of anarchy', noting that researchers are left to draw on abstract theoretical ideas, rather than models of narrative analysis. Mishler's (1995) assertion that there is 'no singular or best way' to study narrative, and Riessman's (1993) suggestion that the narratives themselves should 'invite thought as to the most useful way to analyse them' led me

to scrutinise the literature in order to seek out an appropriate model on which to base my analysis. Narrative analysis is the approach that fits best with the aims of this research, particularly given my interest in eliciting the stories of this group of young people and exploring their sense of self and identity.

#### **4.1.3 Psychological approaches to narrative analysis**

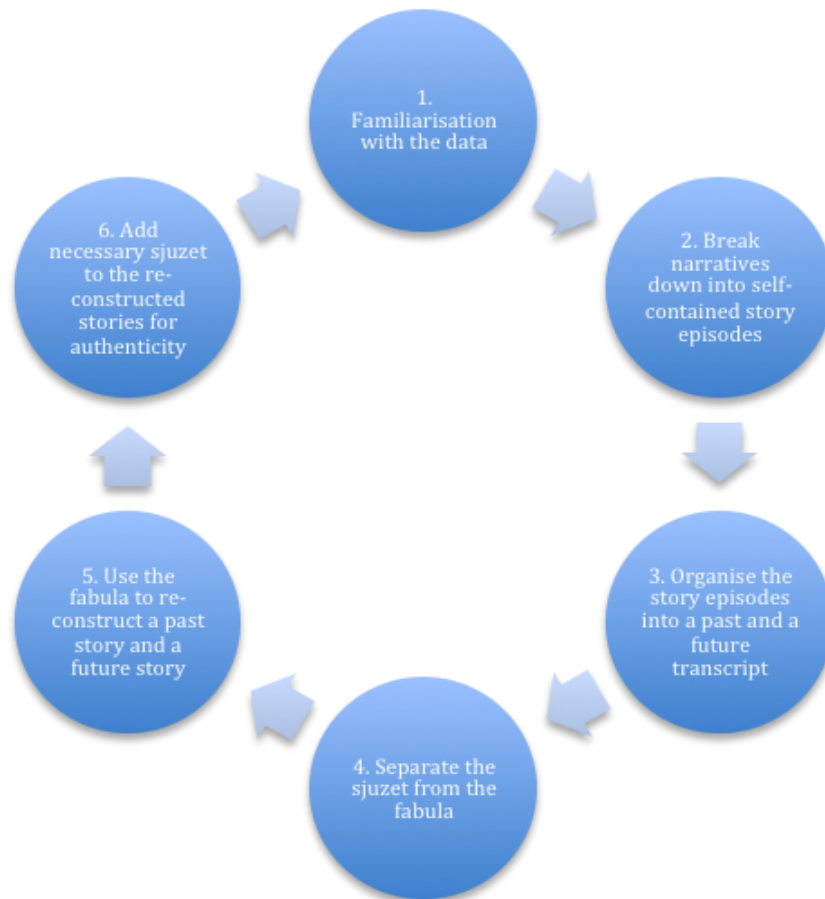
This research draws on a model of narrative analysis that is firmly rooted in the principles of narrative psychology; Hiles and Cermak's (2008) model of 'Narrative Oriented Inquiry' (NOI) is inclusive and pluralistic, rather than exhaustive and definitive. The authors incorporate a number of different approaches to narrative analysis within their model, and advocate that it is used flexibly. This allows researchers to draw on those particular analyses that are most helpful in answering their research question. The authors state that NOI must begin with a narrative approach to data collection; the research question, design and interview strategy, should all be designed to capture data suitable for narrative analysis. The analysis itself involves breaking the text down, before adopting a number of interpretive perspectives to apply to the text, working through it repeatedly and asking different questions of the narrative each time (Langdridge, 2007).

Critically, Hiles and Cermak (2008) note that the different interpretive approaches within their model can be used singularly or in combination. However the authors recommend drawing upon Herman and Vervaeck's (2001) analysis of 'sjuzet' and 'fabula' first, before applying further interpretive approaches. Herman and Vervaeck's (2001) suggest that narratives are made up of two inter-related parts, the bounded consists of *what* is being re-told - the fabula, the unbounded is the *way in which* it is re-told - the sjuzet (pronounced soo-tzay). What follows is an outline of the way in which this research drew on Hiles and Cermak's (2008) model of NOI in order to carry out the narrative analysis. Yin (2003) advises documenting as many of the steps of the procedure as possible, and these steps have been illustrated with extracts from the analysis.

## 4.2 The Narrative analysis used in the current research

### 4.2.1 Re-constructing past and future narratives

*Figure 4.1 The six steps taken to re-construct past and future narratives*



#### **1. Familiarisation with the data**

Once the raw data had been transcribed, the first task was to familiarise myself with the transcripts. I achieved this by reading and re-reading them several times, building a picture of the stories as a whole, reflecting on the young people's general ideas and tone, and forming an overall impression and response to what they said. In essence it was the first step in gaining a sense of their experiences and the meaning they attached to these. Crossley (2007) suggests that six readings are about the right number, but in practice my readings of the transcripts far exceeded this.

## **2. Breaking the narratives down into self-contained story episodes**

These initial readings facilitated the next step, preparing the data for analysis. I identified moves in the telling of the story, in order to break the whole narratives down into separate smaller self-contained story episodes. These story episodes contained the young person's comments along with my own. This process is illustrated in the following extract from Sarah's working transcript:

*C: How did you figure out that college and catering would be the best way to do that?*

*S: Cause I wouldn't rather be sitting in an office, I can't stand sitting in offices, I'd rather be on my feet all day being more hands on.*

*C: Yeah. And have you done any experience in school? Have you been out on any college experiences where you've done that or-*

*S: - Yeah, I've got level 1 and 2 already at college.*

*C: In catering?*

*S: Yeah.*

*C: So you've already done level 1 and 2. Would people normally do that after school-*

*S: -Yeah.*

*C: So you're two qualifications ahead. It sounds like you enjoyed doing those. So you've got quite a clear idea of what you want to do at college. And then what happens, will you be doing that straight in five weeks or will you be doing other things?*

*S: I'll be doing other things, I'll probably be doing that in 2013.*

*C: Why 2013?*

*S: Because I'm having a baby - **Signifies a move in the story***

## **3. Organising the story episodes into a past and future transcript**

I then took each self-contained story episode in turn, and organised them into one of two transcripts; the first - a transcript of the young person's stories of their past, the second - a transcript of their stories about the future. This process is illustrated in the following extract from Kieran's working transcript:

**To be included in transcript of future -**

*K: If none of that happens with the acting yeah, I'll just go straight into my cooking. And whilst I am doing my cooking and that, I will ask for a mortgage. Like I might have to do a hundred steps back before I am thirty-six to rent, like not to rent to take a loan from the bank to own this restaurant, like I might have to do that early but realistically if you do that early you're not going to get very far, cause I dunno, cause that's one of these where you've got to know what you're doing cause if I screw up it's kind of shit, sorry.*

*C: That's alright, it's kind of a lot of money to spend and if you do it, you've got to be sure that, what you're spending the money on, is going to work. Is that sort of what you are saying?*

*H: Yeah and then I will write a book one day.*

*C: You'll write a book one day?*

*K: Yeah, hundred percent.*

*C: What's your book going to be about?*

**To be included in transcript of the past -**

*K: Cause I've had quite an interesting life, like friends and enemies and stuff.*

**4. Separating the *sjuzet* from the *fabula***

As part of NOI Hiles and Cermak (2008) recommend using Herman and Vervaeck's (2001) approach to separate the 'bounded' from the 'unbounded motifs' in the narrative. Essentially, narratives are made up of two inter-related parts, the bounded consists of *what* is being re-told - the *fabula*, the unbounded is the *way in which* it is re-told - the *sjuzet* (pronounced soo-tzay). The *sjuzet* include words, phrases or sentences that reflect emphasis, reflection or asides, which are not essential to the story but influence how it is re-told. I worked through the transcripts, separating the *sjuzet* from the *fabula* by underlining any unbounded motifs (*sjuzet*). This process is illustrated in the following extract from Tommy's working transcript:

*T: I've travelled my whole life.*

*C: Really? Where have you been?*

*T: Well not travelled, **travelled around England** and that.*

*C: So from when you were how old?*

**T: I don't know, I've been here a few years but from when I was younger, my family come from gypsy families.**

C: Oh so they were travelling around by nature really?

**T: I've just come back from [name of place], literally a couple of days ago from a caravan down there.**

C: Oh right, cause your mum said you had gone on holiday with your dad, so is it your dad's side of the family?

**T: My dad's side is Irish traveller, my mum's side is Romany Gypsy.**

C: Oh right, so do they, in terms of their cultures, do they marry up quite well in terms of their, no, are they totally different? That must be weird. So when you were a baby you were presumably travelling, always travelled? Yeah, so travelling to you, most people-

**T: - I ain't really travelled, it's just like, if we do travel it will be around England or something, we don't go international.**

C: Don't go abroad?

**T: My mum tried to, like, bring me up a bit different to that.**

C: Yeah, trying to base you somewhere by the sounds of it?

**T: Yeah, she didn't want me being like my cousins and my brother.**

### **5. Using the fabula to re-construct past and future stories**

I then re-read the entire transcripts paying attention only to the bold non-underlined text (fabula). I was pleased to find that the fabula read, as the authors suggest, as a simple coherent story. Through this analysis I identified the content (fabula) of the young people's stories as the focus for further analysis. Following this analysis, I was in a position to lift the content (fabula) in order to re-construct a past and future story for each young person, confident that I had captured the key experiences that they spoke of in their stories. The following extract is taken from Tommy's past story, and was based on the sjuzet/fabula analysis illustrated above:

*'I'm Fourteen....i've travelled my whole life....my family come from gypsy families...my mum tried to bring me up a bit different to that...she didn't want me being like my cousins and my brother...I've been here a few years...'*

The focus of this research is firmly rooted in the young people's stories of their future. However it seemed important to capture and present the stories of their pasts, as they provide a rich context from which to then interpret their stories of the future. After all, as Ochs and Capps (2001) point out, whilst stories about the past are always told from the temporal perspective of the present, the narrated past is important because of its relation to our present and future. Therefore both past and future stories were included in the findings section.

#### **6. Adding necessary *sjuzet* to the re-constructed stories for authenticity**

Murray (2008) notes that one of the strengths of narrative research is the way in which it manages to convey a sense of a person's experience in all its depth, messiness, richness and texture, often using the actual words spoken. Furthermore Seidman (2006) states that stories are a compelling and powerful way of making sense of interview data. By presenting the re-constructed stories in their entirety, I was able to go beyond presenting 'rich, thick descriptions'. Initially purely fabula was used to re-construct the young people's stories, but I chose to add *sjuzet* in order to reflect their expression, particularly those remarks that conveyed significance and added authenticity to the way in which they had told their stories. This process is illustrated by an extract from James' past story:

*'...I started boxing and rugby at primary and secondary school...they don't do rugby here...you could hurt people and you didn't get moaned at...it would kind of (**emphasis**) take some of the anger out...it would but it wouldn't (**reflection**)...you could punch a bag and it didn't matter, you weren't hurting no one, except yourself if you punched a bit wrong (**aside**)...'*

In some instances it was difficult to separate the *sjuzet* from the fabula. When this was the case, these remarks were also included in the re-constructed stories. This process is in line with Hiles and Cermak (2008), who advocate reintegrating the fabula with the *sjuzet* at a later stage if it is helpful.

#### **4.2.2: Conducting a categorical-content analysis**

After breaking the text down and re-constructing the stories based on the fabula, a further interpretive analysis was carried out on the future stories, drawing on Hiles and Cermak's (2008) model of NOI. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zibler (1998) identify

four approaches to narrative analysis connected to different types of research questions. These can be used singularly or in combination, the only pre-requisite is that the analysis draws on an initial sjuzet-fabula analysis. From these four approaches a categorical-content analysis was chosen because, whereas other approaches focus on the way in which stories are told, a categorical-content analysis focuses on the content of the story. This analysis permitted exploration of themes within the story that were relevant to the current research, which aims to identify positives in the young people's stories. Approaches to a categorical-content analysis vary and some are relatively quantitative in nature. The categorical-content analysis used in the current research can best be described as impressionistic-interpretive in nature. Essentially this analysis was used to explore the young people's perceptions of the future, drawing on positive psychology to identify themes of potential, growth and any factors that the young people deemed to have helped them. Figure 4.1 outlines the stages of the categorical-content analysis.

*Figure 4.2 The four stages of the categorical-content analysis*



### ***1. Selection of the relevant subtext for the research question***

Categorical-content analysis consists of four main stages. The first had been fulfilled through the choice of research question, which identifies the future story as the primary subtext on which the analysis would focus. However sometimes interpretation of the subtext can be validated or facilitated by parts of the interview that are outside of the selected subtext (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zibler, 1998). The authors suggest that a subtext focused categorical-content analysis from a life-story, which completely ignores the context, loses much of its power and meaning. Therefore the past stories also informed this analysis.

### ***2. Defining the content categories***

This research aims to explore the stories that young people with SEBD tell about their future. In particular it sought to answer the following questions:

RQ 1. What strengths and resources do they identify as factors that have helped them?

RQ 2. How do they describe any qualities that they have built as a result of earlier negative experiences?

RQ 3. How do they present themes of potential and growth in their stories of the future?

Therefore the theoretical orientation of positive psychology informed the readings of the future stories, rather than allowing themes to emerge from the text in a grounded-theory manner. This was considered the most transparent way of identifying themes, and themes that pertained to the potential for growth, strengths and resources were sought across the young people's past and future stories. This process was informed by my earlier readings and particularly close attention to the fabula. It was important to consider the future stories in the context of the past stories, because positive psychology suggests early negative experiences have the potential to build qualities and facilitate upward psychological trajectories. Whilst I was specifically interested in identifying, growth, strengths and resources, I tried to avoid imposing unnecessary structure onto the stories taking note of Langdridge's (2007) advice to let the subject speak by focusing on the story as it appears, then choosing the most appropriate

descriptors. Therefore where possible, the young people's own words were used as category descriptors.

### ***3. Organising the utterances into categories***

The NOI model suggests identifying clusters of meaning, rather than breaking apart the narrative as one might if they were carrying out a thematic analysis (Langridge, 2007). In practice, this process was circular and involved reading the stories several times in order to identify clusters of meaning.

### ***4. Identifying principle sentences***

From these clusters of meaning I chose a 'principle sentence' to represent each category. Table 4.1 presents the categorisation process for Kieran's future story. The first column presents the principal sentence that is used to represent the category. The category is identified in the second column. The third column was used to make comments that later informed the discussion of the narrative analysis.

*Table 4.1 A demonstration of the selection of principal sentences and their categorisation: Kieran*

<i>Principle sentence</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b><i>'I've got loads of back-up plans'</i></b>	Self-belief	He makes reference to his dreams boosting him. Accepts that they might not happen but explains that he will try his hardest to make them happen using his imagination and ability. Compares himself to Richard Branson.
<b><i>'I just want a nice life'</i></b>	Desire for a nice life	Kieran wants to earn as much money as he can to help him achieve his dreams and to get away from a normal boring life. He values family and friendship over money. Wants to make the most of his opportunities in order to live life to the full.

In order to formulate a holistic picture, the contents collected in each category were described. Having identified principle sentences to reflect each category, I decided the most logical way of referring to the stories in the discussion of the analysis was to assign line numbers to the future stories. Discussion of these future stories was then contextualised by broader reference to the past stories.

#### **4.2.3 Further models of narrative analysis drawn upon**

As highlighted earlier, one of the reasons Hiles and Cermak's (2008) model of (NOI) was used was because it is inclusive and pluralistic in nature. The model advocates drawing on other interpretive perspectives, if this is deemed helpful. Gergen and Gergen's (1986) approach was drawn upon in order to make inferences on the overall structure of the narratives. The authors identify two primary structures, progressive and regressive narratives. A progressive story is one in which the protagonist overcomes adversity and regains what has been lost. A regressive tale is a story in which the protagonist suffers adversity despite the best of intentions (Murray, 2008). This approach was considered particularly useful given the emphasis this research places on exploring whether the young people's stories contained themes of potential and growth and these themes are considered to stem from progressive narratives. Therefore the third research question will be explored through an analysis of the overall structure of the young people's narrative (progressive versus regressive).

#### **4.2.4 Conclusions on the narrative analysis used in the current research**

Creswell (2009) urges researchers using qualitative analysis to recognise that it involves multiple levels of analysis and is far more interactive than linear in practice. Breaking the text down and applying layers of analysis was a lengthy process. Nevertheless it was useful because it required me to stay close to the data and helped to ensure that my interpretation was based on the meaning the young people conveyed through their stories. By engaging in this iterative approach and outlining the steps that were taken, I have been able to evidence a consistent, systematic and transparent approach to the data analysis. This is necessary given that the rigour of NOI relies on establishing transparency (Hiles & Cermak, 2008, p. 161).

## Chapter 5: Findings

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These eight profiles depict a rich and differential picture of the future envisaged by young people with SEBD, as emerging from their life stories. The part played by stories of the future within the individual life story was intertwined with the past, and the analysis of the stories reveals meaningful similarities and differences in their outlooks.

### 5.1 Tommy's story

#### 5.1.1 Tommy's past

'...I'm Fourteen...I've travelled my whole life...my family come from gypsy families...my mum tried to, like, bring me up a bit different to that...she didn't want me being like my cousins and my brother...I've been here a few years...I've only been abroad once, it's weird isn't it considering I've travelled a lot...my mum's not got the best of money innit, and it's quite a lot of money to go abroad...mum says if we had the money, if we was rich...we'd have a big mansion abroad...

...I hate school but I've gotta put my head down cause last year I was, like, on the verge of getting expelled...I've been brought up around older people...and obviously I was with them and just doing it as well...I had a laugh doing it, it's just not right like, it's against the law...and it was rubbing off at school... all the people from my primary school came here but I don't chill with none of them...

...I'm close to my mum but we've been through quite a lot...my dad used to be a bit of a prick...my mum's not strict, she has her rules...trust me, I don't want to piss my mum off...but she lets me do a lot of stuff that a normal fourteen year-old wouldn't be allowed to do...I'm a bit grown up for my age...she says if I act up like a kid, she's going to treat me like a kid, which is fair enough...it's like a guideline to get me on track...

