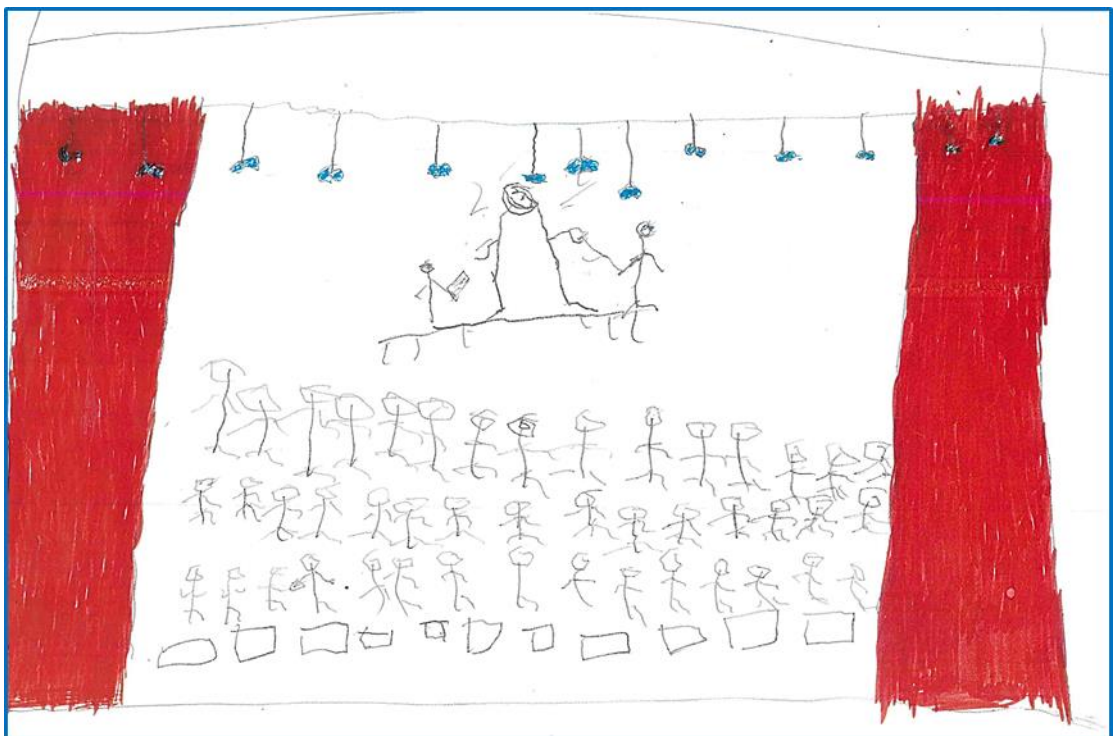


# Pupils' Experiences of Authentic Voice and Participatory Practices in a Special School.



*Figure 96 Javier's Drawing*

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## Table of Abbreviations

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Abbreviation	Full Title
<b>AAC</b>	Augmentative and Alternative Communications
<b>AHT</b>	Assistant Headteacher
<b>ALLFIE</b>	Alliance for Inclusive Education
<b>AR</b>	Action Research
<b>CFA</b>	Children and Families Act 2014
<b>CMN</b>	Complex Mixed Needs
<b>CYP</b>	Children and Young People
<b>DAM</b>	Draw-A-Man
<b>DAP</b>	Draw-A-Person
<b>DCSF</b>	Department for Children, Schools and Families
<b>DES</b>	Department for Education and Science
<b>DfE</b>	Department for Education
<b>DfES</b>	Department for Education and Skills
<b>DoH</b>	Department of Health
<b>DWT</b>	Draw, Write and Tell
<b>EHCP</b>	Education, Health and Care Plan
<b>EP</b>	Educational Psychologists
<b>ESRC</b>	Economic and Social Research Council
<b>HFD</b>	Human Figure Drawings
<b>ID</b>	Intellectual Disabilities
<b>LA</b>	Local Authority
<b>MLD</b>	Moderate Learning Difficulties
<b>OCC</b>	Office for the Children's Commissioner
<b>PAR</b>	Participatory Action Research
<b>PCA</b>	Person-Centred Approach
<b>PCP</b>	Person-Centred Planning
<b>SaLT</b>	Speech and Language Therapist
<b>SEBD</b>	Social, Emotional and Behaviour Difficulties
<b>SENCO</b>	Special Educational Need Coordinators
<b>SEND</b>	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
<b>SEND CoP</b>	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice
<b>SLD</b>	Severe Learning Difficulties
<b>SLT</b>	Senior Leadership Team
<b>TA</b>	Teaching Assistant
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCRC</b>	The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>UNESCO</b>	The United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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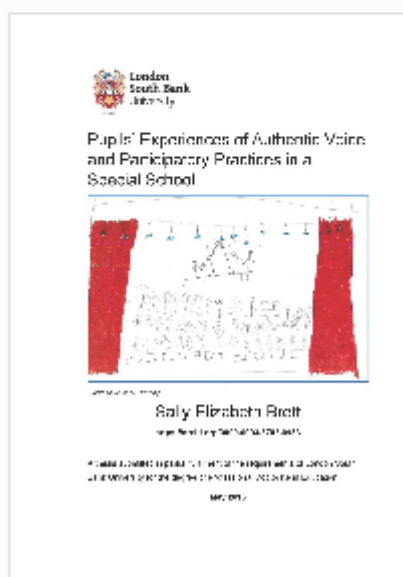


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## **Abstract**

This qualitative study seeks to examine the experiences of pupils identified with special educational needs and disability (SEND) in a London special school, and better understand what constitutes authentic voice and participation. The research focuses on pupils labelled as having Complex Mixed Needs (CMN) who may be considered “harder to reach” (Porter, 2009, p. 349) because of their speech and communication difficulties, learning disabilities or complex health needs.

I was motivated to undertake this research by the introduction of Education, Health and Care plans (EHCP) proposed by the *Children and Families Act 2014* (CFA) and the updated SEND Code of Practice (CoP) (DfE, 2015), because legislation appears to be championing inclusive practice and enabling unprecedented opportunities to ensure pupils have a say in key issues that affect them.

This research scrutinises aspects of SEND reform and contends that while new legislation enshrines pupil voice and participation in law there appears to be no coherent plan for how this is to be implemented. The concept of voice as speech is far from straightforward and I argue for a reconceptualisation of voice beyond speech. This study examines how voices are heard and if pupils’ experiences of participation correspond to the principles outlined in the EHCP process.

The methodology applied is child-focused and encompasses an action research (AR) approach. This sits well with the emancipatory principles of critical disability theory because it places the voices of pupils identified with CMN at the forefront of research. The Draw, Write and Tell (DWT) approach was utilised to access 19 pupils’ perspectives which provided rich and complex visual, written, verbal and non-verbal data.

This research has important implications for education policy and practice and makes a series of recommendations for change. It advances the debate about pupil voice and participation and establishes that a visual, child-friendly methodology can be employed to support pupils identified with CMN to have their say.

## **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Overview**

Chapter 1 introduces the context and rationale for my research as well as detailing my background and professional interest. The research aims and questions are outlined at the end of this chapter.

### **1.2 Context**

The central purpose of the research is to examine the experiences and better understand what constitutes authentic voice and participation for pupils identified with special educational needs and disability (SEND) as part of the Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) process. The research was undertaken in a large London special school with pupils aged 11-19. The study focuses on pupils labelled as having Complex Mixed Needs (CMN) who may be considered “harder to reach” (Porter, 2009, p. 349) because of their speech and communication difficulties, learning disabilities or complex health needs. Critically, the research is interested in recent reforms such as the *Children and Families Act 2014* (CFA) and the SEND Code of Practice (CoP) (DfE, 2015), because legislation appears to be championing inclusive practice and enabling unprecedented opportunities to ensure pupils and disabled young people have a key say in issues that affect them.

The CFA aims to create a more joined-up approach to improving the way different agencies and services work together. One of the significant changes to the SEND CoP (DfE, 2015) is that pupils with CMN will have a co-ordinated assessment. The EHCP replaces the Statement of Special Educational Need. The new CoP states that “the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person, and the child’s parents” (DfE, 2015 p. 19) need to be considered in the EHCP process. The previous revised SEND CoP (2001) introduced the notion of pupil participation and supported the right of pupils to express an opinion, but it placed the duty on professionals to endeavour to gain the views of pupils. The CFA and the new CoP has reinforced participation and pupil voice by enshrining the principle in law and placing the onus on local authorities (LA) to ensure pupils and young people are fully involved in discussions and decisions about their individual support and local provision.

Listening to the voices of pupils with a diverse range of communication and social interaction needs may be far from straightforward and poses daunting challenges (Ashby, 2011; Franklin and Osbourne, 2009; Lewis and Porter, 2004; Porter, 2009; Tangen, 2008). Pupils identified with CMN have been traditionally marginalised or silenced (Shakespeare, 2005) because they challenge the notions of normative participation as their verbal comprehension, communication skills or cognitive abilities may appear to be different. Indeed, *They still need to listen more* (OCC, 2014, p. 1), concluded that disabled children and young people (CYP) “find it hard to get their views heard and taken seriously”. New legislation and policy literature have deemed that pupils should be invited to have their say but there appears to be no coherent plan for how this is to be operationalised in schools or how these voices will be elicited. Research for the Driver Youth Trust (Bernades *et al.*, 2015) examined aspects of SEND reforms and questioned how these are playing out and how schools and professionals across a range of service providers are responding to new challenges. If pupils with SEND are to have an authentic voice and participate in decisions that will impact on education, health or care outcomes, new and innovative practices may need to be developed.

This research is rooted firmly in my own practice and motivated by a quest to investigate the effects of policy change. The aim of this research is to better understand what constitutes authentic voice and participation and implement more inclusive school practices to facilitate voice and participation beyond mere tokenism (Arnstein, 1969; Hart, 1992; Todd, 2012).

### **1.3 Conceptual Framework**

#### ***1.3.1 Special School Provision and Inclusion***

The conceptual framework adopted acknowledges that inclusive education is a contested issue because of the numbers of pupils who are excluded from participation and denied equal access to mainstream education on the grounds of disability. The *Warnock Report* (1978) recommended that pupils identified with SEND attend mainstream rather than special schools. The need for special schools is contested and organisations such as the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE) have campaigned for their closure to promote greater social justice and eliminate social exclusion. The notion that separate

types of education are required for disabled pupils is founded on the premise of the 'medical model' in which impairments are seen by society in terms of physical deficits of the body or mind and disabled people are perceived as being 'not able'. The 'medical model' views disability as a 'problem' within the individual (Oliver, 1990). Disability located in these terms is culturally loaded and socially constructed and may explain why traditionally the marginalised voices of disabled pupils have been afforded limited space. The redefinition of 'disability' had a significant impact and paved the way for the theorisation of disability as being constructed as a form of social oppression. The "social model of disability" (Oliver, 2009) refers to the "shift away from an emphasis on individual impairments towards the ways in which physical, cultural and social environments exclude or disadvantage people labelled disabled" (Barnes, 2003, p. 5). The social model argues that a person's impairment is not the cause of disability, but rather disability is the result of the way society is organised and this both disadvantages and excludes. Accordingly, pupils labelled with SEND are required to establish their level of need prior to accessing services and education in order that they can gain the support they require. Beresford (2002) noted that disabled pupils are socially excluded because LAs place the problem with the disabled pupil rather than tackling external factors such as the social, physical, organisational and curricular structures of schools that contribute further to social exclusion.

Creating an inclusive society is a goal of education policy and legislation but in practice inclusive education needs to be understood in the context of human rights. *The Equality Act 2010* and precursor disability legislation made it unlawful for education providers to treat disabled children less favourably and required LAs to improve disabled pupils' participation. Pupils have a right to receive an education that does not discriminate on grounds of disability. Despite inclusive policies, school census data suggests that "...with 1,048 special schools in England in 2011, it is evident that the number is greater in the twenty-first century than the early 1970s" (Shar cited in Curran and Runswick-Cole, 2013, p. 60). There are currently 1,037 special schools in England, but the latest DfE (2017) statistics suggest an increase in the numbers attending. In 2010 "...38.2% of pupils with statements attended maintained

special schools, and this has increased to 43.8%” in 2017 (p. 6). This trend corresponds with census data for the special school in which this study was undertaken. During the research period pupil roll increased from 111 in 2014 to 137 in 2017. These figures suggest that despite legislation, in practice inclusion for pupils labelled with CMN remains somewhat “illusory rather than inclusionary” (Hodkinson, 2012, p. 6).