...my mum only broke up with my dad like a year ago...my mum's happier now...that's what I want, my mum to be happy...I don't get on with my dad...I only just found out I got a sister, a half-sister...I was like 'Who the fuck are you?'...after that was when I was going through the stage of getting kicked out of school, going off the rails...me and my brother are probably closer...he'll be like....'Stop being a prick'...but he can't talk cause he's a hypocrite...people told me if it weren't for my mum I would have been in prison by now...I was putting her through hell, not just in school but out of school as well, getting arrested and stuff...it's just respect innit, respect for my mum...'

### 5.1.2 Tommy's future

1 '...I'd like to coach or something teaching football, like go round  
2 different schools and that...whenever I got to do my work  
3 experience...that's when I am gonna try and start it...that's  
4 something which school's helped with, like encouraged me with  
5 even more....I do football outside of school as well....nearly semi-  
6 professional...or construction...it's just another thing I enjoy  
7 doing with my hands instead of sitting down writing...**I do a bit of**  
8 **work with my cousin and my uncle**...my cousin does electricity,  
9 he's got his own electricity company....my other brother is a  
10 designer like decorator and my dad just does stuff...anything with  
11 construction...probably own my own construction company or  
12 something... I've always wanted to do something like that...  
13  
14 ...or it could turn out to be coaching...it could turn out to be  
15 either... study it at college, that's all I can do, get better at it...I  
16 just want to go straight to college...get working quick time...I  
17 wanna get out like, I dunno, the way I've grown up a bit quicker  
18 for my age, so I just wanna get on with it...I hate school but I  
19 know I've got to get through school so I can get money and get a  
20 job and that...**my mum's always getting me on track...my**  
21 **brother's grown up a bit now**, like from what he used to be....I'm  
22 not too sure what I'm going to be like...  
23  
24 ...I want to go to America when I'm older...get away from  
25 everything...it depends. I might not, it just depends on what I'm  
26 doing here and how I'm getting on...I'm going into a hostel when  
27 I'm sixteen...I just want to get out, just want to start earning my  
28 own money...that and other stuff as well...after a year in a hostel  
29 you get a flat anyway don't you...the council gets you a  
30 flat...maybe saving my money and getting a house...If I put my  
31 mind to something I will do it...depends what I put my mind  
32 for...even if I hate school but I know I've got to get through...just  
33 want to move to a better place you know...it's like perfect innit  
34 really, it's just money, everything, big house...better than here,  
35 it's all just...'

Table 5.1  
A Demonstration of the Selection of  
Principal Sentences and Their Categorisation: Tommy

<i>Principle sentence</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b><i>'I do a bit of work with my cousin and my uncle'</i></b>	Positive learning opportunities	His aspirations stem from positive opportunities i.e. working with his family and football, which have left him feeling proud and like he has experience on which to build.
<b><i>'My brother's grown up a bit now'</i></b>	Positive role models	Tommy refers to positive and negative role models in his story. Importantly he aligns himself with positive role models.
<b><i>'My mum's always getting me on track'</i></b>	Family support	His mum has kept him at school and out of prison. She has earned his respect and he wants to make her happy. She has contributed to his motivation for a better life in the future.

### 5.1.3 Analysis of Tommy's story

#### ***Q1. Strengths and resources***

Tommy has been able to capitalise on practical opportunities to explore potential careers for the future. He has had opportunities to develop his football skills in and out of school, something he is proud of and something that school has helped him with (lines 5-6). He has also had opportunities to learn about the construction trade by working with his cousin and uncle (lines 7-8). These opportunities have left him feeling like he has options (line 6) and he is able to identify work that he might be suited to (lines 6-7). He views his forthcoming work experience as an opportunity to build on these experiences (lines 2-3), and even talks of owning his own construction company one day (lines 11-12).

Tommy refers to a number of role models in his narrative (lines 8-11). He tends to position himself alongside positive role models such as his uncle and his cousin (line

11-12), as apposed to other less positive role models (lines 21-22). Family support is a theme across his past and future stories, with his mum central to his narrative. In his past story, Tommy explains that he is close to his mum, and describes the ways in which she keeps him on the right track and out of trouble. He explains that he is sticking it out at school out of respect for his mum, because he wants to make her happy. Overall, he positions her as someone who has done her best to give him a better chance in life and has inspired him to work hard to achieve this in his future.

***Q2. Qualities that he has built as a result of earlier negative experiences***

In his past story, Tommy recalls that he didn't have much money growing up and how his mum told him life would be better if they had money. In particular she told him they would live in a better place (in a mansion abroad). In his future story, Tommy speaks of his desire for a better life and the way in which this is motivating him to get through school, despite hating it. He wants to start working as soon as possible in order to secure his independence (lines 27-29). He comments that he wants to get out (line 27), go straight to college (lines 16), save money (lines 19-20) and move into a hostel (lines 28-29), with a view to getting his own house somewhere better in the future (line 30). He also talks about his hopes to travel to America one day (line 25). Tommy ends his story by saying he wants to move to somewhere better, better than where he lives now, and paints a picture of somewhere that is -in his words - 'perfect' (lines 33-35).

***Q3. Themes of growth and potential***

Given the strengths, qualities and hopes that are present in Tommy's story, his narrative could be best described as progressive. He is determined to secure a better life for himself in the future. He thinks he can achieve this by drawing on the support of his family and making the most of the opportunities available to him in the future.

## 5.2 Sarah's story

### 5.2.1 Sarah's past

'...I was in Ireland...my nan was up there...to be honest I don't like her. Cause Irish women, they favouritism boys. Boys are like stars, like everything in their eyes, gold, and they don't like girls... My brother was just everything to my nan. She's like that with all her grandchildren...it was hard. My mum just didn't want us to stay there...because my dad was down here...so we only lived up there for a bit...I had an accent, when I first started primary school...an Irish accent. They just thought I was a pikey...a traveller. Cause I had really long blonde hair. I could sort of put it out like, the accent, sort of put it away...It was hard though. I got excluded once...set off some fart gas...

...I had a break between secondary and primary school cause I went back to Ireland...I got kicked out in year 7 or 8...just for being naughty and fighting all the time...not going into lessons...just being a complete and utter idiot...my cousins...used to tell me off if I was being naughty...they were older than me... it felt like having a parent...

...the only thing that I probably liked was PE...I took all of my aggression and energy out...then I started getting frustrated cause I couldn't be bothered to do it...I went to another school like this...but I got kicked out after five weeks...got bored of it and didn't go to school...I come here at the beginning of Year 9 I'd say...it's alright...less people, more one-to-one, it's just easier...it would be more hard cause you couldn't concentrate, get frustrated...because of my ADHD...'

### 5.2.2 Sarah's future

1 '...I wanna go college and do level 3 catering...**I've got level 1 and**  
2 **2 already**...specifically pastry...I love baking...when I am thirty-ish,  
3 I want to open a bakery shop...I'll probably be doing that in  
4 2013...because I'm having a baby...I'm still shocked, I probably  
5 won't really think about til the day that actually comes...it goes  
6 quick, really quick, you'd be surprised... quicker then what you  
7 think...too quick...it would be hard for me to start college this  
8 year while being heavily pregnant...I've looked into colleges and  
9 there's like, night colleges...I could do two hours a night for a  
10 year and I would get my level 3.....**I've got family around me as**  
11 **well so I'll never go without**...too helpful...my mum will have  
12 them most of the time...they're always gonna be there, same as  
13 his family as well...I've been brought up around children...my  
14 mum's got twelve...I'd like to have four other children...I wouldn't  
15 want twelve...it's too much...  
16  
17 ...I think I'll be more happier. Cause you haven't got all that stress  
18 of school...exams, just too much of it...I can't stand sitting in  
19 lessons. I gotta get up and walk around or fiddle...I've got too  
20 much energy...I can't stand sitting in offices, I'd rather be on my  
21 feet all day being more hands on...myself and baby, like make  
22 myself proud...my baby will be in nursery so probably part-time  
23 work...either working in a nursery or getting a job in a restaurant.  
24 I've already done both...It would be more for the baby, not me. I  
25 wouldn't be going out, partying, doing things that I'd like to do...  
26  
27 ...nothing ever works out to plan though, you always think what  
28 you want...how I'd like it to be, but if you don't go down that  
29 path you could go down another. Something could go completely  
30 different...if you really wanna do something, you should head up  
31 to it and just focus on that thing and just don't let other things  
32 pull you off track...if I set my mind to it I can do anything really...'

Table 5.2  
A Demonstration of the Selection of  
Principal Sentences and Their Categorisation: Sarah

<i>Principle sentence</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b><i>'I've got level 1 and 2 already'</i></b>	Positive learning opportunities	She has completed work experience and believes this will help her in the future. She has been able to learn in provision A and found PE to be a useful outlet for her frustration.
<b><i>'I've got family around me so I'll never go without'</i></b>	Family support	Her family will provide moral, practical and financial support and will always be there for her. She describes how being brought up around children has prepared her for motherhood.

### 5.2.3 Analysis of Sarah's story

#### **Q1. Strengths and resources**

Sarah has had a positive experience at Provision A, stating that she has been able to learn there. In particular she has had positive opportunities to develop her skills in bakery via a school placement, and explains that this has left her wanting to go to college to pursue further qualifications in this area (lines 1-2). Sarah also makes reference to her experience of working in a nursery and a restaurant, which she thinks will put her in a good position should she decide to apply for similar jobs in the future (lines 23-24).

The importance of family is a theme across her past and future stories. Her belief in her ability to be a good parent may stem, in part, from her own upbringing. In her past story Sarah describes the way in which her older cousins used to take care of her in the playground. In her future story she notes that she has been brought up surrounded by young cousins and nieces (lines 13-14). Furthermore, she knows she will receive wider family support when she becomes a mother

(lines 10-11), which will include moral support (lines 12-13), practical support (line 11-12) and, should she need it, financial support (line 11).

***Q2. Qualities that she has built as a result of earlier negative experiences***

Despite the surprise (lines 4-5), compromise (lines 24-25) and uncertainty (lines 3-4) that her pregnancy has brought, Sarah has a determined attitude towards her future (lines 30-32). She talks realistically about life not always going to plan (lines 27-29), but outlines the way in which she will juggle the demands of being a young mother whilst pursuing her education (lines 8-9). She has already explored ways of completing her qualifications part-time (lines 9-10). She demonstrates this self-determination when she says that she can do anything if she sets her mind to it (line 32).

***Q3. Themes of growth and potential***

Sarah's story is optimistic in tone and she suggests that she will be happier in the future because she will no longer have the stress of school (lines 17-18). She illustrates this by drawing a direct comparison between her present and her future, explaining that whilst having too much energy makes school harder (lines 18-20), it will come in helpful in the future in her role as a mother (lines 20-22). Overall, Sarah's story of her future is a progressive narrative, in which she hopes to build on the positive learning opportunities she has already had at school to gain further qualifications. At the same time she plans to draw on her determination and family support to overcome the unexpected.

## 5.3 Kieran's story

### 5.3.1 Kieran's past

'...I've had quite an interesting life, friends and enemies and stuff...I've always been close to my mum...still am... [and] my nan...primary school I was a little shit...stabbed somebody with a pencil...bad time...got excluded...went to three different schools...didn't used to take tablets back then...I had really severe ADHD back when I was younger... got diagnosed when I was four...when you're diagnosed with it young it means that you've just got it really bad...my house burnt down when I was three...the whole inside of the flat...there was this ants nest in my mum's house...so I stole my mum's lighter and I burnt them...the perfume on my mum's clothes...flames just 'Whooom'. I can still see the flames in front of my eyes, still remember it...I was scared but...that kind of shit used to excite me...

...wish I could turn back time...one hundred percent change loads of stuff, if I knew what could happen in the future. Some days I do wish that I would wake up and it was just a dream...I could start back at primary school and just be good from there...change the friends that I had...friends who have been from being pricks to being sneaks to being snitches to being rotten...friends who have died...she used to drink a lot...taking a few drugs...I used to drink with her...used to think it was a laugh...I was getting late for school cause I was staying with her every night...I wish...I knew what was happening with her...that I could just take the alcohol off her...I felt when she was gone that it was my fault...it weren't whatsoever...I'm kind of glad I had those times...

...I applied for Brits school but I didn't get in...because of my attendance...they look for ninety-three percent, mine's eighty-three...but I'm still gonna carry on with my acting ...you've just got to take it on the chin sometimes...I used to get bullied...my behaviour...they thought I was weird...I had a couple of cool teachers...the help, the people who help you...I just used to mess about...I can control my anger problems now but then I couldn't. I was all on impulse I used to hit the wall, hit someone...I had fights with them...I just kept getting excluded, excluded, excluded until I came here...'

Now days its calmed down...I can have moments...when I wanna have a laugh...I thought it was a bit shit here...but now...when you start getting used to it...they know how to keep students cool...how to keep me cool, so as long as I'm keeping cool...when you start putting you head down, just go to school, leave school...that's what I'm going to do and at the same time get education...the way I see it is I'm getting my GCSEs and I'm leaving...'

### 5.3.2 Kieran's future

1 '...I'm going to go to college and do performing arts...theatre first  
2 then...film work...I love comedy...after I've done my acting.....I  
3 want to start directing films...**I've got loads of back-up plans**...if  
4 none of that happens with the acting I'll just go straight into my  
5 cooking...I learnt at college, I did a cookery course for a year with  
6 Sarah...it's my ideas all along...my imagination...never read a  
7 cookery book in my life...I want to own my own  
8 restaurant...borrowing money from a bank and then pay them  
9 back from all the money I make...I rap as well so I wanna get into  
10 my rapping, do music...and then I will write a book one  
11 day...cause I've had quite an interesting life...

12  
13 ...still working, still keeping my hands scruffy, still doing business.  
14 Earning...as much money as I can, hopefully buy a big  
15 house...money ain't that important...more to me is having friends  
16 and family...money is always gonna be there, money comes and  
17 goes, money comes when you put your mind to it, money does  
18 this and that, but your life only comes once. You've got to take  
19 the opportunity to make sure you live life to the fullest, be who  
20 you wanna be and my ambitions are what I'm telling you  
21 now...money don't buy you happiness but money sure does help.  
22 So I want to get money to help me with my dreams...**I just want**  
23 **to have a nice life**...

24  
25 ...I feel it's a gift to be not that money motivated cause people  
26 can do nasty things for money...nasty, horrible, rotten things...but  
27 that's not me...if I didn't get all this, I wouldn't care to be honest,  
28 I would care but I wouldn't. I would be like 'Oh, there's my  
29 dreams gone right out the window' but I wouldn't really  
30 mind...I'd just carry on to lead the normal boring life...

31  
32 ...I've got ADHD, I do things on impulse, and get in trouble for my  
33 behaviour. But I think that it's helped me think what am I going  
34 to do in life...think positive...think quicker...think deeply about  
35 things...plan my life without think negatively and getting down,  
36 thinking it's never going to happen...I'm not one of those people  
37 who thinks 'Shit this ain't never gonna happen so I'm gonna go  
38 out and rob someone', some people think like that...

39  
40 ...all of this may not happen...these are just dreams...always  
41 boost, pushing me up... but I am gonna try my hardest to make it  
42 happen...using my imagination and my ability and my  
43 capability...look at Richard Branson...school will just become a  
44 memory, man...things only get better...'

Table 5.3  
A Demonstration of the Selection of  
Principal Sentences and Their Categorisation: Kieran

<i>Principle sentence</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b><i>'I've got loads of back-up plans'</i></b>	Self-belief	He makes reference to his dreams boosting him. Accepts that they might not happen but explains that he will try his hardest to make them happen using his imagination and ability. Compares himself to Richard Branson.
<b><i>'I just want a nice life'</i></b>	Desire for a nice life	Kieran wants to earn as much money as he can to help him achieve his dreams and to get away from a normal boring life. He values family and friendship over money. Wants to make the most of his opportunities in order to live life to the full.

### 5.3.3 Analysis of Kieran's story

#### ***Q1. Strengths and resources***

In his past story, Kieran acknowledges the support he has had; he explains that he has always been close to his mum, has had some cool teachers and that the staff in provision A know how to keep students calm. He begins his future story explaining that he would like to be an actor (line1-2), but goes on to talk about his many back-up plans (lines 3-5). Some of his future career plans are directly linked to positive learning opportunities he has had in school (lines 5-6). Whilst he accepts that some of his dreams may not happen (line 40), his self-belief is evident when he states that he will try his hardest (lines 41-42), outlines his resources (lines 42-43) and compares himself to a successful role model (line 43).

Kieran is keen to work hard in order to secure himself a nice life (lines 41-42). He explains that whilst it is important not to be too money orientated (line 25), money will play a part in helping him secure the life that he hopes for in the future. This is

illustrated in his comment that money doesn't buy you happiness but it does help (line 21).

***Q2. Qualities that he has built as a result of earlier negative experiences***

Kieran's positivity is evident throughout his narrative. In his past story, he comments that you have to take things on the chin sometimes and be grateful for the things that you do have. In his future story, Kieran identifies ways in which having ADHD has been helpful: it helps him to think quickly (line 34), think positively (line 34) and forward plan (line 33-34). He goes on to draw a comparison between himself and people who think negatively (lines 36-38). Kieran suggests that his positivity sets him apart from others because it would enable him to accept life if it did not turn out the way he had planned.

***Q3. Themes of growth and potential***

Overall Kieran's narrative is progressive in tone. His future story is one of hope, ambition and potential. He comments that he wants to live life to the full (lines 22-23) and acknowledges that his dreams are motivating him to work hard. His optimism is evident in his comment that he may be able to draw on his interesting life experiences to write a book one day (lines 10-11). This optimism extends throughout his past and future narrative and is epitomised in his final comment that things will only get better (lines 44).

## 5.4 Jamie's story

### 5.4.1 Jamie's past

'...there's not a lot to know about me...if I'm in a bad mood then I won't work and if I'm in a good mood then I will...I hated primary school...any teacher that I had, left...I had loads of supply teachers...you're supposed to get used to one teacher... they're supposed to help you through things but because mine kept changing...it was making things difficult...I had to do the same work over and over...got fed up in the end...just said, 'I'm not doing it anymore'...there was this one girl that I used to fight with...all the time...nothing helped...there was a few people....not a lot of them...my teacher in Year 6 told me that I wasn't going to get anywhere in life...

...my mum and dad broke up...dad went to live with his dad...I had an hearing aid in year 6...I used to hate it...I used to wear it to school then take it out...my mum...worked in the school...whenever I saw her, just shove it back in...everyone was the same...nobody had anything wrong with them...they didn't know because I didn't wear it...I was really anti-social...really socially awkward...I'm still quite socially awkward...when it comes to me meeting new people...I won't talk...deep down I am quite shy...I don't really show it...

...Secondary... was scary...from being the oldest in school to the youngest...I was okay up there cause my brother was there...we've got a really close relationship...it was a big change in life...I just started speaking to everyone...I was more friends with the older people...that's how I got into smoking...couldn't really get on with anyone in my year...I was just getting into trouble all the time and fights...then in year 8 I got kicked out...My Head Teacher just hated me...didn't like me at all...

I went to respite [provision B]...that was what really made me want to settle down...I had to behave...it got me into a smaller group...lessons were easier because there wasn't many distractions...then I was back for two weeks...got kicked out again for no reason...I was being really good...just had a big meeting and they just said that they'd had enough...I hadn't done anything wrong...[Provision A has] been amazing...it's just changed me...at home, here...much calmer, I haven't been arguing as much...I've grown up...it was my last chance basically, to change, and that was the time that I needed to do it...if I need anything I'll go to my keyworker...if I have trouble at home...in school... she talks to me about it...I won't need to talk to everyone...she's like my school mum basically...I feel better...'

#### 5.4.2 Jamie's future

1 '...Well I'm going to college in September and I'm doing  
2 childcare and if I get enough GCSEs...I need to get four...C grade  
3 or D grade...I am hoping to get Cs but...then I will get put  
4 straight through to level 2, which means I only have to do it for  
5 a year and because **I already do extended work experience in a**  
6 **nursery**...out of choice...I can go to the nursery that I am at now  
7 and do an apprenticeship...then...I can get a job and...it will look  
8 better on my CV...it's just something I've always wanted to do  
9 because my mum's done it for ages...I work in the same nursery  
10 as she does...I've never thought of anything else...  
11  
12 ...I'm gonna give up smoking and that as well. I wanna give  
13 up...cause I wanna save money if I wanna go on holidays and  
14 that, then I can't spend all my money on cigarettes and if I have  
15 a kid...even now, I don't smoke around babies...so I'd feel even  
16 bad if it's my own kid...  
17  
18 ...I want to have my own house, but I don't want to move out  
19 until about eighteen...get a job and that first...in this area...I  
20 wouldn't move away...I've got all my friends...my social life is  
21 here...  
22  
23 ...now I wanna be older, but when I'm older I'll probably want  
24 to be younger again...I just reckon it will happen because my  
25 brother...now cause he's eighteen...he says that he misses  
26 school and that so I can see that happening with me...**my**  
27 **brother will help me**...he's like my home counsellor...'

Table 5.4  
A Demonstration of the Selection of  
Principal Sentences and Their Categorisation: Jamie

<i>Principle sentence</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b><i>'I already do extended work experience in a nursery'</i></b>	Positive learning opportunities	This experience has created an opportunity to do an apprenticeship and is motivating her to get the grades she needs, in order to pursue her training.
<b><i>'My brother will help me'</i></b>	Family support	Her brother is a great source of support. Her mother is a role model and she wants to follow in her footsteps. She knows she is able to continue living at home if she needs to.

### 5.4.3 Analysis of Jamie's story

#### ***Q1. Strengths and resources***

In her past story, Jamie explains that her time in provision B made her want to settle down, and describes her time in provision A as an amazing experience that changed her. She identifies a number of positives about this learning experience; smaller class sizes, less distractions and a positive relationship with her keyworker. She also had the opportunity to carry out work experience in a nursery (lines 5-6), which has led to further opportunities in the form of an apprenticeship when she leaves school (lines 6-7). These positive learning opportunities have left her motivated to achieve the grades she needs in order to get into college and pursue her training (lines 1-4).

Jamie explains that she has always wanted to work in a nursery (line 8) and positions her mother as a role model (lines 9-10) when she says that she wants to work in the same nursery when she qualifies (lines 9-10). Jamie wants to continue living in the same area in the future (lines 19-21) and knows she will be able to live at home until she is financially independent. This links to the second theme identified in her narrative, family support. Jamie describes her brother as a great source of support in

both her past and future story. In her past story, Jamie explains that he played a significant role in supporting her transition to secondary school. In her future story she states that she will be okay in the future because her brother will be there to help her (lines 26-27). Jamie's confidence in her brother's support reflects the value she places on interpersonal relationships and the positive theme of family support prevalent throughout her narrative.

### ***Q3. Themes of growth and potential***

Jamie's future begins as one of progress but the tone of her narrative changes towards the end of her story. She suggests she might look back on her youth with regret (lines 23-24), missing school like her brother did. Nevertheless, overall Jamie's narrative is progressive in tone. She outlines the way in which she will build on the positive learning experiences she has already had (lines 5-8) and identifies areas in which she hopes to make positive changes in the future: giving up smoking (12-15), securing a job (line 19) and a home in the future (line 18).

## 5.5 Gemma's story

### 5.5.1 Gemma's past

'...I've always liked school...In year 9, I was playing up like being really naughty...I nearly got chucked out...I don't know why, I just went through a stage of hating school, hating everyone and hating myself, proper like depressed...I was messed up...there were days I was refusing to go in but my mum would always make me...or I would pull a sicky...if I had an argument with one of my friends, I'd blow it up and make it this big thing and then like, wanna go home...I was a proper drama queen... if something happened, I'd make out it's that massive thing when it's not...

...they're always there for me...my mum and my dad and my sisters...but my teachers as well...my student support officer...when I'm in a proper bad mood in school or something she will calm me down...this sounds really stupid but it's one of my friends...we were naughty together...then one day she literally turned her boat around and was like, 'I'm going to be good', now she's deputy head girl...when I do something wrong...she'll just tell me right from wrong...and then they referred me to [Provision B]...

...that sort of helped me....made me think...it was like, if I mess up again then I am out and then that would mean a new start in a new school. I wouldn't be able to do what I want to do...I wouldn't know anyone there and then I would have to pick new courses and they don't do performing arts at the school...drama and performing arts have made me confident...the teachers are part of it cause they boost it a lot...I hate that feeling that I could have been going to another school...I realised that I need to put my head down...if I want to succeed in what I wanna do then I've gotta like, work...get it out the way and then I can do what I wanna do...'

### 5.5.2 Gemma's future

1 '...I want to go to a college where...there's a few of my friends but  
2 not all of them, so there is kind of a new start...I don't want to  
3 say goodbye to my friends but...I wanna focus...I just feel like I  
4 want to make a fresh start in life...meet new people...  
5  
6 ...I definitely know that I wanna work in the performing arts  
7 industry...you've just got to work hard for it...lots of auditions...if  
8 you want to succeed at something then don't give up...put my  
9 head down and try my hardest...**I know that if I work hard**  
10 **enough I can do it**...there are millions of people who are better  
11 than me...I mean come on...but if I just keep working at  
12 it...hopefully. Maybe not famous, but at least in one  
13 Broadway...get into a good theatre production...not for the fame,  
14 I just want to succeed at what I want to do...be successful...it's  
15 not all about money it's about my happiness and doing what I  
16 wanna do. But money obviously is a bit important, I don't want  
17 to be poor...  
18  
19 ...mainly for me, cause it's what I want to do and I want a bit of  
20 happiness but cause, for my mum as well...none of my  
21 sisters...that one hasn't got a job...**I just want to make her**  
22 **proud**...my older sisters...they're all still living at home. And I'm  
23 like fifteen and when I'm sixteen then I am moving out...why  
24 would you want to stay at home when you've lived here all this  
25 time...all this freedom you have...I'm bored here...I really do want  
26 to go to America cause I've never been there....need to go to  
27 Australia...Africa as well...they just seem like really interesting  
28 countries...I wanna move somewhere interesting, like New  
29 York...it's just the whole Broadway thing...  
30  
31 ...if I become really successful and really famous, I ain't joking but  
32 that feeling that people look up to you...I've been inspired by  
33 Jessie J and I know what it feels like to be inspired by someone,  
34 knowing that someone is like that about me. It's like you being a,  
35 what's it called, a psy...a psychologist, it's like you're helping  
36 people and people may look up to you...if this doesn't work, if  
37 this whole thing goes down the drain, my whole career, I'd  
38 wanna do something helping people, like become a...Social  
39 Worker...a back-up plan...or like a teacher...  
40  
41 ...I basically have an obsession with Jessie J...and I think...what  
42 she said...'**Make a mold from what you want from your life and**  
43 **don't let anyone else make it for you**'...a tweet...which is true  
44 and **it just made me think...**'

Table 5.5  
A Demonstration of the Selection of  
Principal Sentences and Their Categorisation: Gemma

<i>Principle sentence</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b><i>'I know that if I work hard enough I can do it'</i></b>	Self-determination	Gemma vows to keep working hard until she has succeeded and wants to be happy doing what she does.
<b><i>'I just want to make her proud'</i></b>	Desire to make self and others proud	She wants to become independent by moving out of the family home. Becoming successful will make her feel proud of herself and she wants others to look up to her, either in the performing arts industry or a helping profession.
<b><i>'Make a mold from what you want from your life and don't let anyone else make it for you... it just made me think...'</i></b>	Positive role models	She has been inspired by role models in the musical industry.

### 5.5.3 Analysis of Gemma's story

#### **Q1. Strengths and resources**

In her past story Gemma identifies her parents, sisters, and members of school staff as people who have helped her. There are also a number of positive themes in Gemma's future story, in particular: her self-determination, desire to make herself and others proud and positive role models.

Gemma hopes to break into the performing arts industry (lines 6-7), and whilst she acknowledges that it will be hard work and competitive (line 7) her self-determination is evident (lines 7-12). She hopes this career will provide her with a good income (lines 16-17) but more importantly, she believes it will make her happy (lines 14-16). Role models are a theme across Gemma's past and future stories. In her past story, Gemma makes reference to the impact her friend had on her when she made the decision to behave, and describes the way in which this has helped her to do the same. In her

future story, Gemma explains the ways in which those in the industry have inspired her and left her even more determined (lines 41-44), and wanting to inspire others (lines 31-34).

Gemma wants to make herself and other proud (lines 19-20). She believes that if she is successful people will look up to her, whether this is in the performing arts industry (lines 31-32) or a helping profession (lines 36-39). Gemma believes that by becoming successful she will also make her mum happy (line 20) and, unlike her sisters, she hopes to move out of the family home when she is sixteen (lines 22-23).

***Q2. Qualities that she has built as a result of earlier negative experiences***

In her past story Gemma describes the impact provision B had on her. It was significant in helping her to see that she would not be able to pursue her career in the future unless she started to work, as she puts it – she had one last chance. This experience left her motivated, willing to work and is likely to have contributed to her self-determination.

***Q3. Themes of growth and potential***

Throughout her narrative, Gemma speaks of the opportunities that the future presents. In the short-term, she is looking forward to going to a new college in order to have a fresh start and focus on her work (lines 1-4). In the long-term, she looks forward to the freedom she will have as she gets older and speaks of her aspirations to travel to different parts of the world (lines 25-29). Gemma's determination, desire to make herself and others proud and her ability to acknowledge opportunities culminate in a narrative that is progressive in tone.

## 5.6 James' story

### 5.6.1 James' past

'...I got kicked out of my first primary school... I was always fighting...the day was coming up you know, when I get kicked out....it wasn't that school it was just the group of people that were there...I was small and all the older kids used to think they could pick on me...I got kicked out in the beginning of year 8...same thing...Year 10s, 11s would start on me...a group of them and I would just go and beat them up...all of the builders walked over and pulled me off....

I started boxing and rugby at primary and secondary school...they don't do rugby here...you could hurt people and you didn't get moaned at...it would kind of take some of the anger out...it would but it wouldn't...you could punch a bag and it didn't matter, you weren't hurting no one, except yourself if you punched a bit wrong....

... partly the dyslexia as well... it was just another word...I didn't really do any work at all...they moan at you if you couldn't do the work properly...if it wasn't to their standard.....home tutoring since September....I didn't really like it at the start but I sort of started to like it nearer to the end...she didn't teach me any differently to any other person, it was like, you might have dyslexia but you can still do the work...I prefer that then here...it's always loud...I worked well on my own...it's quiet and that...I got the work done...I found it easier cause it was one-to-one...the teacher was nice...really basic stuff that makes a difference...talk to you at a level...I'd be doing the same work as other people but slower...I knew everyone there so...it helps...and if I finished doing the work they'd set me I could go...it's an old building...it's just so big and old and you sort of respect it cause it's still there...

...they just put me here for a placement...they wasn't sure what to do and then my Social Worker was like 'Go to [name of school] cause it's a good one'...I was like 'Okay cool', so we appealed to go there and the appeals still going...I don't really like it here at all....my mum and dad wake me and say go to school...I probably learn more when I am at home then when I am here...I can cook...If I don't go to school I always go to work with my dad...give me a frame and I'd build it, put it together...like if you do an essay on how to build an engine....you can write an essay on it but you can't do it...the practical stuff...It's just a piece of paper...I don't learn much from a piece of paper...you don't learn life skills from a piece of paper...'

### 5.6.2 James' future

1 '...I wanna live round an old farm...you've got loads of land, its  
2 quiet...it's loud and I just like quiet places...planes fly over and  
3 you can hear them and stuff like that...  
4  
5 ...It hasn't like struck me yet that I need to get, I dunno, that I  
6 need to do the work to get the GCSEs...I might work with my dad  
7 or my uncle...my dad's a mechanic my uncle's a builder...I help  
8 build at home...and I always help my dad out and work with  
9 him...making cement and help lay some bricks and make tea...if I  
10 wanted to be a mechanic, I've got some experience to put on my  
11 CV...**you can write it but it helps if you know how to fix it as**  
12 **well....I've been there, done it...**  
13  
14 ...I'm going to a new school soon...it's boarding school so I like  
15 **can't get in trouble on the weekdays** cause I'll be at school...it  
16 will change me, a bit more independent than my mum and dad  
17 being there all the time... clothes washing and stuff like that...  
18 they've got like fishing lakes and I want to try all that...the  
19 motocross track and the fishing, that's to encourage me to do the  
20 work...there's like three people in a class...it's a bit like  
21 Hogwarts...you go through the big gates...'

Table 5.6  
A Demonstration of the Selection of  
Principal Sentences and Their Categorisation: James

<i>Principle sentences</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b><i>'You can write it but it helps if you know how to fix it as well...I've been there, done it'</i></b>	Positive learning opportunities at school	He explains that if he chooses to become a mechanic, he already has some experience to put on his CV. He comments that he has been there and done it.
<b><i>'I'm going to a new school soon, it's boarding school so I like can't get in trouble on the weekdays'</i></b>	Positive learning opportunities at home	James is looking forward to the opportunities his new school offers him and to becoming independent. The building inspires him. He had a positive tutoring experience. The opportunity to do rugby and boxing in mainstream school was helpful.

### 5.6.3 Analysis of James' story

#### **Q1. Strengths and resources**

James' future story centres on opportunity; capitalising on opportunities he has had in the past and looking forward to opportunities he will have in the future. In his past story James states that he learns more at home, suggesting that the practical nature of these activities suits him (lines 11-12). In his future story, James explains that he might work with his dad or his uncle when he is older (lines 6-7). He clearly values the opportunities he has already had to work with them (lines 8-11). It has left him feeling empowered about his ability to carry out similar work in the future, with him suggesting that having been there and done it is more helpful than being able to write about it (line 12).

James also identifies a number of positive learning experiences in school. In his past story, he explains that having the opportunity to box and play rugby in his mainstream school provided him with a positive outlet for his anger. He also states that the one-to-one nature and quiet atmosphere of tutoring helped him to work. Perhaps even more

importantly, it was during tutoring that he received the message that he is just as able to as any other person, despite having dyslexia. He depicts the way in which the old building he attended commanded respect and describes his prospective new school in a similar way (lines 20-21). In his future story James explains that he might start attending a boarding school, he is looking forward to the opportunities this new placement could bring: it will mean he is less likely to get in trouble at home (lines 14-15), and will receive more support with his work (line 20). He will also get to experience new things he may otherwise not have had the opportunity to try (lines 18-20) which would motivate him to do the work.

***Q2. Qualities that he has built as a result of earlier negative experiences***

In his past story James comments that his dyslexia contributed to the difficulties he experienced in school. He explains that he didn't do the work but rather than seeing this as a barrier to achieving, he adopts a far more empowering position, commenting that being able to do something is far more useful than being able to simply write about. He sets himself apart from others by suggesting that he has been able to learn life skills, which cannot simply be learnt from a piece of paper. He is aware of his strengths and the way in which he can draw on these in the future.

***Q3. Themes of growth and potential***

Throughout his narrative James draws contrasts between his present and future. He describes the ways in which his life will change for the better. For example, he explains that where he lives now is noisy, which is why he wants to live on a quiet farm in the future (lines 1-3). The overall tone of James' narrative is progressive. In the short-term he seems motivated by the prospect of starting at his new school. In the long-term he is confident that he has useful experience on which to draw on in order to secure work in the future.

## 5.7 Emma's story

### 5.7.1 Emma's past

'...nought to five I was with my biological mum...she was a drug addict...I can't remember a lot...I didn't go to school much... I didn't have that much support and...I had my half-sister...she's actually been quite stable...I made it by the end but it...made me realise that I can be mature...rise up to the opportunity....I've always been that kind of person...I had to, it was crazy...my mum would go away for days and I would...take action into my own hands...

...when I was five to seven I was in foster care...I remember loads...it's hard to forget...not a good thing...they were horrible...they forced me to eat melon and I didn't like it...I threw up...I hate melon...I started properly going to school...I was just a stupid child...didn't know anything...I missed out...important things you learn to stabilise your life during school...I got the hang of going to school normally...I was a very confident child so I made friends...I was enjoying learning I was doing better than expected, getting my life on track...but then I moved...started a new school...I didn't go to the same school for all of this...sorry, I'm confusing myself...a lot of moving...