### **1.3.2 Critical Disability Theory**

This research is informed by the theoretical underpinnings of critical disability theory which challenges the status quo and highlights structures of power that act to oppress marginalised groups. The social model recognises that we live in a society that privileges those defined as ‘the able’. Indeed, Goodley (2010) notes that while children in the 21st century are generally regarded as “autonomous, able, productive, skilled, accountable individuals” (p. 10) pupils labelled with SEND are frequently referred to as ‘dis-abled’ because they fall short of these ideals. The social model of disability has been subject to critique because it has been argued that it excludes and neglects individual experience of impairment (Shakespeare, 2006). The affirmation model is “essentially a non-tragic view of disability and impairment which encompasses positive social identities, both individual and collective, for disabled people grounded in the benefits of lifestyle of being impaired and disabled” (Swain and French, 2000, p. 569). This model is regarded as having the potential to transform attitudes and allows for a dialogue concerning the interplay of the social model of disability. The affirmation model places the views and experiences of disabled children at the forefront and sanctions the idea that pupils have a unique voice and perspective on disability and can actively participate in decision-making.

Although critical disability discourses support disabled pupils’ voices, the emphasis is often on the voice of the families and professionals, who act as proxies and answer for the pupil (Wickenden and Kumbhani-Tam, 2014). The legacy of the medical model is the perception that disabled pupils are vulnerable and this has created a discourse that impacts on professionals’ attitudes about disabled pupils’ ability to participate in decision-making. Davis and Watson (2000) state that the social model can also downplay the agency of disabled pupils and treat them as passive victims requiring adult support and



access to services and material support, thus enabling adults and teachers to exert undue power over pupils identified with SEND. Dickins (2004) contends that there is a need to consult disabled children about services precisely because this group is subject to medical interventions.

Research has concluded that “parents and carers are asked for their views instead of the young person” (ALLFIE, 2013a, p. 10). May (2005) posed the question: “whose participation is it any way?” (p. 31). Thus, pupils identified with CMN are being disempowered because of their perceived inability to communicate and this is particularly pertinent to pupils with communication difficulties. This can present a significant barrier to meaningful participation because pupils may have to rely on the willingness of teachers, parents and adult carers to facilitate support. The social model has encouraged disabled people to be proactive in their fight for equality and their right to be individuals whose diverse voices and experiences need to be listened to. Importantly, young people recognise that voice and participation can empower and enrich experiences, *“My voice is my power”/ “Listen to me, no one else, listen to me. It’s my body. Listen to me, it’s my life, listen to me”* (Martin, 2008). These comments indicate that however well an adult can give an account it is the pupil’s voice that is central to obtaining a comprehensive version of lived experiences and viewpoints.

### **1.3.3 Implications of the Theoretical Framework**

This study, by focusing on empowering pupils identified with CMN to voice their experiences assumes they have been disempowered. Such a discourse implies that disabled pupils are different from pupils in a mainstream school and perpetuates differences between pupils with and without disabilities. (Ashby, 2011). Therefore, to provide a space to understand and interrogate what constitutes voice and participation there is a need to acknowledge that pupils with SEND have been labelled and that special schools exist.

My study is based on the theoretical positioning that pupils identified with CMN have something worthwhile to say and that voice “empowers pupils and includes them more appropriately in their own education.” (Wright, 2008, p. 39). Teachers and other professionals cannot assume they know what is best, instead they need to seek views and opinions and listen carefully to pupils’

unique voices. This may be challenging and necessitate taking a broader view of voice and going beyond the verbal to investigate the experiences of marginalised pupils who have been labelled as different.

#### **1.4 Background and Motivation**

My research journey commenced long before the submission of my research proposal or my acceptance onto the Ed.D program. I commenced my teaching career in 1980 having trained as a Drama teacher. My pedagogical practice was influenced by Bolton, *Towards a Theory of Drama in Education* (1979) and Heathcote, whose pioneering techniques, such as Mantle of the Expert, transformed Drama in Education practice and supported pupils to have their voices listened to and acted on (Heathcote and Bolton, 1994). Later I was influenced by Boal who used theatre to empower people to change their circumstances and educate others. *Theater of the Oppressed* (1979) is a method developed to portray situations when people are dominated by the monologue of others and have no chance to have their voices heard. Boal's techniques, including forum theatre and image theatre, introduced interactive ways of working to help people express themselves and discover a way out of their powerlessness. Drama in Education practitioners adapted his ideas to help pupils find their own unique voice in the classroom.

My interest in voice emerged during the taught phase of the Ed.D. Having attended a lecture on participation, empowerment and the student and researcher's voice, I came away disgruntled because I felt that I had ironically had my voice 'drowned out'. I wrote a reflexive account of my experience of being silenced and followed through with a critical essay focusing on listening to pupil voice. It was evident by the end of the taught phase of the Ed.D that my research would focus on marginalised voices.

I have taught in a variety of London schools including mainstream secondary, special schools and an inclusion unit. Involvement with the EHCp process began as part of my professional role as Assistant Headteacher (AHT) in a special school when asked to take responsibility for the conversion of Statements of Education. This involved writing 140 EHCp over a four-year period and developing new ways of working to develop participatory practices to support pupil voice for *Section A* of the EHCp. Central to this study is the

need to listen to pupils' experiences of the EHCp process to better understand authentic voice and ensure participation pertaining to recent SEND reforms.

From the outset, it was anticipated that an insider perspective would support a better understanding of the phenomenon under examination and produce socially actionable outcomes. My thesis documents what I discovered with my pupils about authentic voice and participation as part of my practice-based research.

### **1.5 Research Aims**

Based on the issues raised in this chapter, I narrowed the research aims to focus exclusively on pupils' authentic voice and participation, as opposed to that of families or professionals.

The aim of this research is to:

- Better understand what constitutes authentic voice and participation within the framework of the SEND CoP (2015).
- Improve knowledge about practice and implement more inclusive practices for pupils labelled with CMN in a special school.

The first step towards addressing the aims and formulating research questions was to further interrogate the existing literature pertaining to authentic voice and participation practices.

### **1.6 Significance of the Research**

The CFA imposes new responsibilities on LAs and schools to make sure pupils are much more involved in decisions that affect their lives (DfE, 2015) and have a good level of participation in the EHCp process. Recent policy change has important implications for practice. Due in part to the challenges of listening and hearing the authentic voices of CMN pupils, relatively little research has been undertaken into the phenomenon in question. Importantly, significant legislative change means that in principle the EHCp potentially provides for a more inclusive and participatory experience for pupils because the SEND reforms recognise that the pupils' own perspectives can provide important information about their own experiences. This study illuminates these experiences and identifies how the voices are heard within the context of the new CoP (2015). It

highlights some of the challenges encountered in eliciting authentic voice and explores more responsive practices. This research is important and unique because it scrutinises aspects of SEND reform that have not yet been investigated due to its recent implementation.

### **1.7 Organisation of the Thesis**

My thesis is divided into 7 chapters. In Chapter 2, I discuss the literature pertaining to voice and participation and argue for a reconceptualisation of voice that is broader than speech. In Chapter 3, I outline methodology and elaborate on the reasons for adopting both an action research (AR) paradigm and the Draw, write and tell (DWT) approach. I expand on the interpretive nature of the study in Chapter 4. In Chapters 5 and 6, my findings are presented and discussed. Finally, I draw conclusions and consider implications for possible future research in Chapter 7.

## **CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The review provides a summary and analysis of the available literature pertaining to pupil participation and voice. It scrutinises UK legislation and policy and critiques existing education practice and barriers to eliciting voice for pupils identified with CMN. This sets the context for my research and elucidates how it fits into the existing literature on the subject. It highlights the complexities of eliciting authentic voice as well as gaps in the literature between theory, policy and practice and demonstrates the need for a clearer definition and theorisation of the concept of pupil voice and participation. This provides both the rationale for my study and the generation of the research questions outlined at the end of the chapter.

#### **2.1.2 Literature Search Strategy**

Literature was obtained using a variety of strategies. Internet search engines such as Google and Google Scholar were used to access pertinent articles, websites and government publications. The UK Government website was particularly useful for checking legislation relevant to the research. Initially I searched LSBU's library using generic terms such as "pupil voice" and "student voice" and this assisted by contextualising the existing research. I scrutinised a wider body of literature directly related to the research topic such as social exclusion and inclusion and disability theory and this supported greater understanding of the theoretical concepts. My search became more focused by using electronic databases such as EBSCO which enabled access to online journals such as the *British Journal of Special Education*. I narrowed the search further by breaking down the research terms into keywords, including: "children's participation"; "pupil participation", "child", "student", "pupil voice" "special needs", "SEND" "Education Health and Care plan" and "EHCP". I employed search techniques such as truncation, adjacency and abbreviations, as well as combining terms. What was striking was the absence of literature relating to participation of pupils identified with CMN. More specifically, only three journal articles referenced EHCps and two of these were written by the same author. Throughout the study I engaged in a continuous process of literature searching and set up email alerts to inform me of new sources. Additionally, I considered it necessary to widen the literature review to include

studies pertaining to children's drawing so that I could consider how to interpret the picture content. Occasionally I undertook a wild card approach and would browse websites and databases. Using this method, I came across a newly published government research paper. Supplementary literature was identified through the references or citations in articles I was reading. Tracing references allowed me to generate further literature and proved an efficient way of identifying new knowledge and gaining a broader perspective.

### **2.1.3 Voice and Participation**

Voice and participation are often used synonymously, and the terminology requires some disentangling.

What do we mean by the term voice? Voice in the anatomical sense is literally the sound produced in the larynx and uttered through the mouth. Metaphorically, voice means the way people express themselves. Having an authentic voice suggests the right to express opinions and assumes the ability to locate and tap into a 'real' voice. But, having a voice does not necessarily entail the act of physically speaking and my research defines voice as a broader concept than speech. Authentic voice can be expressed through a range of mediums including non-verbal communication, writing or drawing. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) define "giving voice" as "empowering people to be heard who might otherwise remain silent" (p. 204) and hints at the notion of a right to expression. Having no voice equates to being silenced, marginalised or ignored and in the past children have experienced being silenced, not listened too and had "words put in their mouths" (Jones and Welch, 2010, p. 86). This research engages with the voices and perspectives of disabled pupils who traditionally have been marginalised and struggled for the right to have their voices heard.

Authentic voice is not an entirely problem-free concept and necessitates further examination. Voice can be informed by multiple social factors such as class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability, and voice can take a multitude of forms. I acknowledge that I use my teacher's voice to address pupils, my professional voice to speak with colleagues and my academic voice when discussing my research.

According to Bakhtin's (1986) theory of utterance, addressee, and voice nothing we do or say occurs in isolation and voice is shaped by constantly changing contexts. For Bakhtin, language and indeed all human action is dialogic. This dialogic paradigm asserts that voice is culturally situated and shaped by events, the process of claiming voice is "basically an interaction between the individual's beliefs and experiences and past, present and future external voices" (Moen, 2006, p. 62) Dialogic communication assumes a relationship between the researcher and the pupil in which utterances are being interpreted and new meanings are constantly created by both the researcher and the research participants. For Bakhtin a voice is "overpopulated with other voices" (ibid, p. 58). Wertsch (1991) contends that there can be no singular form of voice; instead a multitude of voices are present during encounters. This "multivoicedness" (Moen, 2006, p. 62) raises questions about authenticity and the complexities of locating the true voice of a research participant during the co-construction process. The concept of authentic voice is contested and further examined in section 2.4.

What do we mean when we talk about pupil participation? How is participation different from voice? Participation refers to the broader concept of 'taking part' and involvement in decision-making processes. The literature pertaining to participation of pupils in research identified with CMN is very limited and there are "relatively few studies that explore the perceptions of children with learning disabilities or communication difficulties" (Garth and Aroni, 2003, p. 562). Twenty years ago, Boyden and Ennew (1997) contended that participation means taking part, being present, being involved or consulted. However, the term is contested and there is debate about an exact definition (Lansdown, 2009). Davey *et al.* (2010) in their summary report, *Children's participation in decision-making*, adapted Treseder's (1997) definition and proposed that "Participation is a process where someone influences decisions about their lives" (p. 7). This definition is grounded in a democratic view of participation and denotes a transference of power whereby pupils can influence decisions and bring about change. Booth *et al.* (2002) note that participation means "...being recognised, accepted and valued for oneself" (p. 3). Therefore, participation goes beyond voice and needs to be viewed as a multi-layered

concept that includes sharing ideas, expressing views and, importantly for disabled children, being actively involved in the decision-making process and being given equal opportunities to create change.

## **2.2 UK Government Law, Legislation and Policy**

In many respects, there has been a significant shift in the importance placed upon children and young peoples' (CYP) participation. Listening to childrens' voices and responding to childrens' experiences is recognised as good practice in education and the "right of children to be heard and to participate in decision making in matters that concern them has become a dominant theme in policy and research" (Prunty *et al.*, 2012, p. 29). Increasingly, there has been an awareness of international legislation and the need for UK policy to pay attention to the views of disabled CYP. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) acknowledges the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and makes it clear that pupils identified with SEND have the same rights as non-disabled pupils to participate in decisions and issues that affect them: "Children have a right to receive and impart information, to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account in any matters affecting them from the early years. Their views should be given due weight according to their age, maturity and capability" (DfE, 2015, p. 20). Accordingly, policy initiatives and guidance began to recognise the importance of voice and participation for disabled pupils and the CFA references core UNCRC principles. A literature report compiled by the Alliance for Inclusive Education (ALLFIE) in 2013, details how schools were required by law to promote equality with active participation for pupils with disability, including pupils identified with CMN.