...and then I was adopted, yay...I could relax for the first time in five years....enjoy my life...not worry about anything...didn't take any responsibility whatsoever...I could feel like a normal child...we'd go out, feed the ducks...what normal families would do...happy family things...they'd taken responsibility for me and my sister...give us both equal amounts of attention...stabled us...show us what we could do...we're spoiled now...

...a week after we went into foster care, my mum had a baby...but he doesn't live with me because we were fostered after he was born...luckily my brother got adopted [nearby]...his adopted mum's a bit of a bitch... she would make up excuses...we'll find a way, I will take it to court, I will...I have every right to see my brother...(my parents) will support me...my friends, my family, the people who have stood by me through everything (have helped me)...some teachers

...I'm friends with more people out of school...the people in school get on my nerves...last year I went a bit ballistic...I'd run away...got in trouble in school, almost got kicked out...I stick up for what I believe in...if I think someone's being out of order I will stand up for who I think is right...my deputy head...he defended me...everyone was thinking 'Oh, lets get Emma'...and teachers as well...knew I'd respond...wouldn't back down...I did it and they stopped...I had a fight. Sometimes that has to happen to make people realise that you can't do what you want...it was one of the people that made everyone else feel like shit...I gained a lot of respect from people, which is good....

...it's all good now...I realised that I need to start working hard...however I used to be I am no longer like that...it really has made me determined...it's just the whole experience...things that happened when I was younger...the fact that my mum was horrible...it just comes from everything that's happened to me...has made me want to have an amazing life...I've realised, I'm not going to live like you. Plus it's a promise...it was one of like the last things she said to me before we moved...made me promise that I'd try hard...I promised my mum...that I'd get far in life... So I had a few blips but I am on the way...'

### 5.7.2 Emma's future

1 '...I am going to go through college, university...I want to study  
2 forensics...my dream career would be to work for forensics for  
3 the government...it's not what it's like on TV...collecting  
4 evidence, solving, it's like logic...you kind of put everything  
5 together to find out what happened...I like doing that sort of  
6 thing so I reckon I'd be quite good at it...finish university...you can  
7 put it on your CV...that does say a lot to certain people, because a  
8 lot of people don't go to university...and it does kind of show that  
9 your capable of working hard...**I like to know I can do the best of**  
10 **my abilities**...make the most of what I've got...the higher  
11 possibility of me getting a bigger job...

12  
13 I'd probably go travelling...Australia, Egypt, America...I just think  
14 that they are more interesting...and **if not I'll live at home...find**  
15 **work**...if I feel like staying around here, I'll stay here, if I feel like  
16 going somewhere else, I'll go somewhere else...if I have enough  
17 money, I'll rent a flat...I've always been a fan of small, community  
18 places, where everyone knows everyone...I hate huge  
19 communities...there's too many people and everyone just  
20 backstabs everyone and there's no honest people...I will probably  
21 move to the countryside...

22  
23 ...I'm hoping to be stable when I'm twenty-five, thirty...I've got  
24 into the flow of my job...I'd still be going out and having fun...I'd  
25 like to have a family...get married and find a husband that has a  
26 stable job...so I have a good like, surface for a family...I wouldn't  
27 marry for money it's just that he needs to be stable...so it won't  
28 go downhill...he won't fail it and like, be stable...

29  
30 ...the thing is, forensics...you need a lot of energy for it...my dad's  
31 told me anything I put my mind towards I can do it and **I know I**  
32 **can do it**, I just need to work hard...reaching my ambitions...It's  
33 not that difficult, just work hard...'

Table 5.7  
A Demonstration of the Selection of  
Principal Sentences and Their Categorisation: Emma

<i>Principle sentence</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b><i>'I like to know I can do the best of my abilities'</i></b>	Self-determination	Emma has high aspirations to work for the government and make the most of what she's got. She comments that going to university will show that she is capable of working hard.
<b><i>'I know I can do it'</i></b>	Self-belief	She explains how she rose to the opportunity when she had to take care of her sister when she was younger. She talks about her legal rights to see her brother and sticks up for what she believes in.
<b><i>'If not I'll live at home...find work...'</i></b>	Family support	She knows she can live at home if she needs to in the future. Her dad has facilitated her self-determination by telling her she can do anything she puts her mind to. She appreciates the stability her adoptive parents have given her.

### 5.7.3 Analysis of Emma's story

#### **Q1. Strengths and resources**

Emma's self-determination is evident when she describes her dreams of working in forensics for the government (lines 1-2), something she thinks she will be good at (lines 3-6). She explains that she likes to know she has done things to the best of her ability (lines 9-10) and by going to university she will be able to show she is capable of working hard, (6-9) and make the most of what she has (lines 9-10).

Emma explains that her father has fostered her self-belief, telling her she can do anything she puts her mind to (lines 30-31). In her past story she outlines the positive impact her adoptive parents had on her life, and states that they showed her what she

could do. This is likely to have been reinforced when she found she did better than expected when she started school. As well as nurturing her self-belief, her adoptive parents allowed her to feel like a normal child and relieved her of her responsibilities. Family support is key to both her past and future narratives. She describes her sister as quite stable throughout, but explains that her adoptive parents stabled them both. In her future narratives she explains that she will seek stability herself before having her own family in the future (lines 23-28). As well as providing emotional support and stability, Emma also refers to the practical support her adoptive parents provide. She knows that she will be able to live at home should she need to whilst she finds work (lines 14-15).

***Q2. Qualities that she has built as a result of earlier negative experiences***

Within the context of her past story, Emma explains that the things that happened to her when she was younger have left her determined to have an amazing life, and not the life her birth mother had. There is, of course, the reference to her last conversation with her birth mother, where she promised to try hard and get far in life. In her past story Emma also identifies qualities that she built as a direct result of her early experiences. She learnt that she had the ability to rise up to opportunities and take actions into her own hands from a young age. She also describes the way in which she sticks up for what she believes in. Her self-belief is evident in her past story when she talks about 'finding a way' to see her younger brother. It is also evident in her future story when she comments that she knows she can do it, she just has to work hard (lines 32-34). It is clear that these experiences have directly contributed to her sense of self-belief and her determination to get far in life.

***Q3. Themes of growth and potential***

The overarching positive themes of determination, self-belief and family support extend across Emma's past and future narratives. She identifies qualities that she developed as a direct result of earlier negative experiences and is also able to identify ways in which these will help her in the future. Emma's narrative can be best described as progressive in tone as she discusses her ambitions and depicts a future that is, ultimately, full of potential.

## 5.8 Paige's story

### 5.8.1 Paige's past

'...It's a three bedroom house...living there at the moment there's me, my nan, my granddad, my two uncles, my sister and then her other-half...My nan and granddad sleep downstairs, I have a room to myself, [my sister] and her other-half have a room and my [other] sister sleeps downstairs and my uncles have the big bedroom...I've got a brother... there's fifteen of us all together...quite a lot of us...some of them live up...where my brother's dad lives...there's this lake...my brother's dad died in a car crash...all his flowers have been put round the lake and my mum's flowers...

My mum passed away...I was 18 months...then one day, my dad, he just needed a break for a couple of years...just had a nervous breakdown...a stroke and everything...he was paralysed...my dad passed away...

My nan, granddad...uncles, aunties...sometimes my sister [helped]...It's so safe where we live cause it's a council estate...You know everyone round there, even if you don't get along with them, you can still invite them over. Because otherwise you'll never get along with each other...someone new has just moved onto the estate...they can't speak very good English...my nan's doing English lessons and trying to teach them to pronounce their words right...but when she bumps into someone she don't like, that's when you wanna get up and see her...

There are some dodgy people that turn up round the area...the safer neighbours team just don't do anything...sometimes they can make you feel safer but before, when I got chased down the road, they just drove straight past and didn't realise what was going on...I know them all...they have to say 'Can you put that fag out please'...they used to do that to me, but now my nan said 'Yes it's fine she can smoke because of what she's been through'...if they tell me to put the fag out, 'Bye, see you later I'm not putting it out'...if you've got serious issues...they involve the proper police and you're just like 'Why?'...It's going to be going on your record...

...I've only been here since September...I got kicked out of [name of previous school]...I had tuition for six or seven months and then they found me a place here...coming here [helped]...they teach about, you learn...all these lot here, I've known them all of my life...he's always proper looked out for me...'

### 5.8.2 Paige's future

1 '...College...childcare or hair and beauty...I really love kids...  
2 ...probably go to university or something...my sister...she got all  
3 As in her GCSEs in year 11 and I thought 'Wow' like, considering  
4 you didn't go to school for two years...[or] buy my own  
5 salon....**my mate, she's eighteen now and she's just opened up**  
6 **her own salon and she's made so much rich...**making a life of  
7 business....she's got money coming in left, right and  
8 centre...works everyday...money innit...

9

10 ...Social Services...when you hit eighteen, for the first two  
11 years...they will pay your rent and all your bills...those two years  
12 will be covered...if my nan was still alive I would be living with my  
13 nan...if she did pass away I would probably have her house and  
14 still live in the same area...we want our kids to be brought up in  
15 the area that we've been brought up in...my nan and granddad  
16 have lived there all their life, and my mum lived there until she  
17 passed away and my dad lived there until he passed away...so,  
18 basically the whole family has just been brought up...**if you move**  
19 **somewhere else you're not really going to know anyone there,**  
20 **whereas round there you're going to know everyone...**some of  
21 the little kids round there they're like, can sometimes be a little  
22 bit funny but i'll teach my kids the right way...the one thing I  
23 don't want...my cousin, he's had two kids...and they split up...he  
24 had to sign this contract, saying I will see the kids twenty-four  
25 hours after...

26

27 ...well when you're a grown up, you look back and you think, 'Oh  
28 I really regret doing that, I really wanna go back and do it  
29 again'...everytime I walk past my primary school...I always wanna  
30 go back and do it again...run round with your friends.....you just  
31 miss the screaming of the kids and the bell goes off. Or when  
32 you're in assembly...every Friday we used to sing hymns and I  
33 always miss doing that...me and my mate...we're always thinking  
34 back on the songs. And we always used to sit there in our own  
35 little world just singing them...it's different now...in secondary  
36 they're so much stricter...'Just knuckle down and get on with it'...

37

38 ...**I'm getting my first qualification in year 9**...Functional Skills  
39 level 1...[if I didn't]...I wouldn't get no GCSE's, wouldn't get no  
40 qualifications, wouldn't get a job...I thought of my education,  
41 that's what I've really got to think about...forgetting about all the  
42 childish stuff I used to do. Getting on with my life...'

Table 5.8  
A Demonstration of the Selection of  
Principal Sentences and Their Categorisation: Paige

<i>Principle sentence</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b><i>'My mate, she's eighteen now and she's just opened up her own salon and she's made so much rich'</i></b>	Positive role models	Paige has been inspired by her friend who has secured a job. She has also been inspired by her sister who has shown her that it is possible to obtain GCSEs despite adversity. Her nan is another positive role model in her life.
<b><i>'If you move somewhere else you're not really going to know anyone there whereas round there you're going to know everyone'</i></b>	Belonging	Her family home and the area that she has been brought up in are extremely significant to her. She knows she will always have a place in her nan's home. Everyone knows her in the area and in provision A.
<b><i>'I'm getting my first qualification in year 9'</i></b>	Positive learning opportunities	Achieving her first qualification has given her a sense of pride and motivated her to focus on her education and future. She has been able to learn at provision A.

### 5.8.3 Analysis of Paige's story

#### ***Q1. Strengths and resources***

Paige hopes to go to college and has been inspired by her sister who, despite ill health, managed to get the grades needed for college (lines 2-4). She has also been impressed by the amount of money her friend is making (lines 5-8) and acknowledges how hard she works (lines 8). Paige's nan is a significant role model across her past and future stories. This is exemplified in her past story, when she explains that her nan is helping her neighbours to learn English. At other instances in Paige's narrative where she

discusses the impact less positive role models have had on her. Importantly she identifies how she would like to do things differently (line 22-25).

Many of the role models that Paige refers to are family members. The significance of family and a sense of belonging is a re-occurring theme across her past and future stories. The local community and family home are important to her (lines 13-20) and have left her and her sister committed to raising their own families in the same area. The family home serves as a reminder of those she has lost as well as those that she still has, and Paige knows that she will continue to have a place there for as long as she needs it (lines 12-14). This sense of belonging extends to her experience at provision A. In her past story she explains that she has known some of her peers her whole life and they look out for her. Provision A has also been a positive experience because she has been able to learn there. In her future story she spoke with pride about securing her first qualification in year 9 (lines 38). This appears to have motivated her to work towards getting her GCSEs and a job in the future (lines 39-40).

### ***Q3. Themes of growth and potential***

Paige suggests that she will look back on her youth with regret as she gets older, and will wish she could have done things differently (lines 27-29). She recollects on her experience of primary school in a nostalgic way (lines 29-36). Despite this her future narrative is progressive overall, with Paige keen to gain her qualifications, secure a job and raise a family in the future. Ultimately she wants to forget about 'all the childish stuff she used to do' and 'get on with her life' (lines 40-42).

## Chapter 6: Discussion

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### **6.1 What strengths and resources do young people with SEBD identify as factors that have helped them?**

Very little research has explored protective factors among young people with SEBD. Protective factors refer to assets or resources that moderate or diminish the effect of risk (Cefai, 2007). Questions such as: 'What did you like/dislike about school?' 'Tell me about your relationships in school' and 'What made you disengage?' have been posed. Consequently, we know very little about these young people's strengths and resources. There is no research that has set out to directly ask them arguably the most important question of all - 'What has helped?' Furthermore, the vast majority of research has been past-focused, either relying on adult retrospective accounts or asking young people to reflect back on previous school experiences. Adopting a predominant future-focus and strength-based approach, this research set out to explore the stories young people with SEBD tell about their futures, and identify strengths and resources in their lives. The young people identified a range of strengths and resources, with the findings revealing similarities and differences across their stories. Whilst the focus of the analysis was the young people's future stories, these are placed within the context of their past stories and the literature throughout this discussion.

Ecosystemic theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) has been particularly helpful to understanding SEBD, with young people identifying risks as the various levels of their system (Cole & Knowles, 2011). This has highlighted the systems within which these individuals function and the way in which the different levels of their system interact to produce multiple risk factors in their lives. However as Wise (2000) suggests, there is no further benefit in seeking to eliminate risk factors and practitioners need to accept that they cannot eliminate them all. This research suggests an important alternative - applying ecosystemic theory to work with young people with SEBD in order to capture the strengths and resources at different levels of their systems. McAdams (1985) suggests that the stories we tell ourselves 'bring together diverse elements into an integrated whole, organising the multiple and conflicting aspects of

our lives' (McAdams, 1985, p.198-99). This research has demonstrated that young people with SEBD discuss a unique combination of strengths and resources in their stories and researchers need to explore how the different levels of their system interact to produce multiple strengths and resources.

### **6.1.1 Resources in the school and broader learning environment**

Wise (2000) found that the young people in her research identified 'relationships with teachers' and 'not getting the support they needed' as unhelpful factors in their educational experience. Similarly, in a review of the past research Cefai and Cooper (2009) found that young people with SEBD identified the following themes in relation to their educational experiences: poor relationships with teachers, victimisation by staff and peers, a sense of oppression and powerlessness, and unconnected learning experiences. However, when they were given a second chance, such as going to another school that better addressed their needs, they developed a more positive view of school, learning, themselves and their abilities. This process has been referred to as 'positive resignification' (Cooper, 1993a).

#### **6.1.1.1 Positive relationships with staff and peers**

In the current research the young people identified a wealth of resources associated with the alternative provisions A and B. They described the positive relationships they had built with staff and acknowledged getting the support that they needed, both academically and emotionally. For Jamie, her keyworker adopted the role of her 'school mum' and made her feel better. Kieran acknowledges that the staff at Provision A know how to keep students cool. The young people also recalled particular occasions when they had felt supported by staff. One of Spiteri's (2009) participants, discussing his transition to an alternative provision, reported feeling as though he was 'one of a group' for the first time in his life. The current findings support this earlier research, with some of the young people alluding to feelings of belongingness associated with the alternative provisions, exemplified by Paige who explains that she has known many of the other young people at Provision A for her whole life.

#### **6.1.1.2 Feelings of agency in relation to their learning**

Spiteri (2009) also found that attending an alternative provision instilled a sense of responsibility in his participants. The current research supports these findings, with many of the young people describing their attendance at the alternative provisions as a turning point in their lives. For Kieran, the staff in Provision A helped him to see that he could stay calm and learn. For Gemma, her referral to Provision B made her realise that she had one last chance to get her head down and work. James' time in Provision B taught him that he was able to do the work, just like any other person. Many also described experiencing a renewed sense of agency in relation to their ability to learn.

Sarah found that less people and more one-to-one support helped her to concentrate and manage her ADHD. Similarly, Jamie found that there were less distractions in the smaller unit, and found this made it easier to learn. James found the one-to-one support helpful, and was motivated to complete his work because he knew he was allowed to leave afterwards. Spiteri (2009) concludes that an alternative provision provided his participants with 'access to discourses that enabled them to interpret the world differently'. Similar outcomes were reported in the current research. For Kieran, Provision A was significant in teaching him that he could learn to manage his anger. For James, the alternative provision was significant in making him feel like he was just as able as everyone else, in spite of his dyslexia.

#### **6.1.1.3 Learning opportunities of relevance to the future**

In an earlier review of the literature, Cefai and Cooper (2009) found that young people with SEBD wished that what they had to do at school made more sense to their present lives and future career prospects. They wished it helped them to develop their strengths and talents, rather than exacerbating their weaknesses and difficulties (Cefai & Cooper 2009). The young people in the current research identified practical learning opportunities and described the direct relevance these had to their futures; Tommy describes the ways in which he plans to capitalise on such opportunities in the future. A positive college placement has left Sarah wanting to go on to pursue further qualifications. Jamie's work experience has left her feeling motivated towards her GCSEs in order to pursue an apprenticeship. James valued the practical nature of these learning opportunities and was left feeling confident that he could be successful in

similar work in the future. Paige was proud that she had been able to secure her first qualification in Year 9, which left her motivated towards securing more in the future. Ultimately, within these alternative contexts, the young people were able to access positive learning experiences. These experiences enable them to recognise that they have skills and options available to them. They experienced being good at something - sometimes for the first time - and identified work that they might be suited to in the future. Importantly, these positive learning experiences extended across the home and school contexts.

#### **6.1.1.4 Resources in their mainstream schools**

Previous research has found that many young people with SEBD describe their mainstream school experience as an unpleasant and unhappy one (Cefai & Cooper, 2009). In the current research, Sarah, James, Gemma, Emma and Kieran all identified resources in their mainstream schools. Kieran was able to identify a couple of teachers who had helped him, Gemma identified her Student Support Officer and Emma identified her Deputy Head. Sarah and James identified opportunities for physical exercise as something that had helped them in their mainstream schools. James described the way in which opportunities for physical exercise provided legitimate outlets for his aggression, stating that, by boxing, the only person he could hurt was himself.

#### **6.1.2 Resources in the family and broader social context**

In her research with young people with SEBD, Wise (2000) identified the following risk factors associated with the family and broader social experiences: loss of parents through family breakdown or death, violence in the home, inappropriate role models, caring for a parent, being in care, poverty, class, self-image and cultural expectations associated with being part of an unacceptable cultural group. The young people in the current research identified many of these risk factors, but it is significant that many also identified the following resource in their families and broader social contexts:

#### **6.1.2.1 Positive role models**

Positive role models were a common theme across the young people's narratives. Tommy chose to align himself with his uncle and cousin rather than other, less positive role models in his life. Jamie positioned her mother as a role model, explaining that she hoped to follow in her footsteps and become a Nursery nurse. When Gemma's friend started to behave in school, she felt inspired and supported to do the same. Gemma was also inspired by a successful role model in the performing arts industry, which left her feeling that, if she tried hard, she may be able to experience the same success. Like Tommy, Paige identified less positive role models in her life, but chose to align herself with her sister who had overcome adversity to obtain her GCSEs.

#### **6.1.2.2 Family support**

Family support was of great significance in many of the young people's stories. Tommy's mum was central to his narrative. She kept him on the right track, wanted to give him the best chance in life and her happiness was, ultimately, what motivated him to stay in school. For Sarah, family support came in the form of moral, practical and financial support. She felt safe in the knowledge that her family would be there for her unconditionally. Both Jamie and Page expressed a desire to live close to their families when they were older. For Paige, her family, home and community contributed to her feeling as though she belonged in the absence of her parents. For Jamie, her brother has been a great source of support, both in her past and when looking towards the future. Emma's family provided her with much needed stability; her sister was there with her throughout their turbulent childhood and her adoptive parents relieved her of her heavy responsibilities, allowing her to feel like a normal child.

#### **6.1.3 Strengths in the self**

Wise (2000) found that young people with SEBD report: feeling different, not being able to learn and blaming themselves for their difficulties. The current research supports these findings and the young people described feeling different in their mainstream schools; Jamie's hearing aid made her feel different from the rest of her

peers, James felt he was picked on for being small and Kieran felt that others thought he was weird because of his ADHD.

However many of the young people in the current research also acknowledged a number of strengths within themselves and contradicts Wise (2000) finding that young people with SEBD blame themselves for their difficulties; Kieran refused to blame himself for things that had happened in the past, explaining that he did not feel that his friend's death had been his fault.

The young people also identified a number of additional strengths in themselves: pride, desire to make a nice life for oneself, self-belief and self-determination. Gemma wants to make herself proud and Kieran is keen to work hard to secure himself a nice life. Kieran's self-belief is evident as he discussed his many back-up plans and resources and compares himself with a successful role model. Self-belief was also central to Emma's narrative; she believes she can do anything if she puts her mind to it and has high aspirations.

#### **6.1.4 Conclusions on the strengths and resources identified**

The earlier literature paints a rather bleak picture of the circumstances that these young people grow up in and suggests they lack the resources to cope. The findings of the current research directly challenge this view and demonstrate that, when asked the right questions, young people with SEBD identify a range of strengths and resources in themselves, their schools, their family and community systems. Whilst there are some similarities across the young people's stories, overall each young person presents a unique combination of strengths and resources reflecting the individual nature of their experiences. These could have been collapsed into broader themes but, as Wise (2000) writes, 'To ignore any possible factors...would be to oversimplify the problem' (Wise, 2000 p. 101).

## **6.2 How do the young people describe any qualities that they have built as a result of earlier negative experiences?**

It is important to highlight that whilst this research sought to identify strengths and resources, it acknowledged that these young people were not 'invulnerable to risk'. The past stories were included to acknowledge this and to provide the reader with a context for reading the young people's future stories. As well as seeking to identify strengths and resources, this research sought to explore how the young people identified any qualities that they had built up as a direct result of earlier negative experiences. Positive psychology advocates that qualities can build up as a result of earlier negative experiences and individuals can come to regard their past as a source of strength. In the current research many of the young people identified qualities that had built out of early negative experiences.

Growing up without a lot of money has left Tommy determined to stay on the right path and gain an education, in order to secure himself a better life. Sarah has an equally determined attitude in the face of adversity, and her unexpected pregnancy has left her determined to juggle the demands of being a young mother whilst pursuing her education. Kieran describes the ways in which past negative experiences have contributed to his optimistic and positive outlook. He is even able to view his ADHD as an asset and suggests that he might draw on his earlier negative experiences to write a book one day. Gemma, like many of the young people, described the impact being at risk of exclusion had on her. It was significant in making her realise that she had one last chance, and left her determined to work hard. James' dyslexia had a big impact on his ability to access the curriculum, but despite this he adopts an empowering position in his narrative. He explains that other positive learning opportunities have left him with life skills that cannot be learnt from a piece of paper. By doing so, he sets himself apart from others, identifying his strengths and conveying a sense of self-belief. Finally, Emma's early negative childhood experiences have left her determined to make the most of her life. She reflects on the way in which she learnt to rise up to opportunities and take action into her own hands, culminating in a strong sense of self-belief.

Furman (1998) writes:

‘We can’t change history – events in the past that have actually happened...yet we can – to a surprisingly high degree – influence the way we perceive past events and what they mean to us. The past...[is] a story that’s alive and changing as it’s being retold, given new emphases, meanings, explanations and consequences’ (Furman 1998, p. 114).

These young people’s ability to attribute positive meaning to exceedingly challenging circumstances is a credit to them. What they have learnt from their experiences is significant, not only in the way they view their past in the present, but in relation to their future selves. Self-determination, self-belief, optimism and positivity are all qualities that will help them in the future. These findings support the earlier findings of Kloep, Hendry, Gardner and Seage (2010) who found that young people from deprived backgrounds are able to look beyond their difficult circumstances, to acknowledge the possibilities such circumstances present for the future. The findings also directly challenge suggestions that SEBD develops in children and young people who lack resilience, the ability to bounce back from adversity (Cole & Knowles, 2011, p.65). Each of these young people can be considered to have faced adversity, bounced back *and* developed qualities as a result of their earlier negative experiences.

### **6.3 How do the young people present themes of potential and growth in their stories of the future?**

Many discourses exist in relation to young people with SEBD and their futures, with it commonly suggested that they have lower life prospects (Cefai & Cooper, 2009). If this view is to be accepted, it would follow that they may experience difficulty conceptualising positive views of themselves in the future. Crossley (2000) defines ‘living in the empty present’ as a situation absent of hopes, possibilities and aspirations. She suggests that those living in the empty present may avoid looking to the future for fear of what it will entail (Crossley, 2000 p.150). However the young people in this research did not view their lives in this way. The hopes, possibilities and aspirations present in their future stories means that the young people’s narratives can, without exception, best be described as progressive in tone.

Tommy is determined to secure a better life for himself, by drawing on the support of his family and making the most of opportunities that present themselves. Sarah believes she will be happier in the future, and remains determined to overcome the unexpected. Kieran's story is one of hope and ambition, he has a firm belief that things can only get better. Jamie is confident that she can make positive changes in the future, with the support of her family. Gemma is looking forward to the changes the future will bring and is driven by her desire to make herself and others proud. James is looking forward to the ways in which the future will change his life for the better, and is confident that he has useful life skills on which to draw. For Emma, the future is full of possibilities and she is determined to achieve her ambitions by drawing on her personal qualities and the support of her family. Finally, Paige sees the future as an opportunity to forget about all the childish stuff she used to do and get on with her life.

These findings contradict those of Kloep, Hendry, Gardner and Seage (2010) who found that, whilst some young people were able to construct positive future selves and create upward developmental trajectories despite significant adversity, others perceived themselves as having no resources to change their situation for a positive future, resulting in downward developmental trajectories. In the current research, all of the young people were able to create upward developmental trajectories. These findings support Spiteri (2009) who highlights the way one of his participants shifted his focus from where he had come from to where he was going. Spiteri (2009) suggests that by focusing on the future, this young man was able to look at his identity through a different lens, no longer viewing himself as a victim (Spiteri, 2009, p.245). Murray (2008) suggests that when we are denied the opportunity to express our agency, we experience suffering. By offering the young people the opportunity to describe their futures, this research permitted the young people a sense of agency over their lives, allowing them to focus on where they are going.

## **6.4 Limitations of the research: The participants in the current research**

MacDonald and Greggans (2008) question the existence of 'squeaky-clean' methodological process in research. Irwin and Johnson (2005) suggest that research is 'sanitised' and does not reflect 'the unique situations, dilemmas and practical sticking points involved in collecting data from children' (Irwin and Johnson, 2005, p.822). The real-world nature of this research meant that a number of ethical and pragmatic challenges were confronted, which have implications for both the current and future research.

### **6.4.1 Self-selection of participants**

This research utilised an opportunity sample of young people with SEBD who were willing to take part in the research. One could argue that because these young people self-selected, they may not represent those most in need. In research of this kind, there is a risk that the findings may be based on the words of the more articulate or open participants, with them offering the majority of data. The current research avoided this by presenting and analysing each young person's narrative individually. Multiple-realities and individual meanings are accepted within the broader epistemological and ontological premise of the research, and the findings are not generalised to all young people with SEBD. What this research does offer, is an insight into the individual meaning young people with SEBD can make when asked to describe their lives.

### **6.4.2 Gaining consent**

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) highlight that researchers need to pre-empt any ethical issues that may arise during their research. In provision A, I was able to meet with the young people to explain my research and take time to establish consent. Unfortunately this was not possible in Provision B, therefore the young people were sent a letter describing the research. Approximately one week later, I phoned their parents/carers to find out whether they had shown interest in taking part. If they had, I arranged to meet the young people and spent time establishing their fully informed consent, before carrying out the interviews. It was made clear that they were under no obligation to take part in the research, they were also given the option of taking part at another time if they preferred. All of the young people from Provision B agreed to

take part in the research when I met them, at which stage I sought their written consent before interviewing them.

#### **6.4.3 Building rapport**

Woodgate (2001) advocates 'gradual entry to the field', in order to build trust and address power imbalances in research. I spent time in Provision A getting to know the young people and building rapport, before inviting them to take part in the research. It is possible that my presence in provision A added to the young people's sense of ease during their interviews. Unfortunately this was not possible with the young people in Provision B, however it did not seem to impact significantly on the quality of the experience or their narratives. This could be attributed to the time I spent building rapport with the young people from provision B before carrying out the interviews.

#### **6.4.4 Equality across participants in research**

A further ethical issue was confronted in relation to thanking the young people for their input. I was able to thank the young people in Provision A by giving them a tuck-shop voucher, paid for by the provision. This was not possible in Provision B. Fortunately this did not affect their narratives, because the young people were unaware of the tuck-shop vouchers until after the interviews. But it does raise a possible ethical dilemma with regards to treating all participants equally. This could be considered to be an example of 'the discord between espoused theoretical principles of research and the practical reality of carrying it out research in the real world (MacDonald & Greggans, 2008, p. 3126).

#### **6.4.5 My position as an LA representative**

There were also challenges and possible biases associated with carrying out a piece of research on behalf of the LA. This was further complicated by my role as a Trainee EP. Significant time was spent making my position as a student researcher clear to the young people. In particular, it was made clear that I was there as a researcher rather than a psychologist. This was considered necessary as it was possible that some of the content of their interview might have been upsetting for them. Each young person identified a member of school staff/family that they could speak to after the interview, and were also informed of how they could contact me if any questions arose from

their conversations afterwards. It was hoped that this would manage their expectations appropriately. It was also hoped that this would go some way in reducing any negative connotations they may associate with professionals and the LA, as a result of their past experience.

## **6.5 Limitations of the research: Carrying out the interviews in practice**

### **6.5.1 Interviewing across different contexts**

Whereas most of the interviews were carried out in schools, some of the interviews were carried out in the young people's homes. Given the social constructivist epistemology that underpins this research, it is accepted that the location of the interview will have impacted on the process. However the young people interviewed in their homes appeared at ease, and may even have found being interviewed 'on their own turf' empowering. In reality, interviewing the young people in either their school or home provided a rich context in which to ground their stories during analysis.

### **6.5.2 The dual task of establishing rigour whilst ensuring wellbeing**

A further issue was confronted during the interviews with regards to my dual responsibility to both the participants and the research. Participant wellbeing had to be maintained throughout the interviews, whilst eliciting rich information pertinent to the purpose of the research. I sustained rapport throughout the interviews by telling the young people that they were doing well, seeking opportunities to relate to them and, critically, knowing when they had had enough. The young people all managed well for the duration of the interviews, but I had an ethical duty to make sure they felt they could leave at anytime. In order to manage the issue of power and consent in an ethical way, I paid close attention to their body language and acknowledged when they appeared tired.

### **6.5.3 Multiple interruptions**

Issues of power, equality, right to withdraw and rigour took place within broader challenges. These included multiple interruptions during the interviews in Provision A, and family presence during the interviews conducted with the young people from Provision B. Issues of consent, entitlement to anonymity and privacy were at the

forefront of my mind. MacDonald and Greggans (2008) argue that interruptions are part of the 'complex social reality of other people's lives' (MacDonald & Greggans, 2008 p.3124). In one interview, the young person's mother was present. However it became clear that it was entirely appropriate for her to stay with them, as she provided reassurance and encouraged them to open up. As Irwin and Johnson (2005) write, a parent's presence can add 'scaffolding' which adds richness to the young person's narrative.

#### **6.5.4 Embracing tangents**

Nunkoosing (2005) stipulates that a good interview should not be hurried or feel like an interrogation. This issue is particularly important to narrative interviews. At times during the interviews the young people's narratives appeared unstructured and scattered, but it was important to resist the urge to 'bring them back on track'. As Irwin and Johnson (2005) write, these tangents are often core to the narratives, revealing the truth behind their stories. As I gained experience over the course of the interviews, I learnt to reserve judgments over the quality of the data and accept that the young people's tangents were their way of telling their story in their own words. The result was interviews that were more relaxed or 'unhurried' in nature, peppered with tangents, but ultimately richer in content as a result.

### **6.6 Limitations of the research: The narrative analysis**

#### **6.6.1 Identifying an appropriate model of narrative analysis**

Howitt (2010) suggests that an evaluation of narrative analysis should include a review of narrative psychology in general. He continues that narrative research can, to the newcomer, appear to be a 'somewhat chaotic set of ideas...waiting to find its focus', with models 'harder to come by' and theory 'more difficult to clarify' (Howitt, 2010, p.317-318). Despite this, narrative research presents an opportunity to explore an individual's sense of self and identity in all of their totality, through the stories they tell about themselves in their everyday lives (Howitt, 2010, p. 318). This research utilised narrative methodology, specifically 'Narrative Oriented Inquiry'. The approach was key to eliciting the rich and meaningful data that was produced, however a number of

practical considerations impacted on the way in which the narrative analysis was carried out.

### **6.6.2 Establishing a rich context for the interpretations**

During the analysis a 'categorical' analysis was employed rather than a 'holistic' focus, which means key themes were explored rather than the story as one whole. One criticism levelled against a categorical analysis is that extracting categories from the narrative risks disregarding other contextual factors. Furthermore the 'content' of the young people's stories was analysed, rather than the 'form' of their narrative. One criticism of a content focused analysis is that, by focusing purely on content, one risks losing the 'intensity, emotionality and tonality' of the research (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zibler, 1998). In order to address these issues, the young people's reconstructed stories were presented in the findings, alongside the analysis. This provides the reader with a rich context in which to interpret the categorical analysis. Furthermore, it provides the reader with the opportunity to interpret the tone of the stories and offers them a richness and depth in which to contextualise the interpretations made.

### **6.6.3 Drawing tentative interpretations**

It is left up to the narrative researcher to decide how much interpretive work takes place in sorting the material into categories. Rather than collapsing the categories into broader groups, the decision was made to define these categories more tentatively, using definitions most appropriate to the individual's stories. Although this subjective approach is harder to defend, Hiles and Cermak (2008) suggest it can lead to 'more profound realms of understanding lives and experiences' (Hiles & Cermak, 2008, p. 139). This social constructivist worldview underpinning this research is advocated by the authors, who accept that no reading is free from interpretation (Hiles & Cermak, 2008, p. 166). Furthermore Murray (2008) writes that the tension in narrative analysis is in the analysis of narrative accounts, which are often tentative and thus open to further interpretation/ challenge (Murray, 2008, p.114).

#### **6.6.4 The impact of the broader theoretical orientation**

The analysis was employed within a broader theoretical orientation, which shaped the research questions and the way the data was collected and analysed. One could argue that this limited the breadth of analysis, after all the stories were exceedingly rich in content and could have been explored in a number of ways. Nevertheless Hiles and Cermak (2008) stipulate that concordance between the research goals and methods is of most importance (Hiles & Cermak, 2008, p. 165). Therefore while the categories of strengths and resources emerged from the young people's stories, it is accepted that the aims of this research influenced the analysis.

#### **6.6.5 The impact of the Quality of Life literature on the findings**

Similarly, it is important to recognise that the Quality of Life (QoL) literature (Rapley, 2003) will have shaped the way in which the data was collected and analysed. The QoL tool was used in response to Bell (1999), who advises using a loose framework to ensure crucial topics are considered during an unstructured interview. It could be argued that drawing on this literature may have limited the breadth of the interviews and analysis in the current research. However, the QoL literature is concerned with 'general feelings of well-being, feelings of positive social involvement, and opportunities to achieve personal potential' (Fox, 2013, p.2). Therefore whilst it is accepted that the literature will have informed the interviews, analysis and findings, the QoL literature was considered an appropriate body of research on which to draw given the aims of the current research.