The *Children Act 1989* is pertinent to discourses around participation and states that "if a child has complex needs, communication needs or severe learning disabilities arrangements must be made to establish their views and that a disabled child cannot be assumed to be incapable of sharing in decision-making" (ALLFIE, 2013, p. 14). The importance of listening to pupils has been reinforced by successive government policy. The SEND CoP (DfES, 2001) introduced the notion of consultation with children and states the "views of the child should be sought and taken into account" (p. 7). Interestingly, health policy



also recognises the importance of disabled children being given the opportunity to participate. *The National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services* (NSF) states :

Professionals should ensure that disabled children especially children with high communication needs are not excluded from the decision-making process. In particular professionals should consider the needs of children who rely on communication equipment or who use non-verbal communication such as sign language. (DoH/ DfES, 2004, p. 29)

While the importance of hearing the voices of pupils labelled with SEND is clearly acknowledged, it also recognises that empowering voices may be far from straightforward. If only the more articulate voices of disabled pupils are 'heard', this raises concerns that those with significant communication or speech challenges may be disempowered.

*The Children Act 2004* established the post of Children's Commissioner for England with the responsibility for working on behalf of all children in England but particularly those whose voices are least likely to be heard. Labour policy further encouraged the participation of pupils identified with SEND in issues that affect them. *Every Child Matters: Aiming High for Disabled Children* (DfES, 2007a) considered "access and empowerment" (p. 5) as a priority to help improve outcomes for disabled children. It recognised the practical benefits that can ensue if pupils, including those with communication difficulties, have a role in the decision-making process. However, despite policy recognition of the importance of voice and participation, *The Berrow Report* (DCSF, 2008) described the system for providing support to CYP with speech, language and communication difficulties as "highly variable" and characterised by a "lack of equity" (p. 59). The review team acknowledged that very few services had managed to translate policy into effective practice. *The Berrow Report* made 40 recommendations, highlighting the requirement for more effective services to provide better long-term outcomes and the need to address the gap between policy at government level and practice at local level.

Additionally, the literature report compiled by ALLFIE (2013b) points out that as much of the policy prior to the CFA is not a legislative requirement its implementation is discretionary. Davis and Watson (2000) maintain that this discretion within policy provides a discourse behind which people can claim disabled pupils have an effective voice. Martin and Franklin (2009) contend that

participation of disabled pupils is more rhetoric than reality. Between 2008 and 2011, £5 million was allocated to support parent and carer voices, but *Hear Us Out!* specified that when “funding streams were no longer ring-fenced, many of the participation opportunities stopped too” (ALLFIE, 2013a, p. 6). Similarly, one of the aims of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded project, *Does Every Child Matter, post-Blair?* (Goodley et al., 2011) was to find out what life was like for disabled young people. Their findings indicated that supporting disabled children to communicate and have a voice was not seen as a key policy priority. The literature suggests that opportunities to promote and empower the voices of pupils identified with SEND may have been missed as reforms have paid little attention to pupils’ views in practice.

Despite a “plethora of policies” (ALLFIE 2013b p. 22) and the rhetoric of listening to and including pupils identified with SEND there have been few opportunities to participate in practice. Franklin and Sloper (2009) comment that “while evidence suggests that mainstream pupils are increasingly being involved in decision-making, growth has been slower in respect of disabled children” (p. 3). Flynn (2011) notes that the voices of some pupils are seldom sought, particularly children labelled with social, emotional and behaviour difficulties (SEBD). She comments that “there have been many studies focusing on the perceptions of pupils in mainstream education but very few have focused on pupils with SEBD” (2011, p. 60). Tangen (2009) acknowledges that some young people seldom have a voice, and this includes pupils with disabilities.

Participatory research which includes the voices of disabled pupils, notes that “disabled young people are still being excluded from decision-making and are not supported to participate in inclusive participation opportunities” (ALLFIE, 2013b, p. 14). Similarly, Macay (2014) contends that active participation is “at least variable, and at worst prejudiced” (p. 766) indicating that marginalised groups are still at risk of not having their views incorporated into decision-making processes. Significantly a young person stated, “It’s hard for disabled children who are non-verbal. They still have an opinion but express it in a different way” (OCC, 2014, p. 19). The literature indicates that active participation is an area in which those with communication impairments are finding it difficult to have their say.

There appear to be several reasons why the voices of pupils identified with CMN have been excluded. The first is that they may be perceived as too difficult to include. Lewis and Porter (2004) acknowledge challenges, while Prunty *et al.*, (2012) note that assessing “the views of children with disabilities in authentic and reliable ways is a challenge” (p. 30). Macay (2014) comments that “active engagement with services is contingent upon assumptions about degrees of capability or deservability” (p. 765), which suggests that disabled pupils are dependent on the advocacy of school staff and service providers for active participation and for making decisions about pupils’ ability to communicate. The Office for the Children’s Commissioner (OCC) notes that young people wanted their communication needs to be met “by having access to the right support and for people to take time to listen to them” (2014, p. 20). It concluded that disabled pupils faced barriers to communicating and suggested a need for more training in order that professionals and service providers understand how to communicate with disabled CYP. The literature gives the impression that, while policy discourse promotes participation, the actual mechanisms to facilitate voice are often hindered by practicalities such as the lack of training afforded to the adults working with pupils and the views and assumptions about pupils’ capability to communicate. These barriers may account for the considerable gap between policy, rhetoric and pedagogy regarding how inclusive participation is enacted at school level. (Martin and Franklin, 2009). Despite policy change there are ongoing concerns about implementation and genuine commitment to participation and authentic voice.

The Conservative-Liberal Democate Coalition Government (2010-2015) proposed radical changes in a Green paper: *Support and Aspirations: A New Approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability* (DfE, 2012) and the CFA entered the statute books in 2014. The new SEND CoP (DfE, 2015) updated the 2001 predecessor to reflect changes introduced by the CFA. The reforms go further than previous legislation by decreeing that local government translate legislation into practice and give formal powers to promote closer co-operation between education, health and social care. In 2014, statements were replaced by an EHCp, a single assessment process, that promotes high aspirations and the best possible educational outcomes for the 0–25 age range. The EHCp

process ostensibly gives pupils and their families a greater say in matters that affect them. But, EHCps were not fully tested prior to their introduction and therefore there has been “...limited progress over implementing some key principles, such as involvement of children and young people...” (Norwich and Eaton, 2015, p. 120). Crucially, the EHCp process is still reliant on the competencies of teaching professionals to elicit authentic voice. Regrettably, it could also be argued that the EHCp is merely an extension of the existing statement covering a wider age range. Norwich and Eaton point out that EHCps extend, integrate and tighten up “existing principles and practices”, but comment that “Calling the new plans ‘EHC plans’ could also be misleading as they are basically educational plans where health and social care needs are included in so far as they relate to SEN” (p. 119). In fact, there is a call within education for EHCp’s to be known as “E plans” because although LAs are legally responsible in practice they are written and conducted by schools. Nevertheless, the EHCp builds on person-centred planning and promotes user-friendly reviews that seek to actively involve pupils in their future outcomes. It was envisaged that more disabled pupils would become actively involved in the EHCp process and become “authors of their own life stories” (Curran and Runswick-Cole, 2013, p. 10). Nonetheless, compliance with imposed legislation, instead of focusing on how voice and participation is enacted may lead to the voices of the pupils being drowned out or diminished by adults.

SEND legislation deems that disabled pupils should be invited to have their say in matters that affect them; but there is a real danger that in the rush to action new policy the complexities of operationalising this may be forgotten. Authentic pupil voice is not an unproblematised concept and health and social care researchers have expressed concerns:

Children and young people’s agency should certainly be a contested and scrutinised concept rather than one which is taken-for-granted, unproblematised or assumed inherently to be positive and desired by all children and young people. (Tisdall and Punch, 2012, p. 256)

The literature highlights the need for research to investigate the impact of reforms and how voice and participation is enacted at a school level. In fact, this need for scrutiny is acknowledged by the new CoP (DfE, 2014, p. 151).

## **2.3 Barriers to Eliciting Voice and Participation**

### **2.3.1 Eliciting Voice and Participation**

Critically, the literature review highlights a “dire need for more” research (ALLFIE, 2013b, p. 63) especially studies that consult with disabled children on specifics rather than “exploring broader aspects of disabled children’s lives” (Wickenden and Kembhavi-Tam, 2014, p. 403). ALLFIE’s research into disabled children’s lived experiences of school and services noted that “some groups of disabled young people were less likely to participate than others” (2013b, p. 14). This finding acknowledges that “It should not matter whether a young person can speak, they should be asked for their views - they can express themselves using body language and expressions” (ibid, p. 14). Indeed, Rabiee *et al.* (2005) comment:

...the exclusion of disabled children from research and consultation says more about the unsuitability of research and consultation methods and adults not knowing how to relate to them than about the limitations on the part of the informants. (p. 8)

To an extent this may account for the sparsity in research literature eliciting the voice and lived experienced of pupils identified with CMN, a paucity that this research addresses.

A reason that pupils with ‘non-normative’ voices may have been left outside research may be due to the perception that their voices are too difficult to include. Richards, Clarke and Boggis (2015) contend that voices that can be “easily heard and understood are privileged” (p. 121) while the less conventional remain marginalised. Kellet and Nind (2001) recognise that researchers tend to gravitate towards normative voices and face a dilemma: “Do we compromise with whom we do our research or do we compromise the ideal of dialogue in our methods?” (p. 51). Another barrier to participation has been that those who do not use speech have in the past been considered not to have valid opinions. Twenty years ago, Morris reported in her study of children living in residential homes and schools, where pupils had very limited verbal language, that little effort was made to find alternative methods of communication:

One of the most disabling attitudes faced by children with physical or sensory impairments and particularly by children with significant learning difficulties, is the assumption that they do not have a view to express or a way of expressing it. (1998, p. 36)

Consequently, Wright's (2008) practitioner-based research is of interest because it focuses on the voices of pupils identified with multiple and complex needs. Wright's research highlights the vital role that communication aids play in supporting pupils with little or no speech and the increasing numbers of pupils who use alternative or aided communication systems. There is a need to facilitate the voice of individuals who have communication difficulties or do not use speech as their primary mode of representation and to find ways to ensure that the voices that do not speak are heard, a point reiterated in this statement, *"I may not have speech, but I have a voice – I can give my opinions, I can even argue"* (Martin, 2008). Wright's findings indicate that pupils labelled with CMN have something worthwhile to say and that finding a voice "empowers pupils and includes them more appropriately in their own education" (2008, p. 39). Nevertheless, pupils are often dependent on trained staff's understanding of specialist methods or technology. Hodge's research (2007) recognised that CYP who use augmentative and alternative communications (AAC) aids fared poorly and were dependent on adults to support communication. *The Bercow Report* (2008) confirms the lack of equal access to technology and communication systems and notes that pupils are further disadvantaged and face a "particular struggle to have their needs met" (DCSF, p. 40). This over reliance on others to facilitate communication continues to create additional barriers to participation.

Research undertaken by ALLFIE highlighted the reduced "opportunities to be involved in decision making" (p. 36) as a structural barrier to participation. However, there are an increasing number of methods to support non-traditional communication and facilitate participation in a school setting. For example, *Colourful Semantics*, (Kirkbride, 1999), a system based on pictorial representations, has been introduced to aid communication with children on the autistic spectrum or who experience verbal or written communication challenges. Wright's practitioner-based research advocates the use of an aided communication system called Talking Mats, an inexpensive symbol-led system well-suited to being used with individuals who have limited communication. Evidence suggests that Talking Mats can liberate voices that have been denied "their individual dignity" (Wright, 2008, p. 40) and can be used in review

meetings to facilitate voice. However, one drawback of this technique is that there is limited opportunity for it to be used without specific training. Nevertheless, it is no longer acceptable or ethical to overlook voices simply because they fail to conform to society's norms.

### **2.3.2 Limited Conceptualisation of Pupil Voice**

Pupil voice presupposes that words will be spoken and ideas transmitted through the medium of language. Devecchi (2015) argues that these expectations result in paying attention only to the voices we can hear and in this "...orchestrated chorality, discordant voices are marginalised and silenced" (p. 1). The literature suggests that negative attitudes prevail because society assumes 'voice' is the ability to physically speak and use "naturally produced speech as a means of expression" (Richards *et al.*, 2015, p. 122). If voice is conceptualised as speech, some disabled pupils might be construed as being without one. Voice might also be more accurately described as the ability to express oneself using non-verbal communication such as typed text, signed or gestured communication. Mazzei (2009) argues for an orientation of "listening in the cracks", hearing voice in all aspects of interaction that goes beyond what is verbalised. Franklin and Sloper's (2006, 2009) research noted that professionals often had an ideal of what participation looked like and that anything less than vocal contribution was not valid. Indeed, they concluded that a broader understanding of the meaning of participation is required beyond that framed within notions of normative voice.

This limited conceptualisation of voice appears to have led to the contradictory decision to investigate the *Experiences of the EHCp process* (Adams *et al.*, 2017) predominantly from the perspective of adults. This research purports to have surveyed families and CYP to ascertain how the EHCp process was being experienced and if it reflects the intentions set out in the SEND CoP. The survey asked families and CYP to rate different aspects of their overall experiences but, significantly for this research, asked questions specifically about the participation process. However, most of the 13,643 respondents were parents or carers and "only 722 were from young people" (p. 37). Parents or carers were invited to consult the CYP "if they felt this was appropriate" (p. 36) and encouraged to answer the survey with input from the CYP.

Paradoxically, CYP were seemingly invited to express their opinions about the effectiveness of the EHCp process, but even this participation appears to have been in the gift of adults. The survey is over-reliant on adults' views which are used as a substitute for children's perceptions of participation, which could be inaccurate. This reliance on parental views reinforces the impression that disabled CYP are beholden on advocacy to express their views about individual experiences of participation. In addition, the use of a questionnaire did not fully consider individual needs or preferred communication and this limited conceptualisation of voice further excluded pupils identified with CMN from participating. The SEND CoP is very clear that parents' views should not be used "as a proxy for young people's views" (DfE, 2015. p. 22). It is contradictory that a survey investigating the effectiveness of the EHCp process should do so without directly consulting those whose lives it affects. Pupils' voices have been tokenised by the survey and there is disconnect between the rhetoric concerning the right of CYP to participate in decision-making and the chosen research methodology.

My study will go beyond the verbal to understand what voice and participation means for pupils identified with CMN. It recognises that pupils' own perspectives can provide unique information about their individual experiences.

### ***2.3.3 Power and Structural Barriers***

Power and the structural organisation of schools can present as additional barriers to participation. Martin and Franklin (2009) contend that this "can impact disproportionately on disabled children" (p. 101). Schools and education structures can prevent pupils from having a voice and render them powerless to become active decision-makers simply because of a lack of opportunity or the way they are positioned. Bahou (2011) asserts that schools are highly structured settings controlled by adults, such as policymakers, school leaders, teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) who shape and control power and determine what is asked, when it is asked, and by whom. CMN pupils are rendered silent because they cannot access the levels of verbal or written discourse and therefore "remain silent when more powerful people speak" (van Dijk, 2008, p. 31), powerless to influence or inform policy or service provision. Bahou (2011) acknowledges that voice is a "complex web of school structures



and cultures” (p. 2). Indeed, Hart’s (1992) typology describes the degrees of power in relation to pupil involvement and influence in decision-making processes. It outlines eight levels of involvement that range from ‘non-participation’ (tokenism) to the highest level which is pupil initiated and shared with adults. Additionally, Prout (2003) noted that pupils “are expected to fit into adult ways of participating when what is needed is institutional and organisational change that encourages and facilitates children’s voices” (p. 32). Therefore, key to pupil voice is the way pupils “are positioned in relationship to adults” (Kubiak, 2017, p. 41). If pupils identified with SEND are to have an authentic voice in the EHCp process, attention needs to be given to the issue of power and real opportunities to participate.

The literature reveals that the way pupils are positioned in their relationships with adults as well as bureaucratic structures may pose further barriers to eliciting voice. It cannot be assumed, that *Section A* of the EHCp entitled *All About Me*, will automatically result in authentic voice and create opportunities to express their views. Consequently, there is an urgent need to investigate the EHCp process to ascertain if disabled pupils face additional barriers or pressure because of the prescribed nature of the EHCp.

#### **2.3.4 Communication Barriers with Adult Services**

Different communication styles can pose barriers to pupils participating at a meaningful level. The new reforms place pupils labelled with SEND at the heart of the provision and professionals have a duty to ensure that they are involved in discussions about key matters that shape their lives. Research undertaken by the Children’s Society highlights how some health professionals struggle to communicate effectively because of their “...lack of knowledge, understanding and training” (Franklin and Osbourne, 2009, p. 38). This is of significance because the EHCp reviews involve professionals who may not necessarily have had formal training and may have restricted time to undertake the review. Sloper *et al.* (2010) identified high levels of unmet need regarding transition services with pupils and their families, reporting that they required more information on a host of issues. Research highlights that lack of experience and training can act as an obstacle to pupil participation and that: “Disabled children and young people face barriers to communicating with others including

professionals and service providers due to lack of training and awareness about how to communicate with disabled children and young people” (OCC, 2014, p. 8). Thus, pupils with communication difficulties may be disadvantaged by the EHCp process due to the lack of availability of trained specialist staff. Therefore, it is vital that professionals learn how to listen to the differently-voiced and expand their conceptualisation of participation in order that disabled pupils can have opportunities to have an authentic voice. Consequently, there is an urgent need for more research into the perception of education professionals and training opportunities to enhance communication and participation for pupils labelled as CMN.

The literature indicates that a lack of collaboration between professionals maybe a barrier to pupil participation. *The Bercow Report* (DCSF, 2008, p. 50) notes the importance of “the right people in the right place to offer the right service” and stresses the importance of joint working for effective participation. Feiler and Watson (2010) examined the role of professionals working in two special schools with pupils with severe learning and communication difficulties. Their findings indicated that effective improvements in service provision can be made when there is “team work” (p. 118). The importance of teachers and SaLT) working collaboratively is pivotal according to Baily *et al.* (2006). However, effective team work between professionals is described by Feiler and Watson as “notoriously difficult to achieve” (2010, p. 119). Significantly, Norwich and Eaton (2015) commented that the EHCp process will only improve participation if “services collaborate in the commissioning and planning of joint services” (p. 19). Given that the CoP states that the LAs must work to integrate education provision and that the EHCp calls for collaboration between service providers this presupposes that this new way of working will just miraculously happen. *Joining the Dots* (Bernades *et al.*, 2015) examined the effect of SEND reforms and described these as “chronically fragmented” (p. 50) and recommends that structures and practices need to be joined up to ensure the core aims of the CFA are met. Criticism of the reforms and specifically lack of collaboration has come from several quarters. Predergast (2016) wrote a blog entitled, *The Great EHCP Swindle*, that stated that SEND reforms have been poorly communicated and inconsistently executed. This contrasts sharply with

Redwood (2015) whose research into insider perspectives of EHCp process concluded that parent and professional experiences of the process were broadly “positive” (p. 4). This corresponds with Skipp and Hopwood’s (2016) research into user experiences whose findings indicate that parents and CYP were reasonably satisfied with the new EHCp and the process is more joined-up and participatory. The most recent and comprehensive survey (Adams *et al.*, 2017) notes that “threequarters of parents and young people reported that different services worked together” (p. 20). It is unclear to what extent services are collaborating, but it is possible that the EHCp assessment is perceived to be more responsive than the statementing process which it replaced.

### **2.3.5 Person-Centred Planning (PCP) and Person-Centred Approaches (PCA)**

Franklin and Osbourne (2009) suggest that participation could improve for children identified with CMN if a more “individualised” (p. 38) approach was adopted during the reviewing process. The SEND CoP (DfE, 2015) proposes to support pupils’ participation using person-centred approaches (PCA) (DfE, 2015, p. 148). PCAs have been used prior to the new legislative reforms and were founded on the principle that “Person-centred planning begins when people decide to listen carefully and in ways that can strengthen the voice of people who have been at risk of being silenced” (O’Brien and O’Brien, 1998, p. 8). In the UK, PCAs began to gain recognition when the DoH issued *Personalisation through Person-Centred Planning* guidance (DoH, 2010). PCA have been used in special schools prior to the introduction of the EHCp to support pupils to have a voice in the transition and review process. Person-centred planning (PCP) in theory allows pupils to have input regarding aspects of school and enables pupils’ views to be ascertained directly. PCA gained further prominence when the indicative draft of the new SEND CoP made it clear that PCP would guarantee genuine involvement “ensuring that EHC plans are developed with the child, young person and parents and reflect aspirational and achievable outcomes” (DfE, 2013, p. 18). Accordingly, the CoP (2015) expects that the assessment and planning process will adopt a PCA that focuses on the individual pupil, enables parents, pupils and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings and be involved in decisions, highlights their strengths and capabilities, enables pupils to communicate their

achievements, interests and desired outcomes and tailors support to pupil needs. Feiler and Watson (2010) commented on the need for “highly individual approaches” (p. 117) grounded in a thorough understanding of pupils’ needs. A study undertaken by Corrigan (2014) highlights several potential barriers to the effective use of PCP and noted the PCA is very much dependent on the skill level of staff to adapt and individually personalise the process. Norwich and Eaton (2015) make a pertinent comment about the world of “difference, between calling a process person centred and actually making it so” (p. 122). If the process of engaging with disabled pupils’ voices is not to become something of an “accountability exercise” (Devecchi, 2015, p. 1) it is imperative that researchers investigate how PCA are being adopted and how the principles of voice and participation are being implemented regarding the SEND CoP (DfE, 2015). My research will specifically explore how pupils can be given choices and control during the EHCp process that are rooted in person-centred philosophy.

## **2.4 Problematising the Concept of Authentic Pupil Voice**

### **2.4.1 Authenticity**

Those interested in capturing pupils’ experiences are striving to find authenticity and elicit the genuine voice of CYP. Nevertheless, researchers are beginning to critically examine what is meant by authentic voice. Spyrou, (2011, 2016) states that the search for authenticity and “unadulterated self of those being studied” (p. 7) is based on the premise that this is a “methodological problem that can be solved by tapping into our subjects’ “true” voices” (2016, p. 8). This discourse assumes that authentic pupil voice is possible and relatively easy to pin down and that truthful experiences can be revealed. Cooper (1993) points to the importance of ensuring that pupils’ responses are ‘authentic’ but by this he means they are consistent. But, surely authentic voices are not necessarily dependable, accurate or consistent. Pupils identified with SEND, like many young people, are apt to contradict themselves and change their minds and what they say one day may not in fact be the views expressed on a following occasion. Punch (1998) notes, young children often have difficulty distinguishing between reality and fiction and tend to make up imaginative stories and, therefore, what they say may not be reliable (although don’t adults do this too!). Benzon (2015) argues that researchers should not ignore untrue

or fictitious contributions because they “risk losing valuable data and silencing one form of children’s voices” (p. 330). Begley (2000) highlights a significant issue when trying to elicit voice which is that pupils often try to please the listener. Finlay and Lyons (2002) suggest that pupils with learning difficulties acquiesce to the suggestions of others and there is evidence that pupils say “yes” to questions and have a tendency towards giving answers they believe the listener wants to hear. Research also illustrates that disabled pupils may be more likely to say they like something rather than dislike and not contradict the opinions and observations of others (Wright, 2008). The process of eliciting authentic pupil voice is complex and should not be assumed to be an unproblematised concept or easily attainable. Indeed, Eldén (2012) argues that there is a tendency to simplify and reduce the “complexities *within* children’s voices” (p. 68). The literature indicates that many of the challenges associated with eliciting voice are exacerbated when pupils identified with SEND are involved (Ashby, 2011). Therefore, researchers should take account of the differing communication styles and recognise features such as ambiguity, inconsistency or contradictions.

#### **2.4.2 Co-construction and Interpretation**

Tangen (2008) highlights the methodological challenges faced by researchers regarding “*how to listen*” (p. 159) and acknowledges that these challenges are even greater if pupils have developmental or speech and communication difficulties. Tangen defines listening as an active form of communication that “involves hearing and/or reading, interpreting and constructing meanings” (2008, p. 159). Holliday *et al.* (2009) stress the importance of listening to children with significant communication impairments and emphasise that this “an active form of communication that encompasses two-way verbal and nonverbal dialogue” (p. 246). Therefore, care needs to be taken by researchers during data collection to separate the researchers’ and the pupils’ voices and points to the danger that researchers may impose their own interpretations. Moreover, attention needs to be paid to how pupils’ voices are mediated and remain separated from that of their families or school staff. Careful consideration needs to be given to pupils’ voices to ensure that their perspectives and views are heard rather than their presumed views and opinions. This has implications for the EHCp process as school staff are

required to listen and record pupil responses. If the process of listening is considered complex for researchers, who will have specific skills, then how are school staff expected to undertake this task? Consequently, it is easy to imagine a scenario where researchers, school staff, families and service providers may interpret what pupils say to mean what the adults understand by transposing their adult interpretive perspectives (Spyrou, 2011). Therefore, listening to the voices of CMN pupils presents a unique challenge for those seeking to gain a clearer understanding of their lives and experiences.