#### **6.7 Implications: For future research**

MacDonald and Greggans (2008) write that 'Qualitative researchers need to be self aware, flexible, adaptable and willing to take risks in the field' (MacDonald & Greggans, 2008, p. 3129). To this end, this research goes some way in addressing some of the theoretical and methodological limitations of earlier research and has, in turn, raised a number of implications for future research with young people with SEBD.

### **6.7.1 The value of adopting a social-constructivist epistemology**

The epistemological position taken in this research is that young people with SEBD have essential evidence to share about their experiences. In the past, researchers have sought the views of adults at the expense of carrying out research with children and young people. Lubbe (1986) suggests that this is due to a belief that children lack the ability to recall credible accounts of their lives. However, the young people in the current research were fully engaged and willing and able to share a great deal of information about themselves. This supports Wise (2000), who found that the young people in her research were honoured when asked for their views, particularly when told that she hoped to publish a book about them. The young people in the current research were interested in my reasons for carrying out the research, particularly when I explained that I felt not enough attention had been paid to asking them what they think in the past.

This research accepts that the meaning these young people attach to their experiences will differ from the adults around them. It sought to contribute to the smaller body of research that has sought the views of young people with SEBD, by eliciting their narratives and giving them 'authentic expression'. A social constructivist position is accepted in relation to the notion of reality, with the young people considered experts on their own lives. Fox (2003) acknowledges that 'the confidence of the general public in our professionalism is ultimately rooted in a positive view of reality' (Fox, 2003, p. 100), but suggests social constructivist epistemology has the potential to provide 'illuminating alternatives'. To this end, this research does not suggest that young people's views are necessarily any more valid than those of the adults around them, but simply aims to contribute to a broader research body where all views are heard. Wise (2000) suggests that if we are to accept these young people's views as valid, then we must be prepared to consider them as equal to those of parents, schools and professionals. Lloyd-Smith and Tarr (2000) highlight the value listening to children in the evaluation of national policy, promotion of school improvement and the monitoring of provision for vulnerable groups (Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000 p.70). Future research should seek to explore the views of young people with SEBD, by employing social-constructivist principles and encouraging them to share the meaning they give to their experiences.

### **6.7.2 Young people with SEBD are able to make decisions in research**

Woodgate (2001) proposes that research culture exerts an overly protective stance towards children and young people, suggesting that they should be shielded from difficult subjects. In the current research, the young people were able to talk about their pasts and openly discuss some of the difficulties they had experienced in their lives. In truth, once I had access to the young people, I found that they were able to make decisions about what they considered relevant and what they were prepared to share with me. A common explanation offered for a lack of research with children in the past, is that such research requires 'wading through' many layers of gatekeepers. It was understandable that the adults around the young people took up a protective stance towards their welfare. However the unstructured nature of the research and the strength- and future-focus were all significant in gaining consent from gatekeepers and access to the young people. These principles could be drawn on in future research, in order to gain access to the views of young people with SEBD.

### **6.7.3 The importance of strength-based and future-focused approaches to research**

These young people identified a number of strengths and resources that held strong significance for them in their past, present and future lives. Fundamentally, they demonstrated that young people with SEBD do have, and are able to identify, strengths and resources in their lives. As Boyden and DeBerry (2004) write, there is a need for a more rounded approach in research in order to provide a holistic view of children and young people in relation to stressful circumstances. This research has demonstrated the potential contribution a strength-based approach can make to our understanding of young people with SEBD. It demonstrates that positive psychology, which aims to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive, is a useful theoretical orientation on which to draw, in order to develop new understandings of young people with SEBD. Of particular use, is the focus positive psychology places on the potential for growth in the future. A strength-base and future-focus may be a more effective way of addressing the issue of SEBD, and has the potential to ensure that the voices of some of the most vulnerable students are heard and impact upon policy and development of appropriate provision and resources. Overall, positive psychology offers a helpful theoretical orientation on which future research can draw in order to move away from a predominant focus on

risk, and 'learn how to build the qualities that help individuals and communities, not just to endure and survive but be able to flourish' (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.13).

#### **6.7.4 Narrative: A useful approach for exploring the future**

There is very little research that has sought to explore the views young people with SEBD have about their futures. The research that has, has applied the psychological concept of possible selves to these young people's accounts. The current research has demonstrated that, by adopting a narrative approach and imposing less structure on the young people's accounts, richer information can be gained. Narrative as a method of interviewing proved to be very successful in facilitating the young people to talk about their lives. Within a short space of time they revealed rich, detailed and personal information about themselves, which was highly relevant to the purpose of the current research. It is possible that the unstructured nature of the interview empowered the young people, as Wetton and Williams (2000) suggest that we can enhance young people's involvement in research by adopting an 'open, non-hierarchical, facilitative and reflexive' position. Furthermore many narrative researchers suggest that a primary way that people make sense of their experiences is by telling their 'story'. Riessman (1993) notes that 'This is especially true of difficult life transitions and traumas' (Riessman, 1993, p.4). It is possible that the story format helped the young people to convey their experiences, and may be a more helpful way of eliciting their views than a structured interview format. Therefore future research should seek to impose less structure on to the young people's accounts by employing narrative approaches with young people with SEBD.

Although 'story' as a research tool is a relatively new concept in the social sciences, historically it has been an accepted way of relaying knowledge (Bell, 1999). The 'thick description' that it produces has the potential to be exceedingly powerful. Robson (2011) acknowledges the way in which this type of research can resonate with readers' informal understandings, allowing them to see parallels between the participant's lives and the situations in which they themselves work (Robson, 2011, p.73-74). 'Story' as an approach also has the ability to allow readers who do not share an understanding of the subject to relate to the research. Bell (1999) identifies a number of difficulties

associated with narrative as an approach, particularly for inexperienced researchers or those operating in a 'tight-schedule'. However he also acknowledges that narrative is a powerful and different way of knowing. It is hoped that the current research has demonstrated the unique contribution narrative can make to our understanding of young people with SEBD, and will encourage the use of similar methodologies with this particular group of young people in the future.

#### **6.7.5 The life path: A useful tool for future research**

Wetton and Williams (2000) suggest that there needs to be more child-friendly approaches to gathering the views of children and young people, in order to ensure that they are authentically represented in research. The current research drew on a life path approach to encourage them to think about their lives in a relatively linear way. The life path approach served a further purpose; jointly attending to the visual life path reduced the pressure on the young people to make eye contact and reduced the overall intensity, or 'temperature', of the interview. It also went some way in addressing the power dynamics between myself and the young people, positioning me as a co-constructor rather than an interviewer. Finally, the life path also helped them to concentrate, and was useful to refer them to, in order to bring them back to the task if they became distracted. The young people all engaged well in the interviews, despite the unstructured nature. However at those times when they did offer shorter responses, I was able to refer them back to their annotated life path to prompt them and help them get back on track.

The life path was particularly helpful when asking the young people to identify their strengths and resources. When asked outright 'What helped?' the young people gave relatively concise answers, with some unable to recall any resources or strengths. However, when encouraged to refer to specific stages of the life path, the young people were far more able to answer this question. Jamie answered 'Well nothing helped here, I hated it, I completely hated it, nothing helped'. Later she went on to identify her keyworker as someone who made her 'feel better'. Therefore, even when a young person finds it difficult to identify strengths and resources at particular times in their life, the life path can be used to encourage them to identify exceptions. Researchers may like to draw on this approach in future research, to aid thinking,

facilitate narratives and build rapport with young people with SEBD. It will also provide a useful tool for helping young people to explore the 'total space' and the exceptions in their lives.

#### **6.7.6 The un-structured interview: A helpful approach in future research**

Exploring the young people's futures first ensured that it became the focus of the interview. It also meant that their future stories were elicited in the purest form. Asking the young people to begin by describing their futures served a further purpose, we were able to build rapport before exploring the potentially more sensitive stories of their pasts. The young people were reassured that they could share as much, or as little, of their past story as they wanted, but all of the participants chose to share a lot of personal information about their lives. This provided a rich context in which to interpret their future stories. It also provided them with a wealth of information to refer to in the final phase of the interviews; by explicitly asking them to identify strengths and resources at the end of the interview, the young people were able to draw on the experiences they had identified earlier. It also meant that we moved away from discussing the potentially more sensitive issues of their past and moved on to discussing the strengths and resources present in their lives. In reality, the young people's narratives were far less linear in practice. This was welcomed because I wanted them to tell their stories in their own ways. However this 'phased approach' to using the life path provides an ethical structure for exploring the 'total space' of these young people's lives, with each phase of the interview building on the last. Researchers may also like to draw on this phased approach in future research, because it can provide a loose structure which can be helpful in an unstructured interview of this kind.

#### **6.7.7 Qualitative and exploratory research: An alternative way of knowing**

The purpose of this research was to explore a little known phenomenon – the stories young people with SEBD tell about their futures. When the concept was originally put to stakeholders in the commissioning LA, some suggested that it might be more useful to carry out a piece of evaluative research in order to evaluate provision for young people with SEBD within the borough. This led to questions in relation to whether particular types of research (evaluative) are more useful than others (exploratory).

Similar questions were raised about the qualitative nature of the research, with weight given to mixed-method and quantitative research. Talk turned to the issue of generalisability, and the potential for producing 'quantifiable conclusions'. It was recommended that a quantitative element be added to the research and suggested that adopting a mixed-methods or quantitative design would make the research of 'Viva standard'. The implication was that qualitative research may be considered in some way flawed, or less useful than quantitative or mixed-method research. These suggestions were all given due consideration and the ontological and epistemological premise was reviewed. Ultimately however, the exploratory and qualitative elements of the research design were retained because they were considered integral to the purpose of this research.

Individuals have different understandings of what constitutes 'useful' research. Organisations also have their own research cultures, inextricably linked to their worldview. For example, there was suggestion that interviewing young people from Provision A and B may provide a 'rather extreme example' of young people with SEBD. Yet this research was not concerned with generalisability and uncovering a 'truth'. Instead, it aimed to 'deconstruct truths' and gain a sense of the meaning young people with SEBD attach to their experiences. This is not to say that evaluative research is not of value, or that there is not a place for mixed-methods or quantitative designs in research, and it is accepted that there are different ways of knowing things. In particular, there are different ways of knowing things about young people with SEBD. Therefore future research should seek to explore alternative forms of knowledge on this issue.

In practice, researchers are faced with a number of challenges when carrying out research with young people with SEBD. These range from gaining the consent of multiple gatekeepers, through to balancing participant wellbeing with the integrity of research. Interruptions are common and privacy can sometimes be somewhat of an ideal. There is a further emotional impact to carrying out this type of research. Dickson-Swift, James, Kippin and Liamputtong (2006) write that feeling 'emotionally drained' after such a research encounter is common, particularly given the sensitivity of the topics covered. Nevertheless, by being aware of these issues and managing

them appropriately, researchers can gather rich and meaningful insights into the meaning these young people give to their lives. Researchers carrying out research with young people with SEBD could be considered best prepared when they ‘expect the unexpected’ (Pruitt and Privette, 2001).

## **6.8 Implications: For practice**

This research is concerned with *particularity* rather than *generalisability* (Greene and Caracelli, 1997) and has highlighted the need to take individual differences into account when trying to support young people with SEBD. In particular, it will be important to identify their unique combination of strengths and resources and their view of their future. Robson (2011) writes that research should have ‘real world value’ and the following implications have been identified for future practice.

### **6.8.1 Using the life path to facilitate a sense of coherence**

From a constructivist perspective, it is accepted that the meanings made by adults may differ significantly to those of young people. Therefore in order to understand the meaning a young person attributes to their experience, we need to ask them about it. The success of the tool used in the current research - the life path – could be replicated with other young people with SEBD with implications for professionals working within an LA context to elicit young people’s views. Hiles and Cermak (2008) highlight that when using narrative approaches to explore the meaning an individual gives to their life, the narrative resources of the individual are key, and not the interpretive skills of the listener. By using the life path tool with young people with SEBD professionals can facilitate their narrative resources.

At the most basic level, using the life path approach with young people with SEBD will facilitate their thinking, allow them to feel listened to and will validate their experiences. This is particularly important for young people with SEBD, given that narrative can provide ‘scattered and often confusing experiences with a sense of coherence by arranging episodes of our lives into stories (McAdams, 1985, *ibid.* 11). The young people in the current research appeared to enjoy the process and found it helpful in thinking exploring their futures. Paige commented that ‘You get really into it

and it's like you just don't wanna stop'. Emma commented that 'It would have been in my head already, just maybe not throughout my whole life. Thank-you for telling me that....this has all been definite'. Finally Kieran commented 'I can just see this right now as you're telling me, I can just see it going on'. Therefore by using the life path with young people with SEBD, professionals can support young people to attach meaning to their experiences. This, in turn, will help them to gain insights into their own feelings and behaviour and to develop a sense of coherence over their lives.

### **6.8.2 Using the life path to embrace more empowering narratives**

The life path can also be used in a more therapeutic way. Within narrative psychology, it is accepted that the way in which people 'story' and 're-story' their experiences constructs their own identity (White & Epsom, 1989, p.13) and Hoffman (1990) suggests that problems are the stories people tell themselves in the absence of alternative and more empowering stories. Whilst the aim of such work will be to help them to explore more empowering stories about their future, they will need encouragement to draw on the past in order to understand how this has contributed to their sense of self in the present and the future. Fundamentally these young people need to understand themselves as coming from somewhere and going somewhere. If we accept that we are the assembled stories that we tell about ourselves, then it is possible that we have the power to 'tell more empowering stories' (Hiles & Cermak, 2008, p. 149). It is the re-telling of these past stories that is key here. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) write that 'We live out stories in our experiences, tell stories of those experiences and modify them through retelling and reliving them' (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 418). It is through this process of 're-telling', that we are able to inhabit and live out new alternative stories (Freedman & Combs, 1996).

Professionals in the LA can encourage young people with SEBD to use the life path to identify strengths and resources in their lives. This may go some way in preventing feelings of helplessness and may encourage them to embrace more empowering narratives about themselves. This process has the potential to help young people to view themselves in a more positive light, and to take a more optimistic view of what they can achieve in the future. By engaging in this process, practitioners will shift their focus from the problem to the solution, which has the potential to make young people

feel as though they are more than their problem.

### **6.8.3 Implications for broader education policy**

Cefai and Cooper (2009) write that an over focus on academic learning creates anxiety among vulnerable children and young people and leaves them lacking in the resources to face the 'tests of life'. The authors question the value of an education system that has become out of touch with the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

'Young people need to be equipped with the skills to be flexible in the face of change, to be creative in problem-solving and effective in decision-making, to build and maintain supportive relationships, to work collaboratively with others, and to mobilise their resources in times of difficulty' (Cefai & Cooper, 2009, p 17).

Lloyd-Smith and Tarr (2000) suggest that an education system that focuses exclusively on academic performance is 'shortchanging' children and young people and denying them their right for a relevant education as a preparation for the world outside school (Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000, p. 17). The young people in the current research highlighted the importance of having access to learning opportunities that were relevant to their futures. James states that 'You don't learn life skills from a piece of paper'. Therefore it is essential that education providers ensure that they offer a broad range of learning opportunities to students, in order to meet the interests, needs and skill-set of *all* children and young people.

## **6.9 Implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs)**

The findings of the current research also have implications for EPs working within Children's Services. EPs have a key role to play in: eliciting student views and assessing social, emotional, behavioural and learning needs. Through this work, EPs contribute to individual and strategic developments, policies and provision for such young people.

### **6.9.1 Promoting alternative understandings of SEBD**

EPs help stakeholders to construct meaning and are in a unique position to promote understanding that change is possible. The profession draws on a range of psychological theories to offer alternative psychological explanations for behaviour.

This research has highlighted that the premise of humanistic psychology is especially useful when working with young people to explore their strengths, resources and opportunities for growth in the future. With its focus on growth, humanistic psychology is inherently in opposition to pathologising and deficit-models. Of particular relevance is the work of Rogers (1962) on ‘the fully functioning person’ and the work of Maslow (1943: 1954) on ‘self-actualisation’. The current research also highlights the potential contribution positive psychology can make to our understanding of SEBD. Like humanistic psychology, positive psychology aims to move away from the pre-occupation with deficits and risk and move towards a model of building on strengths, resources and qualities.

### **6.9.2 Supporting young people with SEBD via therapeutic work**

EPs unique skill-set mean they are apt in building rapport with children and young people. They are particularly well placed to draw on narrative therapy techniques/the life path approach to carry out strength-based and future-focused identity work with young people with SEBD. The young people in the current research appeared to enjoy having the opportunity to explore their lives in this way, and were able to construct meaningful narrative about their past and future lives. The focus of this work will vary from one young person to another; some will benefit from support to develop a coherent past story, and others will need encouragement to explore the future. Others may need support to re-construct their stories and to embrace more empowering alternatives. In whatever form such intervention takes, it should aim to develop these young people’s sense of agency over their lives.

### **6.9.3 Delivering training and contributing to school policy**

Acknowledgement of the young people’s wider ecological contexts and social relationships will be key to this work. EPs are very well placed to help schools and families develop their own strength-based and future-focused approach when working with young people with SEBD. EPs will need to seek out opportunities to carry out this work, but may like to draw on this approach during consultations and when contributing to whole-school training and policy. Furthermore, as the work of EPs extends to working with young people up to the age of 25, the profession will be in an excellent position to support schools/colleges in identifying need and providing

appropriate provision for school-leavers with SEBD. Professionals will need to work hard to negotiate this work within the broader changing landscape of Educational Psychology because it has great potential for contributing to the wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable children and young people with whom we work.

## **6.10. Reflections on the research journey**

### **6.10.1 The role of the self in constructing research**

A reflexive researcher does not simply report facts or 'truths', but actively constructs interpretations of his or her experiences in the field, then questions how those interpretations came about (Hertz, 1995). I accept that my own background (race, gender, class, experience and views of SEBD) impacted on this research. In particular, my background influenced my interaction with the young people – the other - and the way in which I represented them in my work (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). However, I strived to remain sensitive to the context (theoretical understandings, earlier research, sociocultural context and young people), and to carry out the interviews and analysis in a rigorous way. In particular, great effort was made to ensure that the narrative analysis and re-constructed stories were presented in a transparent way, so that the relationship between the theory and the analysis was clear to the reader.