Indeed, Whitehurst (2006) in her study focusing on eliciting the voices of pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD), highlights the need for “enormous care with interpretation” (p. 60). Komulainen (2007) emphasised the “ambiguity of the child’s ‘voice’” (p. 116-117) in the research she undertook in nursery placements with children who had little or no speech. Komulainen noted that workers interpreted children’s verbal intentions in various ways and therefore voice is shaped by factors such as assumptions about the child or the context and is co-constructed. For pupil voice to be considered authentic, it must be the pupil’s own and not found for them. For example, it is my experience that adults will write in the EHCp that pupils want to become bus or train drivers, when in fact they have expressed an interest in these modes of transportation. Central to the EHCp process is that it enables pupils’ opportunities to voice opinions about their worlds through their eyes rather than those of an adult. However, voice is social and co-constructed and pupil voices are mediated by school staff and a variety of service providers. In fact, May (2005) asserts that pupil voice is contrived and reliant upon professionals and adults “for the accurate interpretation of their responses” (p. 30). Similarly, Spyrou, (2011) has noted the tendency for researchers to “jump in and out of children’s worlds in order to quickly ‘collect data’” and cherry-pick quotes (p. 157). Additionally, adults recording pupils’ views will tidy up and attempt to make sense of what is being said. Ashby (2011) comments that with participants with limited communication that there is a temptation to fill in the blanks and a need to “...fight the urge to seek consistency and cohesion” (para 44). Current literature indicates that school staff involvement in supporting authentic pupil voice and participation merits further research and investigation as to exactly what role adults are

playing in this co-construction process.

### **2.4.3 Listening to Silence**

The literature highlights the need for researchers to listen and take account of both verbal and non-verbal communication. Mazzei (2009) recognises the proclivity of researchers “to seek that voice which can elucidate, clarify, confirm, and pronounce meaning” (p. 46-7) but argues that researchers have an obligation to include accurately silences and confused, incoherent and unclear fragments or utterances. Until recently, the issue of listening to and interpreting silence has not been considered. Lewis (2010) argues for the reconceptualisation of silence and cautions researchers to be “careful about hearing voices” and that “Listening better includes hearing silence and that silence is not neutral or empty” (p. 20). Lewis’ comments have considerable implications for my research because she is championing for silence to be carefully recorded during the co-construction and data collection process. Spyrou (2016) explores children’s silences and argues that this element of voice needs to be more rigorously analysed:

The gaps, the silences, and the multiple and often contradictory positionings are discerned through a close and careful listening of what transpires during the research encounter. (p. 17)

Both Lewis and Spyrou urge researchers “to make silence speak” (p. 23), which may be more illuminating than the actual words spoken. Spyrou ascertains that silence should not be treated as non-data but in fact presents an opportunity to learn more about children’s views and perceptions because it goes beyond what is articulated. Ashby (2011) contends that “hearing silence” (para 22) and recording omissions and a lack of response is important, especially when undertaking voice research with disabled pupils. The challenge for researchers is to account for silent voices and pay attention to what is unspoken and to record both verbal and non-verbal contributions. Ashby (2011) noted in her study with individuals who use type to communicate that this produced far less data to work with and this is also true for pupils with speech and communication challenges. Ashby (2011) asserts that it is important for researchers to learn to “...listen deeply to the voices and the silences of individuals considered to be disabled” (para 48) because it may also lead to a more extensive conceptualisation of voice and participation.

## **2.5 Conclusions**

The literature review critiques legislation and policy change that assures that pupil voice is enshrined in law. Importantly, the review reveals that pupil voice is far from an unproblematised concept and it highlights barriers to participation and raises questions regarding practices that may limit the EHCp process and leave pupils identified with CMN largely unaffected by policy reforms. The existing literature suggests that there are significant gaps and that further research is needed to better understand and conceptualise voice for pupils labelled with SEND. This chapter posits that due to the challenges of implementation the EHCp process may be in danger of paying lip service to pupil voice and that participation is at best tokenistic.

## **2.6 Research Questions and Objectives**

Having interrogated and scrutinised the current literature pertaining to voice and participation three research questions were formulated:

- What constitutes authentic voice and how is participation experienced by pupils identified with CMN in a special school during the EHCp process?
- How are the principles of voice and participation being experienced as intended by the SEND CoP? (2015)
- How can practice be improved so that pupils actively participate and contribute to the EHCp process in ways that are inclusive, democratic and move beyond tokenism?

To address the research questions with confidence three interlinking objectives were identified:

- Set up and consult a Pupil Advisory Group (PAG) on the research process to be undertaken in a special school
- Develop an appropriate data collection approach that gathers between 15-20 pupils' experiences of the EHCp process in a London special school.
- Consider if pupils' experiences of having a voice are inclusive and how participation can inform discourses about inclusive practice, disability or impairment.



These objectives were devised to support the actualisation of the research questions and allow for the in-depth examination of the overall aims of the thesis.

## **2.7 Summary**

After careful consideration of the literature, three research questions were formulated to provide structure and investigate how pupils identified with CMN can have an authentic voice and be meaningfully engaged in participatory practices during the EHCp process.

In the next chapter, I consider methodology, data collection and ethical challenges posed by my study. I address the issue of the rights of pupils labelled with CMN to participate in the co-production of data. I identify methodologies and associated methods and explain how these will support the development of answers to my research questions.

## **CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Having examined the literature, I commence this chapter by reiterating my research aims:

- To better understand what constitutes authentic voice and participation within the framework of the SEND CoP (2015).
- To improve knowledge about practice and implement more inclusive practices for pupils labelled as having CMN in a special school.

These aims together with the research questions underpin my methodological principles, inform my theoretical understanding and guide the development of the research.

This chapter looks at methodology as well as the methods chosen and my reasoning for this. I discuss qualitative principles and my ontological and epistemological stance and explain why Stringer's action research (AR) approach was adopted. I consider the existing literature regarding the conceptualisation of CYP and describe the challenge to find an inclusive data collection method. I clarify why Draw, Write and Tell (DWT) was utilised to gather data and answer the research questions. Finally, I outline ethical implications and detail why this demands extra consideration.

### **3.2 Methodological Orientation**

The methodology applied in this study can be defined as qualitative and child-focused. Qualitative approaches provide a means of addressing my research with pupils because it centres on the meanings, social relations and practices of human beings and attempts to learn about and describe social phenomena from the perspective of insiders by giving voice to individuals (Lapan *et al.*, 2012, p. 3). Qualitative paradigms can provide rich insight into "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 5).

My epistemological and ontological orientations guide the study because they embody my assumptions about the world. Dowling and Brown (2010) have acknowledged that researchers "always bring some agenda" (p. 78) I

acknowledge my professional interest because this positioning affects how I set about uncovering information and determines my research methodologies. It is my understanding that my own views and experiences can be legitimately employed in the interpretation of knowledge, but these assumptions will impact and influence how I interpret the complexities of pupil voice and participation, and individuals' experiences of the EHCp process.

Qualitative research generally favours an interpretivist orientation. An interpretivist position posits that knowledge is a social and cultural construction and necessitates an in-depth understanding of human beings, their individual experiences, and their multiple realities (Denzin, 2010). This is in opposition to traditional quantitative methods which presume findings must be quantifiable. Qualitative researchers are not searching for an objective truth because their world view is that no such single experience of reality exists. My epistemological stance is that there are multiple ways of interpreting experiences and contends that reality is socially constructed (Mertens, 2002). My ontological perspective values the views of the pupils labelled as having CMN while recognising they too are interpreting and constructing their own social realities. The central aim of my research is to better understand pupils' experiences of voice and participation and therefore a qualitative interpretivist paradigm was considered best suited to answering the research questions.

The qualitative approach utilises a naturalistic research paradigm in which researchers are inclined to "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). For this reason, researchers tend to consider themselves a vital part of the process. Indeed, my study was undertaken in the school in which I am leading on the EHCp initiative and I used my situated and tacit knowledge as well as my own perspectives to explore the phenomenon under investigation.

### **3.3 Action Research (AR)**

AR is qualitative in nature and this fits well with my chosen research paradigm. AR is not a new approach and Corey (1953) is attributed with introducing the term in education, believing if teachers conducted their own research it would be more meaningful to them.

### **3.3.1 Defining AR**

AR is a generic term used to describe an array of methodological approaches to examine and improve practice. AR has the following characteristics: it is cyclical with inter-related stages; it is a reflective process involving critical reflection on both the process and the outcome; it is collaborative as the researcher and researched are active participants in the research process and a change is intended as a result. In practice, teachers involved in AR seek to research problems in their own classrooms and undertake a series of actions and reflections that lead to enhanced practice. Elliott (1991) defined AR simply as the “the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it” (p. 69). Reason and Bradbury (2008) suggest that AR seeks to:

...bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (Reason and Bradbury, p. 4)

Reason and Bradbury (2001) acknowledge that there is “no short answer” (p. 1) to explain what AR is but there is a shared commitment to enquiry in which the researcher addresses questions affecting their workplace to improve or bring about a positive change in practice (McNiff, 2013; Stringer, 2013; Zeichner and Noffke, 2001). While approaches to carrying out AR may vary, it is generally agreed that AR is a form of practitioner research that leads to knowledge generation and contributes to the empowerment of participants. Consequently, AR has been embraced across a range of disciplines precisely because it “empowers practitioners to generate knowledge about and improve the contexts within which they work” (Kane and Chimwayange, 2014, p. 54).

The teachers’ AR movement perceives teaching as research and teachers as researchers (McNiff, 2013; Stenhouse, 1975). Mills (2014) notes the synergy between AR and teaching and contends that AR builds on the “natural teaching cycle of reflection, implementation, evaluation and improvement” (p. 4). Stenhouse (1981) comments that teachers are best placed to investigate educational problems: “It is teachers who in the end will change the world of school by understanding it” (p. 104). Hine (2013) argues that AR can provide teachers with “structure, focus, and methodological rigour” (p. 3) leading to knowledge generation in their own settings. A hallmark of AR is that it is practice-based research with the aim of transforming both practice and theory.

My research has identified a need to investigate an aspect of practice relating to policy change and the EHCp initiative. By adopting an AR paradigm, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of practice and better facilitate pupil voice and participation in my own school.

### **3.3.2 “Look, Think, Act” AR Model**

AR is an umbrella term and each model is characterised by its own distinctive way of working through various AR cycles. AR has been described as a cyclical process by Lewin, (1952). Stringer’s model is an interacting spiral commonly referred to as the “Look, Think, Act” routine and is characterised by repeating research phases.

Look: Building a picture and gathering information.

Think: Interpreting and explaining.

Act: Resolving issues and problems.

(Stringer, 2013, p. 8-9)

According to Stringer, the researcher first looks at the situation by defining the problem and gathering data. Next, the researcher thinks about the data, reflecting on and analysing the collected information to identify significant features and priorities for action. The “think” phase then moves into interpreting the issues in greater depth and identifying priorities for action. In the final stage, the researcher acts on the findings, examining the results of the actions, before gathering more data and devising practical solutions to the problems. AR is rarely a simple cycle but more a spiral where reflection and further actions may lead to better understanding of practice or a change in practice. Regardless of the model, these repeated cycles and separate and yet mutually dependent steps provide practitioners with the means to implement the changes required for social improvement (Hine, 2013). Although AR is characterised by critically reflective cycles, the structure allows researchers to shape the study to meet the needs of the context and to find solutions to bring about positive change. This is an important consideration for my study, as the research approach needs to be flexible enough to promote the active involvement of pupils identified with CMN and enable their inclusion and collaboration in the research.

### **3.3.3 Participatory Action Research (PAR)**

I want to draw a clear distinction between AR and Participatory Action Research (PAR). AR considers social change and the inclusion of people

affected by that change as imperative (Lewin, 1946). PAR has a history of being actively involved with emancipation and social change and draws on the work of Freire (1970) in breaking down the distinctions between the researcher and the researched. Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) model has a distinct ideological foundation linked to the promotion of equality and social justice and demands that disabled people take control of all aspects of the research process and are recognised as equals and experts. Thus, PAR promotes the principles of inclusion while fundamentally infusing disability rights and emancipatory principles into the research cycle. This is of primary importance from a critical disability perspective. Stack and McDonald (2014) note that advocates of PAR value this approach because it builds on "socially informed models of disability" (p. 84) and shows respect for the abilities of disabled people. Theoretically, PAR should provide opportunities for disabled pupils to be actively involved at all stages of the research process. Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) outline seven core principles:

- PAR is a social practice
- PAR is participatory
- PAR is practical and collaborative
- PAR is emancipatory
- PAR is critical
- PAR is reflexive
- PAR aims to be transformative in both theory and practice (p. 567-568)

However, while I wish to engage in research which empowers and benefits the participants, I had concerns that the core principles could not be fully or realistically implemented given the requirement and demand for participants to be involved in data collection, reflection and analysis from the outset. Stack and McDonald's (2014) research identifies PAR projects with adults with intellectual disabilities (ID) and concluded "that relatively few projects can be classified as high on the continuum of shared power" (p. 83) and more than half of the researchers failed to offer evidence "that adults with developmental disabilities were included in key aspects of the research" (p. 89). The challenges for researchers adhering to emancipatory research principles were highlighted by Goodley and Moore (2000) when evaluating an arts project with

adults identified with intellectual impairment. The conflicts for emancipatory researchers were further explored by Barton (2005). These tensions suggest that although theoretically PAR provides opportunities for participation, researchers often fail to fully comply with PAR methodology. Therefore, I exercise caution using the PAR approach.

My research has inclusive ideals at its heart and is specifically interested in developing a methodology that facilitates equitable research partnerships that includes pupils in key aspects of the research. The AR approach seeks to empower principal stakeholders by engaging them as active participants. Stringer (2013) describes active participation as “key to feelings of ownership” (p. 31). Reason (2006) views AR as a “participative and democratic process that seeks to do research with, for, and by people; to redress the balance of power in knowledge creation” (p. 189). Methodologically, AR can be viewed as participatory and a defining principle is that you are doing research *with* participants as opposed to doing research *on* them. Crucially the researcher and researched are active participants in a shared and equitable process where there should be a real possibility of changing, influencing or benefiting the decision-making process. Even though Stringer defines his model as AR, this approach clearly embraces PAR principles. Perhaps a more accurate description of my research methodology is one that blends inclusive, emancipatory disability research principles with the AR approach.

#### **3.4.4 Research For, With or On Pupils**

Key to inclusive research is the attitude of the researcher who affects how and for whom the research is constructed and must consider if the research is “for, with or on” the participants (Nind, 2008, p. 4). This is an important philosophical and ethical consideration when undertaking research with vulnerable pupils in a school setting and brings to the fore the inherently unequal power relationships between pupils, adults and professionals (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008). Increasingly, research is undertaken with pupils in order that those “affected by the research and action are not acted upon” (O’Leary, 2010, p. 149). These methodological considerations are important because they can influence the participation choices CYP have in a research project.

### **3.4.5 Including Pupils' Voices in Research**

How children's voices are positioned and included in research is shaped by evolving theoretical discourses about childhood. Children are increasingly recognised as active rather than passive and emphasis is being placed on their capability and rights.

Historically children have struggled to have their voices heard or their views considered. Locke (1689) in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* described children as "blank slates" waiting for environmental influences to shape them into adults. Children were thought to be void of reason and knowledge and viewed as "adults in waiting" (Kellett, 2010, p. 11). Indeed, until the 20th century, childhood did not have a recognised status. What children had to say was of little significance and the idea that "children should be seen and not heard" was prevalent. This historical positioning views children as passive and undermines, disempowers and silences their voices. In recent decades there has been a paradigm shift in how childhood is positioned, and children are now considered to be distinct entities and competent social actors as opposed to incomplete versions of adults (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). This reconceptualisation of childhood has resulted in significant shifts in how children are included in research. Children are no longer viewed as unknowing but as active and expert participants. Researchers place emphasis on practice that values children as experts in their own lives and seeks to acknowledge and understand the world as experienced and lived by the child (Clark and Moss, 2011). This has led to the dominant discourse recognising that research should be undertaken 'with' children as opposed to 'on' children (Kellet, 2010, p. 16).

In the 21st century pupils are conceptualised as a distinct group with a unique voice and are encouraged to have a say on issues concerning them. Indeed, "...principles of pupil voice have become increasingly recognized as important" (Flutter, 2007, p. 345). Lewis and Porter (2007) comment that the "...key drivers behind eliciting pupil voice has been the rights movement whereby children are seen to be vital contributors to decision-making" (p. 230). Cutler and Frost (2001) argue that being listened to and taken seriously "must be seen as a fundamental right as expressed in Article 12 of the UNCRC" (p. 6). This paradigmatic shift formally endorses children's rights to have a voice and these



changes in theoretical perspectives have impacted on disability research. In the past, the “voices of disabled children themselves have frequently been excluded as research has focused on the perspectives of parents, professionals and other adults” (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 5). Increasingly, research is moving towards the inclusion of all children, and Tay-Lim and Lim (2013) advocate the importance of participatory methodology “in empowering children’s voices” (p. 12).

This research is premised on the philosophical belief that all pupils, including those with communication impairments, are reliable participants with valid opinions and are therefore the best authority on their experiences and their voices need to be heard. This is echoed by Nind (2008) who comments:

people with learning/communication difficulties have something to say that is worth hearing and experiences that are worth understanding, making it important to commit serious attention to the methodological challenges involved in researching them. (p. 4)

Nind argues that it is the researcher’s responsibility to be expert at developing and employing appropriate methods to more effectively include the voices of pupils labelled with CMN.

Interestingly, SEND reforms mirror theoretical perspectives about childhood and approaches to research with children. In the past, pupils identified with SEND were issued with a Statement and this process was regularly undertaken by adults with pupils having a limited say. Pupils with SEND were conceptualised as “passive and dependent” (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 5) and incapable of giving accurate information about their lives. The EHCp process is premised on the principle that pupils need to be actively encouraged to have a say in matters that concern them.

#### ***3.4.6 Including Pupils in Disability Research***

A further parallel methodological shift has been brought about by proponents of the social model of disability and disability rights activists (Oliver, 1992; Walmsley, 2004; Zarb, 1992) who advocated participatory research in response to the exclusion of disabled people from traditional research. New approaches to the study of disability have stressed the importance of research that is engaged not with changing disabled individuals but changing disabling environments and attitudes. Work undertaken in the field of critical disability

research has brought about a paradigmatic shift that stresses the need for research to be inclusive, focused on emancipatory goals which embody the call for “nothing about us without us” (Charlton, 1998). This is transforming the way research is conducted and is particularly pertinent to research involving pupils who have been constructed as having ‘difficulties’ with expressing opinions or very little to say about their own lives (Clough and Barton, 1995, 1998). Clarke comments that “Participatory research is particularly relevant to those individuals, groups or communities whom we regard as ‘silent’, vulnerable, disempowered, poor and disadvantaged” (2004, p. 5). It is imperative that the research methods chosen enable the voices of disabled pupils to inform the research.

Stringer’s AR model seeks to give voice to those who have previously been silenced. A major feature of AR is that it gives a voice to those being researched and the knowledge produced will benefit and empower those whose situation is being researched.

... sometimes in action research what is most important is how we can help articulate voices that are not being heard. How we can draw people together in a conversation that is not taking place? How we can create space for people to articulate their world in the face of power structures that silence them? (Reason, 2006, p. 198)

AR is therefore an apt approach to investigate voice and participation. Stringer’s AR model was chosen to provide the framework for the research precisely because it places an emphasis on democratic inclusion and a basis to engage with pupils’ voices. This sits well with the emancipatory principles of critical disability theory and is considered a viable method to support the aims of the research and respond to the call for “nothing about us without us” (Charlton, 1998).

#### **3.4.7 Pupil Advisory Group (PAG)**

The recent moves towards participant-led research has seen research projects developed that champion inclusive participation with disabled CYP taking active roles.

Kellet (2010) undertook research with a group of six young people aged 14 to 19 with learning disabilities that advocated inclusive participation. The participants collected and analysed the data as well as producing findings

about the barriers to meaningful participation and designing a toolkit to address the barriers that they identified. The National Children's Bureau acknowledges the benefits of involving children in research and issued *Guidelines for Research with Children and Young People* (Shaw *et al.*, 2011). Researchers have come to recognise that pupils identified with SEND can be active participants in the research process and be involved meaningfully in decision-making, research design, data collection and analysis.

ALLFIE (2013) undertook the VIPER Project, (Voice, Inclusion, Participation, Empowerment and Research), with 16 disabled co-researchers. The OCC (2014) built on this model and trained 4 disabled researchers as co-researchers. However, both these research projects were conducted outside of an education setting. There is scant evidence of research undertaken with disabled pupils in schools where they are co-researchers. In a move towards finding appropriate and inclusive methodologies that increase the role of disabled pupils in the conduct of research, Good (2005) recommends that researchers have access to an advisory group. Feiler and Watson (2010) undertook research in a special school for pupils identified with severe learning and communication difficulties. They worked with a group of young people with disability aged 13–25 who guided the research (p. 115). I decided the best way to operate through an ethos of empowerment was to establish a Pupil Advisory Group (PAG) to make recommendations and support the process of informed consent. Year 11 pupils, who had recently had their SEND Statement converted to an EHCp, were invited to join the PAG. Three pupils expressed an interest and were recruited (Appendix 7) and trained to work alongside the research participants. This inclusive approach was initiated to support research participants to have equal involvement, make research processes accessible and avoid the pitfalls of tokenism.

### **3.5 Methodological Concerns Regarding the Research Design**

Having decided that AR was best suited to the methodological challenges, I was aware of the onus to provide a flexible and inclusive method to assist with data collection that would be accessible to pupils identified with CMN. The Mosaic approach advocates the use of flexible, participatory and creative frameworks for young children and acknowledges that it is important to draw

“together methods which ‘play to the strengths’ of the research participants” (Clark and Moss, 2011, p. 73). Tay-Lim and Lim (2013), in a study conducted with pre-school children, comment that it is imperative that researchers attend to children’s “strengths as communicators” whilst enabling “their voices to be projected through mediums that empower them as adept informants of their own lives” (p. 68). The inclusion of pupils labelled with CMN in research therefore requires not only suitable methodologies but suitable methods if researchers are to overcome the complexities of listening to children’s voices (Tangen, 2008).

Initially, I considered that semi-structured interviews would be the primary data collection tool because this would allow for broad-framed questioning together with the freedom to probe pupils’ experiences and listen to their voices. *The Life as a Disabled Child* project (Shakespeare, 2005) observed more than 300 children in their school settings and conducted informal individual, paired or group interviews with 165. This study aimed to be inclusive and the “different styles of research relationships and activities were often mediated by the children themselves” (p. 2). Although the notion that children can mediate their own preferences regarding participation is interesting, nevertheless, this study was heavily dependent on talk and the spoken word to generate data to explore disabled children’s experiences. Whitehurst’s study (2006), involving pupils identified with SEND, uses interviews successfully to elicit responses by taking into consideration pupils “preferred method of engaging and communicating” (p. 58). This study had access to SaLT to support the interview process, but my research did not have funding for this level of provision. I began to have concerns about one-to-one interviews, especially regarding potential issues with communication, cognition and comprehension.

I felt a strong disinclination to use an adult-orientated technique and favoured a more child-centred approach that would not require specialist support to ensure communication. Further scrutiny of the literature revealed that researchers were adopting more child-friendly methodologies. Greenstein (2014) advocates the use of creative, “playful” methodologies as a means of including the voice of “inarticulate participants” (p. 71). Lewis and Porter express the need to develop methodologies that, “circumvent possible

problems including memory, emotion, social skills, linguistic pragmatics, receptive language, expressive language” (2007, p. 230). I began to reflect that an interview may act as a barrier given the level of communication challenges experienced by the pupils in the study. Greenstein argues that the research design should not be limited to the use of traditional data collection methods, such as interviews, because this restricts and acts as a barrier to participants who might use alternative forms of communication and “prove particularly difficult for children and/or adults with learning or communication difficulties” (2007, p. 71).

Consequently, I began to reflect that the interview approach might have the opposite effect to the one I intended and result in silencing voices. There also appeared to be a paradox in this research method precisely because one-to-one interviews privilege speech and the spoken word. Additionally, interviews rely on more traditional narrative forms and this could result in unauthentic voice because whatever question is asked there will be a recognised need for a response and an “immediate imposition of the discursive expectations or demands of the conventional qualitative interview” (Allett, Keightley and Pickering, 2011, p. 1). I concluded that interviews may in fact result in inhibiting participants rather than empowering them. Indeed, by adopting this method I might be falling into the same trap as the EHCp process which adopts the question and answer format in *Section A* without regard to communication preferences.

### ***3.5.1 Modification of the Research Design***

Qualitative research is frequently described as a journey and however well planned there will be unforeseen twists, turns and unplanned stops. It is not unusual for action researchers to become “confused and unsure how to proceed” (Arnold and Norton, 2018, p. 10). In terms of methodological concerns, a major challenge for my research during the ‘look’ phase was how to access pupils’ perspectives and their experiences of voice and participation. My apprehension centred on the form authentic voice and participation might take and concerns that my methodology was not rigorous enough to enable the voices of pupils identified with CMN to be central to the research and express opinions about their worlds through their eyes rather than those of an adult

researcher. Mayaba and Wood (2015) acknowledge that “authentic involvement of children in research is not an easy task” (p. 3). Furthermore, in my quest for authenticity I assumed that pupils’ voices would emerge miraculously if I got my research methods ‘right’. Nelson (2015) views the concept of “authenticity” as a “troubling” truth because it implies that authenticity will be achieved if researchers pay attention to both their research methods and the ways in which they “engage with students to elicit their unique experiences and promote their active participation in educational matters pertinent to their interests” (p. 1). This view is underpinned by an assumption that “voice can speak the truth of consciousness and experience” if freed “from whatever restrains it from coming into being” (Mazzei and Jackson, 2012, p. 745). This rather cavalier attitude towards giving voice resulted in a misguided assumption that getting someone to say something, anything, is tantamount to giving them a voice. Furthermore, this presumption assumes that disabled pupils previously had no voice and an imposed system, such as an EHCp, will miraculously result in individual and authentic voices being heard.

Having identified barriers to participation and the myriad reasons why pupils labelled with CMN have been traditionally excluded from research, I was on a quest to find suitable methods to enable pupils to be co-researchers. I returned to the literature in search of a more credible participatory, creative and child-centred approach to data collection.