### **6.10.2 My commitment to the research and the implications**

At the beginning of the research journey I encountered some doubt in relation to the research aims. Questions were raised over whether the aims were realistic. My experience of working with young people with SEBD empowered me to pursue this piece of research in the face of such doubt, and to view these young people as willing and capable of engaging in the research. My experience of working with young people with SEBD also left me determined to consider the issue from an alternative position, and to explore their potential for growth. At the end of the research, I realised that the journey has only served to increase my professional interest in strength-based approaches and a future-focus in my work with children and young people. In particular, it has affirmed my commitment to applying these principles in my work with young people with SEBD. I have learnt that growth is not only possible, but

inevitable, and that our ability to acknowledge potential is rooted in the stories we tell about ourselves and others.

### **6.10.3 Development of new knowledge**

My personal interest in 'stories' is now balanced by a professional interest in the power of stories in psychology. I am left inspired by the potential narrative psychology offers as an: approach to research, method of analysis and therapeutic orientation. On a practical level, I leave this research with new understandings of the life path tool, a useful approach to use when working with children, young people their schools and families. It is a dynamic tool that can be used creatively with children and young people to help them give meaning to their experiences. Lastly, I am left with a new-found commitment to carrying out and disseminating research. I look forward to feeding back the findings of this research to stakeholders within the LA. Feedback will be given to the Heads of the units, as the findings have very real implications for the way in which staff support young people with SEBD, both during school, and when preparing to transition from school. The findings will also be disseminated to the EPS, for whom the research is particularly relevant. Finally, I hope to be able to pursue my interest in narrative research further in my role as an EP in the future.

### **6.10.4 Positioning the young people as experts of their own lives**

The deployment of the self was key during the interviews, so that the young people viewed me as a researcher. By reminding myself that my primary role was to collect information, I ensured that the boundaries between rapport building did not blur with that of therapeutic work. However, I found that there were a number of similarities across the researcher and EP role and the experience reminded me that genuineness, unconditional positive regard and high expectations go a long way when working with this group of young people. This experience taught me that when we *position* these young people as the expert in their own lives, they *become* experts in their own lives, and enjoy the agency this position offers them.

#### **6.10.5 The end product: A collaborative narrative**

Ultimately, it is my retelling of these young people's stories that is the story told here. Emphasis is placed on the uniqueness of the individual stories, acknowledging their pasts, future aspirations and most importantly of all, their potential for growth. The young people's views have been combined with my own to form a collaborative narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and to produce *multiple meanings*, which I believe have been 'transforming' for us both (Etherington, 2009). I hope that this research offers an alternative and more empowering narrative of young people with SEBD, and will go some way in altering the way in which this group are perceived in the future.

#### **6.11 Summary of Findings**

By adopting a predominant future-focus and strength-based approach, this research set out to explore the stories young people with SEBD tell about the future. It also aimed to identify strengths and resources in their lives. The young people in the current research identified the following strengths and resources:

- Resources in the alternative provision
  - Positive relationships with staff and peers
    - Occasions when they had felt supported
    - Feelings of belongingness
  - Feelings of agency in relation to their learning
    - Less people, less distractions and more-one-to one support
    - Access to more empowering discourses about the self
  - Learning opportunities were relevant to their futures
    - The practical nature of these activities helped them to recognise they had skills
    - The opportunities helped them to identify work they might be suited to in the future
- Resources in their mainstream schools
  - Members of staff who had supported them

- Legitimate outlets for their aggression i.e. PE
- Resources in the family and broader social context
  - Positive role models
  - Family support
- Strengths in themselves:
  - Desire to make a nice life for oneself
  - Desire to make self and others proud
  - Self belief
  - Self-determination

Six of the eight young people demonstrated qualities they had built up as a result of earlier negative experiences, these include:

- Determination to secure a better life for oneself in the future, as a result of growing up with little money
- Self-determination in the face of adversity, as result of an unexpected pregnancy
- An optimist and positive outlook, as a result of earlier negative school experiences
- Determination to work hard, as a result of being at risk of permanent exclusion
- Adopting a more empowering discourse in relation to one's ability, as a result of earlier negative school experiences pertaining to undiagnosed dyslexia
- A strong sense of self-belief, as a result of having a great deal of responsibility as a child

The following themes of potential and growth were present in their stories:

- Determination to secure a better life for oneself in the future
- Determination to overcome the unexpected
- A firm belief that things can only get better
- Commitment to making positive change in the future
- A desire to make oneself and others proud
- Looking forward to the ways in which life will change for the better
- A determination to achieve one's ambitions
- Viewing the future as an opportunity to forget about the past and get on with life

## **6.12 Conclusion**

The findings of the current research contribute to the literature by offering an alternative understanding, and a more empowering narrative of young people with SEBD. The findings indicate that, when asked the right questions, young people with SEBD can identify a range of strengths and resources in themselves, their schools and their family and community systems. Each young person presented a unique combination of strengths and resources, reflecting the individual nature of their experiences. What they have learnt from their experiences is significant, not only in the way they view their past in the present, but in relation to their future selves. When asked about the future, the young people presented themes of hope, possibility and potential in their stories. These themes contributed to narratives that can, without exception, best be described as progressive in tone, reflecting Kieran's final comment that 'things only get better'.

The rest of the tapestry is not determined by what has been woven before. The weaver herself, blessed with knowledge and with freedom, can change – if not the material she must work with – the design of what comes next (Furman, 1998, p.22).

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## Appendices

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## Appendix I: Details of the systematic literature review

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Following a meeting with the subject librarian, a systematic literature review was carried out in November 2012. The purpose of this review was to identify any research that had sought the views of young people with SEBD with regard to their future. The databases searched included PsychINFO and PsychARTICLES.

### Stage 1. Identifying terms

During the first phase of the systematic literature review, the 'advanced search history' option was used to identify terminology in the literature and build up a 'history of searches'. This involved searching for key terms i.e. 'Adolescents', then searching the 'Key words' used in research on 'Adolescents' in order to identify alternative terminology. It seemed important to identify the key words used in the databases, given that this is how the collections are organised. Importantly, it was noted that the collections were indexed using American terms, rather than British terms, therefore both American and British terminology was identified.

Once term identifications had been exhausted, terms were grouped into categories and combined to form systematic combinations of terms i.e. the terms 'Adolescents', 'Youth', 'Teenagers', 'Young people' and 'School age' were combined to form combination 'S30'. Each category was then assigned an appropriate title i.e. 'Young people'. This ensured that when search term S30 was employed in future searches, all five identified terms would be automatically searched for. The following systematic combinations of terms were identified and categorised as follows:

**Young people (S30)** – Collectively searched for term

- |    |                     |
|----|---------------------|
| S1 | Adolescents         |
| S2 | Youth               |
| S3 | Teenagers           |
| S4 | <b>Young people</b> |
| S5 | School age          |

**Social, emotional, behaviour problems (S32)** – collectively searched for term

- S7 Behaviour difficulties
- S8 Behavioural problems
- S9 **Social, emotional behaviour problems**
- S10 Social emotional behavior
- S11 Social emotional behavior problems
- S12 Exclude\*
- S13 Excluded
- S14 Risk of exclusion
- S16 Risk of school exclusion
- S17 Pupil referral Unit
- S18 PRU
- S19 Special School
- S20 Alternative education
- S21 Residential mental health and substance facilities
- S24 All other miscellaneous schools and institutions
- S25 Special school\*
- S26 Alternative education

**Future (S89)** – collectively searched for term

- S68 Hopes
- S73 Future narratives
- S74 Future
- S79 Motivation
- S80 **Future**
- S81 Future stories
- S83 Future life

- S84 Student aspirations
- S88 Life story
- S87 Narratives

## Stage 2. Systematic literature review for research including the above terms

In the second phase of the systematic literature review, the systematic search terms were used to identify key pieces of research. The following table depicts the process and the criteria used to identify key research:

Terms searched	Number of papers	Inclusion criteria 1	Number of papers	Inclusion criteria 2	Number of papers	Inclusion criteria 3	Number of papers	Inclusion criteria 4	Number of papers
<b>Young people (S30) + Social, emotional, behaviour problems (S32) + Future (S89)</b>	7,024	Last 10 years (2002 - 2012) only	6,026	Adolescents (13-17) only	654	Academic journals & dissertations only	547	Link to full text only	243

The 243 papers were hand-searched and two relevant papers were identified:

- Motivational Patterns in Disaffected School Students: Insights from Pupil Referral Unit Clients (Solomon & Rogers, 2001)
- 'Possible selves' of young people in a mainstream secondary school and a pupil referral unit: A comparison (Mainwaring & Hallam, 2010)

A further hand search identified one further paper relevant to the current research:

- Young People's Views of Their Present and Future Selves in Two Deprived Communities (Kloep, Hendry, Gardner and Seage, 2010)

## Appendix II: Using the life path to explore the future

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<i>Young Person</i>	<i>Question</i>
Tommy	C: 14, so you're here, well there really (points on life path). So if we start in this box, if I get you to think ahead five or six years. Tell me, as best you can, what you think will happen in your life?
Sarah	C: So you're 16, so you're here (gestures to life path). I'm going to ask you really openly now, just to describe the next few years. I'll jump in with some prompts if you need me to, alright?
Kieran	C: So if I said this was 25 (gestures to life path), and this was 30 and this was 35, you think that you'll have already done your acting for quite a long time?
Jamie	C: So let's start you at 20 years old (gestures to life path) and I want you to imagine that far in the future (gestures to life path). Tell me what your life will be like at 20.
Gemma	C: You're 15, so you fall into, I would say this box here (gestures to life path). You're kind of here. What do you think is going to happen to you in your life in the next five years?
James	C: Yeah? How old do you think you'll be when you do that then, where shall I put it on your timeline?
Emma	C: Can you tell me as best you can what you think will happen in your future.
Paige	C: Alright, Paige you are 13 at the moment aren't you. So, if I said to you, in five years time you're going to be 18. Tell me what it's going to be like when you are 18. It's a really difficult question, but tell me what life is going to be like, what are you going to be doing, will you have finished school?

### Appendix III: Using the life path to explore the past

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<i>Young Person</i>	<i>Question</i>
Tommy	C: Okay so we're going back to her (gestured to life path). Can you tell me bit more about your life at this time?
Sarah	C: Alright well in that case I'm going to take you all the way back to being a baby (S laughs). Okay, 0-5...
Kieran	C:...now can we go back on your life path and fill in some of the gaps? So let's start in this box...
Jamie	C: Okay, let's go back a little bit, and so I guess primary school is this bit, (gestures to life path). 5-10. Tell me if you can the main things that happened during that time in your life...
Gemma	C: So if I put 0-5, 5-10 (gestures to life path). Oh and then we've got 10-15 there. Can you tell me about your life here (gestures to life path). Were you always living here?
James	C: So the next box represents your life from when you were five to when you were ten, this is now primary school. How was primary school?
Emma	C: ...I've separated the sections into 0-5, 5-10, 10-15, 15-20. Can you tell me a little bit about your life before school -
Paige	C: This is the same life path as before and you were here (gestures to map), I want to just go back and you to tell me when you were 0-5 -

## Appendix IV: Using the life path to explore strengths and resources in the past

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<i>Young Person</i>	<i>Question</i>
Tommy	C: So that was what, here I guess (gestures to life path)? So what changed for you then?
Sarah	C: This stage when you were a little one, before you went to primary school, which things in your life helped you?
Kieran	C: So moving onto this one (gestures to life path) when you went to secondary, so that's when you were 11 onwards. What were the good things? What helped you?
Jamie	C: Tell me some of the things that have helped.
Gemma	C: And you mentioned that your student support officer has helped. How have they helped?
James	C: During that time – when you were really young before primary school. What things helped you cope with life?...It could be things about you or things about other people.
Emma	C: If I asked you what helped you in your life at this age (gestures to life path) what would you say?
Paige	C: Finally, what helped you at this time? (Gestures to life path). When you were going through this stage, 0-5-

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## Appendix V: Using the life path to explore how strengths and resources could be helpful in the future

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<i>Young Person</i>	<i>Question</i>
Tommy	C: What kind of things will help you get your own construction company?
Sarah	C: How might having people like your cousins, people who help you with your behaviour and keep you in check and all of that, how might that help you in the future?
Kieran	C: You know when you said that you can just stop and realise and manage your anger, in the future how will you having that ability to stop and manage your anger help you-
Jamie	C: Could these things that you've identified that have helped you before help you in the future do you think
Gemma	C: And how could these things help you in the future?
James	C: How do you think, all of these things that have helped you so far will help you in the future? Do you think that they will?
Emma	C: And how will taking action into your own hands help you in the future?
Paige	C: Do you think that they could help you in the future?

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## Appendix VI: Ethical approval from the University Ethics Committee

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### SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

Dean: Professor Mark N. O. Davies, PhD, CPsychol, CBiol.

**UEL**  
University of  
East London  
[www.uel.ac.uk](http://www.uel.ac.uk)

### School of Psychology Professional Doctorate Programmes

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to confirm that the Professional Doctorate candidate named in the attached ethics approval is conducting research as part of the requirements of the Professional Doctorate programme on which he/she is enrolled.

The Research Ethics Committee of the School of Psychology, University of East London, has approved this candidate's research ethics application and he/she is therefore covered by the University's indemnity insurance policy while conducting the research. This policy should normally cover for any untoward event. The University does not offer 'no fault' cover, so in the event of an untoward occurrence leading to a claim against the institution, the claimant would be obliged to bring an action against the University and seek compensation through the courts.

As the candidate is a student of the University of East London, the University will act as the sponsor of his/her research. UEL will also fund expenses arising from the research, such as photocopying and postage.

Yours faithfully,



Dr. Mark Finn

Chair of the School of Psychology Ethics Sub-Committee

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## Appendix VII: Information sheet for young people

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UEL Doctorate in Professional Educational and Child Psychology



### Participant Information Sheet

Dear.....

My name's Charlie. I work with children and young people in [name of LA]. I'm training to become an Educational Psychologist, and I am doing a project on what young people have to say about their futures. I'm really interested in talking to you if you can spare the time! I'd like to hear what you have to say. There are no right or wrong answers, I'm just interested in what you have to say. I'm hoping to learn more about what helps young people like you in their lives, particularly when thinking about the future. What you tell me might help other young people.

1. **If you are happy to be part of my project after reading this**, I'll arrange a time to come and tell you a bit more about it. I'll answer any questions you have and talk to you about getting your written permission.
2. **If you are happy to be part of my project after we've talked about it** we can arrange a good time to have our conversation. When we have our conversation, I'll record what you say to me using a tape-recorder called a dictaphone. This is so I remember all the important things you tell me.

**What you say will be kept between us.** The only time I would have to speak to anyone else would be if you tell me something that means you or somebody else is in danger. **Once I have talked to other young people I will write about what I have found out.** But don't worry - I won't use your real name. we can make up a different name for you, so that nobody will know what you have told me.

There's no pressure for you to take part, and if you don't want to that's okay, just circle NO.

If you are happy to talk to me about my project then put your name on the dotted line and circle YES.

**My name is ..... and I'm happy to talk to Charlie about her project  
YES/NO**

Thanks for taking the time to read this!  
Charlie

## Appendix VIII: Information sheet for parents/carers

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**UEL Doctorate in Professional Educational and Child Psychology**



### Parent/Carer Information Sheet

Dear.....

My name is Charlie Tellis-James, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist working with children and young people in [name of LA]. I am currently carrying out a project on what young people have to say about their futures.

The research is being commissioned by [name of Educational Psychology Service]. It is hoped that the information collected in this research will help [name of LA] to better support young people to have positive futures.

If you and ..... are happy for ..... to take part in this research then I will arrange a good time to meet ..... at [name of provision/home/mainstream school]. I will listen carefully to what he/she has to say and record our conversation using a dictaphone. .... will be given a different name when I write up my research. This is to ensure that nobody will be able to identify them in my research. All the data will be collected and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). I will write up what I find out, and after I have finished my research all the tapes and transcripts will be destroyed.

..... participation is voluntary and if he/she decides they do not want to take part anymore they will be reassured that this is okay. I will phone you within the next week to find out if you and ..... are happy for ..... to take part. If you have any concerns, or you decide that you do not want ..... to take part, you will be able to tell me when I phone you.

If at any stage you would like further information on any aspect of my project, please contact me via [name of LA link person] at [name of provision]. I would be very happy to talk with you.

Thank-you for your time.

I look forward to discussing this with you in the next week.

Yours Sincerely

Charlie Tellis-James  
Trainee Educational Psychologist

## Appendix IX: Participant consent form



UEL Doctorate in Professional Educational and Child Psychology

### Participant Consent Form



This is the consent form that you need to fill in if you want to take part.

Read the statements in the table and ✓✗ either 'yes' or 'no'.  
Underneath the table there is space for you to sign your name, and write your name and the date.

	 Yes	 No
Charlie has explained her project to me and I understand what will happen if I decide to take part.		
I know I can ask..... to contact Charlie anytime I want to ask her a question about the project.		
I understand that I can choose whether or not to take part. I know that I can decide not to take part before the interview and that is okay. I know that if I want to stop at any time in the interview that is okay too.		
I understand that [name of Educational Psychology Service] will receive a copy of Charlie's research, but that nobody will be able to identify me because I will be given a different name.		
I understand that Charlie will not share what I tell her with anyone else, unless she is worried that I or someone else is in danger.		

I have read the participant information sheet and have been able to ask Charlie any questions I have about her research. I would like to take part in her research.

Signature .....

Name in capitals.....

Date.....

## Appendix X: Tommy's Transcript

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C: How old are you Tommy?

T: I'm 14.

C: 14 so you're here, well there really (points on life path). So if we start in this box, if I get you to think ahead five or six years. Tell me, as best you can, what you think will happen in your life.

T: What you think or what I want to happen?

C: What you think will happen.

T: I'd like to coach or something teaching football, like go round different schools and that.

C: So you want to coach, I'm just going to write this down. So you want to coach, going around different schools coaching football. Have you always been into football?

T: Yeah.

C: So little kids in schools and when will that start happening do you think?

T: I'm not sure, whenever I got to do my work experience and that's when I am gonna try and start it from then.

C: So is that in year 10 or year 11? Year 10. So that's this year. Going into year 11 yeah. So for your work experience you are definitely going to do football coaching?

T: Yeah.

C: Yeah, okay. So that's going to happen-

T:-Or construction.