### **3.6 Child-Friendly Methodologies**

The research literature is sparse regarding the use of creative methods with disabled pupils but there is a variety of studies detailing arts-based creative methods with children. Angell *et al.* (2015) acknowledge that many different creative methods have emerged, including, “artwork (Wesson and Salmon, 2001), collages (Vaughan, 2005), clay modelling (Bernhaupt *et al.*, 2007), Lego™ (Gauntlett, 2007), photography (Darbyshire *et al.*, 2005), video (Gauntlett, 2004), acting and puppetry (Greene and Hill, 2005)” (p. 18). More recently Mayaba and Wood, (2015) have used drawing and collages with children in South Africa. Interestingly, Whitehurst’s research (2006) describes a drama production involving 6 pupils with profound and complex learning needs. Although I have a drama and arts background, I had not considered

incorporating creative research methodologies into my research. This can partially be explained by the fact that the child-centred methods deployed by researchers are essentially very close to the educational strategies used daily in classrooms to encourage active learning. As an educator, I use many of these 'creative' methods routinely in my teaching and therefore do not consider them especially novel. Additionally, I find the use of the word 'creative' confusing because when I use 'creative' I mean 'innovative' or ground-breaking. However, when it is used regarding research, creative methods involve activities which are visual, tactile or performative (Coad, 2007). Lambert *et al.* (2013) used a range of creative data collection methods to access sick children's voices and reported that the participants perceived these "as fun and interesting so they are motivated to participate in research" (p. 602). This is precisely why they are used routinely in education as a tool to aid learning.

### **3.6.1 Draw, Write and Tell (DWT)**

Having attended a conference at LSBU and a workshop session on *How to Meaningfully Include Children and Young People with Learning Disabilities* (Stalker, 2015). I was introduced to the Draw and Write approach by Dr Stalker who had applied this method in her study of Optometry and Autism. The idea of asking children to produce visual material within research is not new and in fact has been widely used by researchers to explore a range of educational, social and health related subjects throughout the last four decades (Gauntlett, 2007). The Draw and Write technique appeared deceptively simple and not one that I had previously considered. It involves the participant drawing a picture in response to a topic or research question and either the child or the researcher writing down any ideas that emerge (Bradding and Horstman, 1999).

The literature advocates that Draw and Write has several advantages pertinent to my studies. Drawing is a popular strategy in research with young children (Tay-lim & Lim, 2013) because participants can participate at their own level and enter the research process on their own terms (Hall, 2009) and in a way that reflects their inner world. The task of drawing may address and "minimise the adult-researcher-child participant power imbalance" (Lambert *et al.*, 2013, p. 609) by placing the emphasis on the drawing activity. Wetton (1999) is credited with pioneering the Draw and Write method and observed that 7 and

8-year olds were able to express their feelings and emotions through drawing more easily than they could articulate them:

It became apparent that the children experienced and empathized with a wide range of emotions including anger, frustration, despair, remorse, guilt, embarrassment and relief as well as delight, enjoyment, excitement. The children differed only from adults in that they did not have the vocabulary to express themselves. (Wetton and McWhirter, 1998, p. 273)

This is of interest because pupils identified with CMN can have difficulty expressing and understanding emotional states and therefore any method that supports this process could be of benefit. Horstman *et al.* (2008) comment that the Draw and Write technique might be appropriate for children whose language or literacy skills might not match their cognitive abilities, while Holliday *et al.* (2009) suggest that drawing may be an apt non-verbal device for listening to and attempting to understand the views of those with communication impairments. It seems that Draw and Write offers pupils with communication and learning disabilities the potential to effectively participate, express ideas and recall events and emotions using a technique where they can use non-verbal communication to participate. Furthermore, Angell *et al.* (2015) note that it provides “a choice for imparting information in ways that might be familiar” (p. 19) as well as being a non-threatening, child-centred method of eliciting voice. Moreover, the Draw and Write method appears apt “for a broad range of ages and abilities, with the potential for children to adapt the style of drawing, or the drawing/writing balance, to suit their personal communication preferences” (ibid, p. 20).

However, more recent literature appears to be advocating listening to children talk during the drawing process. Angell *et al.* (2015) proposed a modified approach, Draw, Write and Tell (DWT). This was of interest because the researcher focuses on the drawing produced but also records any accompanying talk or utterances from the start of the drawing activity. I thought DWT provided a less restricted approach and appeared to offer more opportunities to communicate. Pupils will often verbalise their thoughts and ideas while creating a picture and drawing can be an interactive experience. The interactive nature of drawing and talking is described by Cox (2005) “as a parallel and mutually transformative process” (p. 123). The primary strength of this method is that it ensures that the ‘tell’ component is central and provides



“a more complete and comprehensive account of the children’s perceptions” (Tay-lim and Lim, 2013, p. 12). Studies have highlighted the importance of listening to young children’s verbal exchanges as they draw (Brooks, 2009; Clark and Moss, 2011; Coates and Coates, 2006; Dockett and Perry, 2005, 2007). Cameron and Clark (2004) suggest :

Researchers may gain more from listening to young children’s talking during the drawing process than from a formal analysis of the final drawing. (p. 496)

Tay-lim and Lim (2013) argue that “...dialogical engagement is as important as the drawing itself, and both visual images and the verbal exchanges are central to the children’s meaning making process” (p. 65). The literature suggests that DWT offers both a means of facilitating and supporting communication and an effective approach for listening and documenting experiences via visual representations. However, this approach assumes that the participants can engage with the draw, write or talk activities and that for pupils with gross or fine motor impairment, visual or hearing impairment and communication difficulties this will not pose barriers to participation.

### **3.6.2 *Trialling DWT***

The intention was to simply establish if pupils in my study would respond to the DWT approach. Two pupils were selected, both of whom had recently completed their EHCp meetings and had already consented to participate in the research. The participants were invited to “tell me about” their meetings. I also indicated that pupils could choose to use the drawing materials laid out on the table. I did not record the encounters, but I did scribe pupils’ responses.

The results of the trial were intriguing, surprising and unexpected. Firstly, DWT proved successful at eliciting responses that were visual, verbal and written. Secondly, drawing appeared to ease communication and allow pupils the opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings and emotions freely. Indeed, drawing has been described as “a nonverbal avenue of expression” (Dockett and Perry, 2005, p. 512). Byrne (1999) suggests that drawing can provide an enjoyable means of participation for some pupils. Additionally, DWT appeared to prompt memory offering pupils time to think with no pressure to provide either an immediate or formal answer. Brown *et al.* (2008) comment that children will spend longer in an interview situation when drawing. It also gave me time to

think before prompting the pupil to shed light on a point raised in the picture. The act of drawing seemed to assist with a gradual build-up of ideas and thoughts and this is helpful with pupils who cannot cope with too much information. During the trial both pupils produced a series of pictures with verbal comments about their participation at their EHCp meeting which I had scribed verbatim on to the drawings with their endorsement. It was evident that DWT approach could act to facilitate communication and participation.

The benefits of visual methods in eliciting children's views and perspectives have been commented on:

...visual methods can: provide an alternative to the hegemony of a word-and-number based academy; slow down observation and encourage deeper and more effective reflection on all things visual and visualisable; and with it enhance our understanding of sensory embodiment and communication, and hence reflect more fully the diversity of human experiences. (Prosser and Loxley, 2008, p. 4)

Prosser and Loxley argue that visual methods provide a means of eliciting a pupil's inner world and experiences by de-privileging the spoken and written word for typically developing children. Images may stimulate different responses to speech or writing and this may elicit emotional responses and allow pupils to express themselves in ways that language cannot. Drawing has been used as a method for gathering children's perspectives and gaining an understanding of their experiences in many studies (Bessas *et al.*, 2006; Dockett and Perry, 2005b; Einarsdottir *et al.*, 2005; Wojaczynska-Stanek *et al.*, 2008). Brooks suggests that "Drawing will often contain and make visible the essence of an idea or concept" (2009, p. 319) and may therefore support pupils to make sense of experiences. Mayaba and Wood, (2015) claim that this "research method provides researchers with a window into the lived experiences of the children and a means to understand how they make meaning of them" (p. 3). Drawing is an activity that can facilitate interaction and communication with children and is considered a valuable 'springboard' for discussion (Cox, 2005). According to Finley (2008) participatory visual methods allow "the voiceless a chance to tell their own stories" (p. 97). Additionally, pupils identified with CMN appeared to find drawing offers a pleasurable and non-threatening medium to express themselves. The adoption of the DWT approach means that multiple modes of communication are being incorporated.

This has the advantage of allowing pupils to enter the research process on their own terms as envisaged by the United Nations:

The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice. (Article 13, UNICEF, 1989, p. 4)

I was encouraged by the way in which both pupils engaged with the visual elements of DWT. Having reflected on the benefits of the technique I considered it an appropriate and child-friendly data-collection tool.

Nevertheless, from the outset I realised that DWT has limitations. It may pose a barrier for pupils with physical, visual or hearing impairments. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that all children enjoy drawing activities (Christensen and James, 2008). While the process of drawing, writing and talking about the EHCp meeting appeared positive, I was aware it might induce negative feelings for some pupils. A further concern was whether DWT would enable pupils to tell their stories the way they have experienced them, especially as pupils labelled with CMN may not be able to provide clear oral accounts of their drawing. Additionally, if drawing plays a critical role then consideration would need to be given to how this data could be interpreted. Indeed, Horstman *et al.* (2008) note that a limitation of DWT is that "it can be difficult to analyse the drawings" (p. 1008).

### **3.7 Data Collection Sources**

The research design includes two further data sources collected as part of the EHCp process:

- Person-centred planning materials used in the EHCp meeting such as power point presentations, computer-generated images, collages and film.
- Examples of the *Section A* pro forma *All About Me*.

The multiple data sources provided opportunities to gain a more comprehensive picture of voice and participation.

### **3.8 Participant Sample**

A total of 19 participants were involved in this study. The sample was drawn from a London special school in which 52% of the pupils are labelled as having

SLD and 48% Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD). All the pupils have learning disabilities and are assessed as having cognition skills well below their chronological age. The school census (2016) records that 82% of the pupils have significant speech and communication delay. Many of the pupils have additional needs including medical, emotional, psychological and behavioural.

The sampling of participants was purposive (Patton, 2002, p. 40). Participants were selected from pupils scheduled to have an EHCp conversion at the time of data collection (2015/16). Data was collected from pupils in the priority EHCp groups, which included school leavers in Years 14, 13, 12, and 11. The sample group therefore had a KS4/5 bias. The sample consisted of 19 pupils: nine in Year 11, one in Year 12, eight in Year 13 and one in Year 14.

The participants have a wide range of diagnoses including autism and Down's Syndrome. The sample group includes 86% pupils identified with SLD and 14% with MLD. The study includes more pupils labelled as having SLD, who experience complex speech, language and communication challenges. Pupils identified with MLD were considered more able to express their views and opinions as part of the EHCp process, but their voices were not excluded from the study.

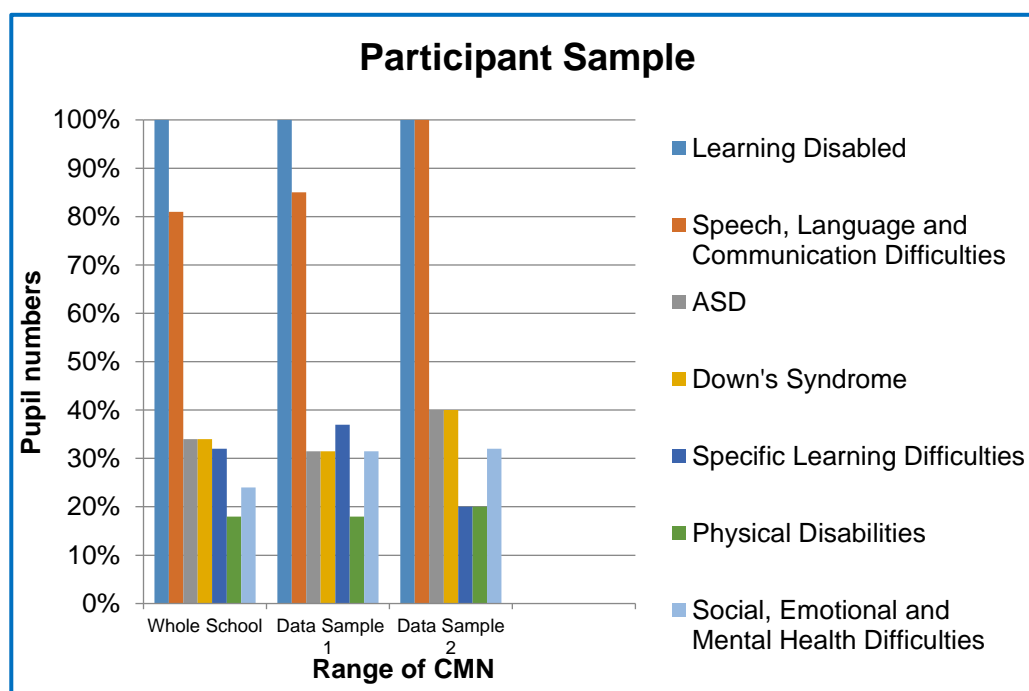


Figure 1 Participant Sample Chart

The sample has a male bias and this reflects the gender bias in special education with boys more prevalent than girls (DfE, 2017). Girls make up 28% and boys 72% of the sample school population in 2015/16. Two out of the 19 pupils in the data collection were girls (10.5% girls and 89.5% boys). This bias can be further explained because originally 21 pupils agreed to participate but two dropped out, one male and one female.