C: Or construction? So that's your other idea. Tell me a bit more about that one.

T: I don't know, it's just another thing I enjoy doing and doing with my hands instead of sitting down writing.

C: So it's kind of practical. What kind of thing would you be doing?

T: Anything. Could become a builder, become an electrician, anything. Brick laying.

C: Have you had any experience of that already?

T: Yeah.

C: Have you?

T: I do a bit of work with my cousin and my uncle.

C: What do they do?

T: My cousin does electricity, he's got his own electricity company.

C: Uh-huh.

T: My other brother is a designer like decorator and my dad just does stuff, like anything, round, doing anything with construction.

C: Different jobs that come up. Oh right, so not in school but out of school you've had the chance to try all sorts of practical jobs out with family. And then the football coaching is your other idea and is that, that's come more through school, something that school have set up for you?

T: Yeah that's something which school's helped with, like encouraged me with even more. I do do football outside of school as well.

C: Oh okay, what do you do out of school, just with your local team or...?

T: I play semi-professional, like nearly semi-professional.

C: Really?

T: Football.

C: How did you get into that?

T: I was scouted.

C: Ah so you were just out playing football with your mates-

T:-I played for a local team at first.

C: Yeah.

T: Then got scouted.

C: So what does that mean, if someone scouts you, that means they think you are good and they want to give you a platform to kind of get better?

T: Yeah and stay with the team or from there I can go to a better team.

C: Ah so that's kind of, you've got two different ideas and you're not really sure which one will happen. Have you got any idea of which one you'd rather do?

T: Er....

C: I see, either or. So the football coaching would start whilst you were still at school and when would the construction stuff start to kick in?

T: Probably college.

C: Yeah, is college on the cards then? Is that your plan?

T: Uh-huh.

C: Would you go to one round here?

T: (names college) probably.

C: Oh okay. And then that would be doing what?

T: Construction.

C: Yeah so that's that route (gestures to life path), construction at college?

T: Or it could turn out to be coaching. It could turn out to be either, I'm not sure.

C: Oh okay, and I guess from what you've said you keep playing football until you get semi-pro and get better and better and work your way up that way. I guess you can't really do all three at once, so it's whichever happens for you really. Okay, so finishing school, doing GCSEs, getting those, do you feel like you'll work towards those and achieve them?

T: Yeah.

C: And then would you have some time off or would you go straight to college?

T: Straight to college.

C: Yeah, you don't feel like having a gap year or anything?

T: What when I leave [name of provision]?

C: Yeah.

T: No.

C: Straight there, what makes you feel like you want to go straight to college and not have time out?

T: Dunno, I just want to go straight to college.

C: Yeah, get on with it?

T: Get working quick time.

C: So in terms of working, if you're going to spend the next four, five years working towards one of these goals maybe more. Where does the rest of your life fit in, so social side, earn a bit of money? What are you going to do as well as working?

T: What - do you mean what am I going to do apart from work?

C: Yeah, exactly.

T: Do what any other person does, go out and have a laugh and get drunk.

C: So will you be getting drunk and having a laugh with your friends from school? Do you reckon you'll stay in touch with a lot of them?

T: Nah, when I went to [name of school] to [name of school], I don't hang out with anyone I chilled out with at primary.

C: Okay so we're going back to here (gestures to life path). Can you tell me a bit more about your life at this time?

T: It was [name of school] my primary school and all the people from my primary school came here but I don't chill with none of them.

C: No? Met different people? So when you go to college which is a different site, do you think that will happen again or are there people that come from this school that will go to college with you that you'll still see?

T: It will be the same, I think, I still see people from my school and that.

C: Yeah?

T: People just meet different people don't they?

C: Kind of get a bigger group of friends from friends of friends? Okay so friends sound like they will play a big part of your free time. Hanging out with them. What about a job, do you think you would bother getting a job whilst you are at college or would that come afterwards?

T: Probably get, I don't know, not sure, I haven't got a clue.

C: So moving on to, I know this is going a bit further now but 20 to 25. You've either gone to college and done the whole construction route or the coaching route. So school is about four years ago now, quite some time ago, and college is done with-

T: -And I probably own my own construction company or something.

C: Really?

T: That's what I want to do.

C: Oh okay. Your own construction company, not working for your family?

T: Nah, cause I'll take over it.

C: Oh I see. So would you work, would you start working with them and then take over it?...Ah, so have you always wanted to do that?

T: I've always wanted to do something like that.

C: Something practical like you say. So that's going to be quite young - 20-25 - setting that up. How do you think you'll get to there?

T: Nah, I don't know, I'm thinking, I dunno, I've not got a clue what I am doing when I'm older.

C: It's difficult to think about. You're doing really well, you've obviously given it a lot of

thought already. What kind of things will help you get your own construction company? What's your plan? So you're here now (gestures to life path).

T: Study it at college, that's all I can do, get better at it.

C: And then you'll be qualified. So you've got the skills really?

T: I've got the qualification, put my stuff in the yellow pages and do stuff like that.

C: Ah, so that's a really simple way of doing it, so people will just bring the work to you basically. So you think, once you've got to a certain level, you think that the clients will just start coming to you? Okay, so where will you be living when you've got your own construction company?

T: I'm going into a hostel when I'm 16.

C: Are you? So here, (refers to life path) yeah? So what makes you want to do that? That's leaving home pretty early.

T: Cause I just want to get out, just want to start earning my own money and that.

C: Uh huh, so something around independence?

T: That and other stuff as well.

C: So just wanting to get away by the sounds of it? So when I was asking you about when you are 25 and stuff, where you would be living... You didn't say at home, you said 'Well actually I'll probably have spent the best part of ten years already living-

T:- Well after a year in a hostel you get a flat anyway don't you.

C: I dunno. Do you?

T: Uh-huh. If you spend a year in a hostel the council gets you a flat.

C: Oh okay. So it's not so much about living in a hostel it's about getting a flat, getting independence, getting on the property ladder and getting a property.

T: Maybe saving my money and getting a house, something like that.

C: Yeah. Makes a lot of sense. So actually after ten years you'll probably already have something quite solid at 25 cause you would have got your own flat already. So is there anywhere in all of this this where you think about maybe going travelling? Or is it much more about...

T: I've travelled my whole life.

C: Really? Where have you been?

T: Well not travelled, travelled around England and that.

C: So from when you were how old?

T: I don't know, I've been here a few years but from when I was younger, my family come from gypsy families.

C: Oh so they were travelling around by nature really?

T: I've just come back from [name of place], literally a couple of days ago from a caravan down there.

C: Oh right, cause your mum said you've gone on holiday with your dad, so is it your dad's side of the family?

T: My dad's side is Irish traveller, my mum's side is Romany Gypsy.

C: Oh right, so do they, in terms of their cultures, do they marry up quite well in terms of their, no, are they totally different? That must be weird. So when you were a baby you were presumably travelling, always travelled? Yeah, so travelling to you, most people-

T: - I ain't really travelled, it's just like, if we do travel it will be around England or something, we don't go international.

C: Don't go abroad?

T: My mum tried to, like, bring me up a bit different to that.

C: Yeah, trying to base you somewhere by the sounds of it?

T: Yeah, she didn't want me being like my cousins and my brother.

C: Is your brother a lot older?

T: Yeah 24.

C: Oh okay. So did your mum travel around a lot, like abroad?

T: I don't know, I haven't asked.

C: Yeah. So when you were a baby, I guess from that age on you've travelled around at least the UK and so when I ask most people 'Would you consider travelling at 25?' they might say 'Oh I don't know I've not thought about that', you're saying-

T:- I want to go to America when I'm older.

C: Oh okay, so where does that come on here? (refers to life path).

T: I dunno.

C: Mid 20's, 30's?

T: I'm not sure, I just know I wanna. Maybe when I get older.

C: What makes you want to go to America?

T: I don't know.

C: You think it's different to here?

T: Get away from everything.

C: And have you, have you been inspired by anyone to go to America?

T: No it's just, I've always wanted to go to America when I'm older.

C: It's just something you've always wanted to do. Did you think that you might just go for a short time or do you think you would stay for quite a long time?

T: Don't know, I haven't got a clue, it depends. It depends. I might not it just depends on what I'm doing here and how I'm getting on.

C: Yeah.

T: Anything could happen really, innit.

C: Oh yeah. This isn't, this isn't necessarily what's *going* to happen, this is, well this could happen (gestures to life path) and this could happen (gestures to life path) but who knows which way you'll go in the end. I guess work probably plays a big part in that, from what you've said?

T: I just want to get my own money, I'm one of those people like, I just want to get my own money.

C: Sounds like you've got a good work ethic though like-

T: -Nah, I haven't but...

C: But?

T: But even if I hate school but I know I've got to get through school so I can get money and get a job and that.

C: Yeah. So you're not here for the love of being here, it's kind of-

T: -I hate school but I've gotta put my head down cause last year I was, like, on the verge of getting expelled.

C: So that was what, here I guess (gestures to life path). So what changed for you then, the verge of getting expelled is pretty extreme from being down there to you today being in a PE lesson and getting on really well?

T: Everything really, it's more, I would say my mum as well. I dunno, I was putting her through hell, not just in school but out of school as well, getting arrested and stuff.

C: So what changed then, did you just start to realise-

T: -It's just respect innit, respect for my mum.

C: Yeah, you realised that it was having a big impact on her and she was starting to worry about you and stuff? That's a good reason you know. And she must be dead proud of you being back at school now? Because if you were as close to the verge as you said you were, she

must be really proud you are back here and stuff. And so, was it a case of, you can say as much or as little as you like, but was it the case of not hanging out with a certain group anymore or have you had to change a lot of your life?-

T:-It was getting involved in the wrong crowd and all that.

C: Are they here at school?

T: Nah cause I'm a bit grown up for my age innit.

C: Yeah-

T: Cause I've got a big family and most of my family are older so I've been brought up around older people.

C: So your cousins like you said, and your big brother and stuff?

T: I was chillin with older people and that, and was just getting into trouble and just doing stupid things, and obviously I was with them and just doing it as well.

C: Yeah, tagging along and getting involved. So I guess for you it means-

T:-but I had a laugh doing it, it's just not right like, it's against the law and stuff like that.

C: Yeah and that's a difficult one isn't it-

T:-And it was rubbing off at school.

C: What was rubbing off at school?

T: I was fighting and just doing stuff that I shouldn't be doing really.

C: And did you find in school they came down a lot harder on you than at home or both?-

T:-Nah.

C: Really, worse at home?

T: Trust me, I don't want to piss my mum off.

C: So she disciplines you then by the sounds of it your mum?

T: Not like child abuse, nothing like that-

C: -No, no-

T: It's just like.

C: I've spoken to your mum, I can tell you seem to have a good relationship?

T: It's weird cause I'm close to my mum but we've been through quite a lot.

C: Cause you live with her right?

T: Yeah, well my dad used to be a bit of a prick when they was together and stuff like that. They've been through a lot and that so.

C: And you've had to, so it sounds like you've got a stronger bond with her, through the thick and the thin of it you've kind of developed a really good, a relationship that has meant that, even though you were having fun doing this that and the other, you've managed to stop that for her really. You haven't said you're doing it for you, although you have said you know you want to have money and be independent. But the person that you said stopped you being on that verge of tipping over the edge and thinking right-

T:-Was my mum.

C: Was your mum. Was there a, going back to this (gestures to life path), was there a time when you were with your dad and your mum then? Was that when you were little here travelling?

T: My mum only broke up with my dad like a year ago.

C: Oh really? So that's quite recent.

T: A year, a year and a half.

C: So here probably (gestures to life path). And then things, would you say things are easier for you now-

T: -I don't get on with my dad.

C: So is he living with somewhere else now?

T: Yeah he lives in [name of place.]

C: Oh okay, not that far away. He didn't move countries or anything?

T: I don't care about my dad though, not properly, not really.

C: You've just spent a week down there as well haven't you? So would you say that life is better now that they've broken up or-

T: -Yeah, my mum's happier now.

C: That's good, and you're feeling that as well and noticing it?

T: Yeah that's what I want, my mum to be happy really.

C: Yeah and I guess, because the timing of you getting into bother and stuff-

T: -Cause my mum's not strict, she has her rules but she lets me do a lot of stuff that a normal 14 year old wouldn't be allowed to do.

C: Treats you like a bit of an adult which is-

T: -She says if I act up like a kid, she's going to treat me like a kid, which is fair enough.

C: She sounds like a good mum. And so is it just the two of you now cause obviously your brothers older? Right, and was your brother about a lot when you were younger?

T: Nah that's my half-brother on my dad's side-

C:-On your dad's side. Right.

T: And my other brother don't get on with my dad either.

C: Okay, so do you see him very much?

T: Yeah but me and my brother are probably closer. My mum was always there for my brother.

C: Okay, so does he come and hang out at your mum's or-

T:-Yeah.

C: Oh that's really nice and is he, would you say he was a good influence on you, or a bad influence on you? You can say either remember, I've given you a different name, no one will know who you are.

T: Good and bad like. Like if I'm doing something wrong he'll be like, tell me like 'stop being a prick' like.

C: Oh okay.

T: But he can't talk cause he's a hypocrite.

C: Ah so okay, he gets himself in bother too sometimes but he's trying to lead, he's trying to tell you not to do the same thing by the sounds of it? So he's kind of here now (gestures to life path), 20-25 yeah. So would you say when you are in this box 20-25 (gestures to life path) you're going to be similar to your brother in some ways but different in other ways?

T: Dunno, my brothers grown up a bit now, like from what he used to be. I'm not too sure what I'm going to be like.

C: You say that in an unsure way, like I'm not sure-

T:-I dunno.

C: Do you feel like, do you feel like if you put your mind to it and decide-

T: -If I put my mind to something I will do it, will do it.

C: Are you just not sure whether you'll put your mind to it completely?

T: Depends what I put my mind for.

C: Yeah, it sounds like school is-

T:-People told me if it weren't for my mum I would have been in prison by now.

C: So having somebody to work for and make happy-

T:-It's like a guideline to get me on track, like my mum's always getting me on track.

C: Well I hope she keeps doing that for the next two years. So what makes you want to go, if you get on so well with your mum - If you don't mind my asking and you can say that you do - what makes you want to go to the hostel then?

T: I wanna get out like, I dunno, the way I've grown up a bit quicker for my age, so I just wanna get on with it-

C: -Oh okay-

T:-Get a flat, my own car, I just wanna do my own thing really.

C: So you feel a bit older for your age already and probably, being at school must be at odds with that. That makes sense. So you've told me so far that you've got different options, the football coaching or the construction, it sounds like you've got a few routes into those whether it's through family or other people. Although I guess if it's, from what you've said about your dad, you'd probably be going over to [name of place] more if you were getting into construction. But then you did say you wanted your own company. And then at some point you'd like to go over to America.

T: I've only been abroad once-

C:-Have you?-

T:-It's weird isn't it, considering I've travelled a lot-

C:- Yeah it is. Where did you go?

T: But yeah, I only went to Spain.

C: So Gypsy Roma means your mum, she's what, of Romanian heritage? And you've never been there?

T: I don't know, when I was younger, my mum said I went there when I was younger.

C: Too young to remember?

T: Yeah, it's not a proper holiday when you don't remember what you've done.

C: No, not when you're a baby, it doesn't count.

T: No.

C: When did you go to Spain?

T: Few years ago.

C: So kind of here (gestures to life path)?

T: Yeah, cause my mum's not got the best of money innit, and it's quite a lot of money to go abroad and that.

C: Yes, for tickets and things. It costs a lot to go away in this country these days if you're staying over and stuff. So do you think you would have travelled more if you'd grown up with more money?

T: Yeah. Mum says if we had the money, if we was rich we wouldn't be in England.

C: Really, where would you be, did she say?

T: Nah, she just says we'd have a big mansion abroad. I think it's the Irish.

C: Do you? Well maybe that's, where some of your drive for independence and money has come from-

T:- I just want to move to a better place you know.

C: Better than what?

T: -Better than here, it's all just.

C: And what does that better place, what is that like?

T:-It's like perfect innit really, it's just money-

C: -Money?

T: Everything. Big House.

C: Big house. Is it still in London?

T: Nah.

C: So would you want to move away?

T: Nah, it's too boring. I wouldn't wanna do that.

C: No. So somewhere, you want to be somewhere with a buzz, but for some reason you don't want to be here or you don't want to be in this part of London?

T: I don't know, I wanna have a laugh and that like clubbing, but, my sisters trying to take me clubbing now.

C: You didn't mention your sister.

T: I've got two sisters.

C: Is that your mum's side?

T: Dad's side.

C: Dad's side. So it sounds like you do hang out with an older crowd and-

T: -I only just found out I got a sister, a half-sister.

C: What do you mean only just found out?

T: Oh I dunno, my dad basically, before my dad was with me and my mum he was with my two, my brother and my sister but before he was with my brother and sister's mum, he was with another woman.

C: Right.

T: And he got her pregnant like, and things happened whilst she was pregnant and he never met her, but she's 18 and she just got in contact with us like this year. She said 'this sounds weird but I'm your sister' and I was like 'Who the fuck are you?'

C: And did you believe her?

T: I was like 'No' and my mum was like 'Tommy, it's true'. I was like, 'What do you mean it's true?' She was like 'Well I was waiting to tell you but obviously she's came and got in touch with you now'. I was like 'What?'

C: That's a lot to take in.

T: After that was like when I was going through the stage of getting kicked out of school, going off the rails and I just found out I had a sister, I was like...

C:-Just another thing for you to contend with.

T: Yeah. But she's alright, she's only from (name of place).

C: So close, for 18 years. Well you've been around for less time than that but. So have you met up with her?

(Bell rings)

T: I've, I think it's the end of the day.

C: Let me look at the time. Have you got five more minutes?

T: I've got to get all my stuff out the PE cupboard cause they lock it.

C: Okay. Well let's end there other than to say one last question. In terms of your family and you in the future talking about your dad and your sister and things. Do you see yourself having a family? Last question.

T: Yeah.

C: Where on here (refers to life path), later on or quite early on? Like your dad when he was young or when your-

T:- About 30 I reckon.

C: When you're here (refers to life path), big family?-

T: I want a big family.

C: Yeah.

T: Five kids.

C: Alright, thank you so much for talking to me, I really appreciate your time. And listen, good luck with it and stick with it for your mum.

T: Yeah.