### **3.9 Ethical Issues**

Ethicality has a significant position in this study and in this section I reflect on ethical considerations.

Research with children raises various complex ethical issues, but research with pupils identified with CMN in a special school raises huge ethical and methodological concerns. My research was undertaken in accordance with the British Educational Research Association's Revised Ethical Guidelines (BERA, 2011). Important ethical challenges and considerations regarding conducting research with children and vulnerable groups were fully addressed prior to data collection and ethical approval obtained from the university's ethics committee

My position as a AHT meant that I could arrange for data collection to take place with minimal disruption both to the research site and participants. The issue of recruitment was therefore slightly less complex, but by no means less important. Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2011) makes it clear researchers "should operate within an ethic of respect" (2011, p. 5). An issue of concern ethically when children or vulnerable groups are involved is that the research process is initiated and dominated by adult researchers. Pupils identified with SEND "are particularly vulnerable to being included in research without their consent" (Porter, 2009, p. 351) and steps need to be taken to make sure that pupils can make their decisions voluntarily and not feel coerced into participating. The participation of pupils in this study was controlled by a hierarchy of gatekeepers such as the Headteacher, school governors, parents and ethics committees who have a responsibility to protect pupils from potential distress or coercion.

The relationship between the researcher and the participants is of primary ethical concern because the research approaches are predominantly

determined by the researcher who has power over how pupils participate and the research process. This is particularly pertinent to this study where I had a dual role, having established a range of formal and professional relationships in the school with pupils prior to them participating in research. To maintain these boundaries, it was important to make a clear distinction between my existing AHT role and my role as a researcher. I had to clearly establish the terms of engagement, especially regarding how the research goes beyond my remit as an AHT. In this respect, having the PAG to explain the research and my role to other pupils helped to reduce power issues and the risk of coercion.

Extra care was taken because the research includes pupils who are under the age of 18. I anticipated that data collection methods would not adversely affect the social or psychological well-being of pupils because the DWT sessions focused on a prior review meeting conducted as part of the EHCp process. Nevertheless, I recognised the potential for pupils to experience distress or anxiety, especially if they felt that their EHCp meeting had not gone well. To reduce levels of distress pupils were given the option to withdraw at any stage. This required the researcher to be sensitive to non-verbal signals or behaviours reflecting any discomfort or dissent. Bearing in mind that the well-being of all participants is paramount, pupils were also given the opportunity to invite a third party to accompany them to the DWT sessions, although this offer was not taken up by any of the participants. I made every effort to ensure that all the pupils felt secure and at ease during the data collection process. I conducted the research in the school in designated meeting rooms chosen because they were familiar to the participants.

Ethical consideration was given to the rights of pupils to participate in research that could potentially be of value and provide insight into individual experiences of voice. Tuffrey-Wijneet *et al.* (2008) considers that it might be “unethical to exclude people with more severe learning difficulties from studies” (p. 188). This research concerns issues that directly affect pupils labelled as having CMN and to exclude pupils who experience barriers to participation would “suggest that their views are not important and not worthy of our time and energy.” (Garth and Aroni, 2003, p. 261-2)

### **3.9.1 Recruitment, Information Forms and Consent**

It is the responsibility of the researcher to carry out research according to ethical codes of practice. AR undertaken with disabled pupils poses several important issues regarding consent. Issues around informed consent are particularly complex in all educational studies involving CYP and there is debate as to whether such research raises unique questions regarding ethics. Lindsay (2000) suggests that “research with children poses the same ethical questions” (p. 19) to those which apply to other research. However, there are specific concerns related to disabled children and these focus on informed valid consent and ways of ensuring that pupils are included meaningfully in the decision-making process. Pupils should be allowed to decide whether to participate based upon a full appreciation of what the research is about and what is expected of them.

In England, children under 16 are not automatically presumed to be legally competent to give consent. However, if a child can be judged to ‘understand’ what participation in research will involve, a standard known as “Gillick competence” derived from a legal decision made by the House of Lords in 1986, can be applied and parental consent is not actually necessary. However, it is school protocol and good practice to inform ‘responsible others’ and seek additional consent for all pupils up to the age of 19. Therefore, consent was sought from both pupils and their families (Appendix 2).

Research permissions, agreements, and purpose of the study were carefully explained and appropriate steps taken to enable pupils to make their own decision to consent. Access to information can make a difference to capacity for pupils identified with CMN. BERA guideline 18 states that researchers should “fully explore alternative ways” in which pupils can be “enabled to make an authentic response” (2011, p. 6). This was achieved by making sure all the information was explained or presented in a way that was understandable, by using simple language, Makaton, visual aids, or breaking information down in to smaller segments.

Pupils were given information about the methods, timing, possible benefits and hoped-for outcomes of the research in advance of data collection. A formal recruitment poster was placed on the school website and in the school’s

monthly newsletter (Appendix 1). Easy-read posters designed by the PAG were displayed in the classrooms of pupils involved in EHCp process. In addition, I had permission from the Headteacher to directly approach potential participants. Initially two members of the PAG group, that I had trained, talked to targeted class groups and explained why, how, when and by whom the research would be conducted. Pupils were invited to take an information sheet if they were interested or willing to participate. It was only at this point that I commenced the process of consent with pupils and then their families. Two versions of the consent form were produced. The first a simplified consent form containing information and the second a visual consent using Communicate in print (Appendix 2 and 3). PAG supported the process of informed consent by explaining consent, reading the forms to support participants to make fully informed decisions. Research interviews with pupils only commenced when all participants had sufficient information to understand what they were undertaking.

Consent forms actively engaged pupils in the research process by valuing their decision to participate and empowering them through opportunities to provide their own signatures on the forms. In terms of gaining consent from families the benefits were understood by the adults because they too were contributing to the EHCp process. Families gave permission because the research was perceived to be relevant to school improvement and practice.

Good practice should view informed consent with children as an ongoing process (Cameron and Murphy, 2007; Curtis *et al.*, 2004; Porter and Lacey, 2005). I was aware that information can be absorbed over time as pupils gain a better understanding through their experiences. The on-going process of consent was managed by ensuring that during all stages of the research process, pupils were given frequent opportunities to review their willingness to be co-participants.

Throughout the research, because of my close involvement with the participants, I adhered to BERA guidelines and London South Bank University's (LSBU) Professional Doctorate Code of Practice.



### **3.9.2 Participant Privacy and Confidentiality**

Anonymity, confidentiality and safe storage are all concerns when dealing with pupil information. BERA guidelines acknowledge that “privacy” (2011, p. 7) and respect of participants and their data is a key ethical responsibility. Both electronic and hard copies of personal information pertaining to the study were stored securely in line with data protection principles outlined in the *Data Protection Act 1998* and LSBU’s Code of Practice. The data generated was stored in a locked cabinet and on a password-protected computer in a secure office used to keep examination material, safe from unauthorised access or accidental loss. I informed pupils prior to the commencement of the research of the procedures taken to safeguard confidentiality and anonymity.

Care was taken to preserve anonymity of the school and all the participants. Pseudonyms were used during the research process to maintain anonymity. Pseudonyms were used in documents such as the interpretive dialogue and the final research findings to ensure data confidentiality and anonymity.

I removed pupils’ names from their drawings so that I could use the drawings without breaching their rights of confidentiality and anonymity. Pupils were given a photocopy of their original drawing immediately after each of the DWT sessions. Scanned images of the drawings were uploaded on to the school system and securely filed and this provided a back-up of all the drawing data.

Briefing and debriefing was conducted with pupils and their families, explaining the purpose of the research and the option to withdraw. This process took a considerable amount of time as it required care with the explanations and offered pupils and their families an opportunity to ask questions relating to the study.

Reflecting back to participants and checking interpretations is considered a “critical technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 314). This verification process involved showing pupils their drawings and transcript in speech bubble format and soliciting their views as to the accuracy of the text and whether they still wished their words and drawings to be included in the research. At a later stage an easy-read version of the summary was assembled and fed back to the participants (Appendix 4).

### **3.10 Maintaining Researcher Reflexivity**

The AR cycle requires a distinct reflective stage, but reflection occurred throughout the research process. Arnold and Norton (2018) contend that a “reflexive mind set” (p. 21) is required. Reflexivity is a contested concept and discussed further in Chapter 4. Shaw (2010) contends that reflexivity involves “an interpretivist ontology which construes people and the world as interrelated and engaged in a dialogic relationship that constructs (multiple versions of) reality” (p. 235). My research adopts this concept of reflexivity and recognises that researchers are inexorably part of the social world that they are researching and therefore should be open and reflexive concerning how this paradigm influences “the research scenario when gathering data and when afterwards analysing it.” (Shaw, 2010, p. 233). Action researchers need to be continually reflexive about their own thinking and candid about how this prompts research decisions.

As a reflexive researcher my aim during interactions with pupils was to capture individual voices and gain a better understanding of their experiences by co-constructing meanings. This process was constantly under review and immediately after each DWT session I used my field notes to write a detailed narrative to accompany each drawing. This provided a descriptive chronological account of the interactions with the participants. Interpretation commenced during the transcription stage when an interpretive dialogue was written to accompany the DWT data. While listening, transcribing and looking at the visual material strong recurring themes emerged, and these were recorded in memos using an open coding system. Notes and memos provided an effective way of keeping a record of initial thoughts, feelings, questions and interpretations. These were revisited because they provided invaluable information about how methodological decisions were made. It later became apparent that the reliability and rigour of my study would rest on the careful description of the methodological and data collection methods and my interpretive decisions (Lincoln and Guba, 2000).

### **3.11 Summary**

In this chapter, I outline my evolving concerns with research methodology. Firstly, I discuss why Springer’s AR model was considered an appropriate

approach. Secondly, I detail the research challenges associated with finding an accessible data collection method to support pupil voice and participation. Thirdly, I describe why after a period of reflection, I revised my data collection plan and adopted the DWT approach. Finally, I outline the considerable ethical considerations that research with pupils in a special school raises.

In Chapter 4, having commenced the first cycle of the AR, I explain why I considered it necessary to widen the literature review to include studies pertaining to children's drawing.

## CHAPTER 4. INTERPRETATION OF DWT DATA

### 4.1 Introduction

According to Stringer's "Look, think, act" model, once the data is collected the logical step in the action sequence is to interpret it. I wrote up the pupils' comments using the notes from the DWT session with an accompanying commentary (later referred to as an interpretive dialogue). Initially, my major concern centred on the need to widen the literature review to include studies pertaining to children's drawing so that I could consider how to interpret the picture content. However, as the research gathered momentum I was collecting data, resolving transcription issues, writing an article, reflecting on the emerging data and modifying actions simultaneously. AR is a dynamic process and one of its key features is that the researcher engages in activities that spiral back and forth. Reflecting, collecting data, trying a solution or action and further reflection are all part of the "continually recycling set of activities" (Stringer, 2014 p. 9). While I acknowledge that AR does not follow a linear trajectory, I had not anticipated the "think" phase would be more akin to spinning plates. Stringer (2014) cautions that AR is not a "neat orderly activity that allows participants to proceed step by step to the end of the process" (p. 9-10). The "Look, think, act" routine merely provides a route or a "road map" (p.10) for the journey.

The journey was not speedy or straightforward and I got lost, drove around in circles and finally found myself back on the road where I started. During the "think" stage I was immersed in my study and I lived, slept and dreamt about it as my research diary testifies:

*I've been woken up at 3:30 am by the chattering in my head about interpretation. My brain is a whirligig and the chattering so insistent that I've had to get up in search of the laptop - but in so doing I have managed to walk into a wall! I'm hopelessly lost in the dark... (26.3.17)*

During this later phase of the "think" stage, I entered an unsettling period in which I groped about in the darkness for a chink of light. Reason (2006) points out that "Good action research emerges over time in an evolutionary and developmental process" (p. 197).

In this chapter, I elucidate on the recursive cycles that took place between November 2015 and May 2017. Initially, data capture progressed well, and it

was evident the pupils were engaged and the DWT approach was appropriate. I began interpreting the meaning pupils were making in an accompanying commentary. After a period of reflexivity, I realised firstly that I needed to review the literature regarding children's drawing and justify my interpretive stance. Secondly, I had to consider transcription approaches relevant to the 'tell' content so that I could present the data in a way that others could read it. Thirdly, I needed to clarify the role that reflection, reflexivity, situated knowledge, tacit awareness and intuition play in interpreting the data.

#### **4.2 Interpreting Children's Drawings**

During the "think" cycle, it became apparent that pupils' drawings were playing a significant role in data generation. Therefore an appropriate approach to support interpretation of the DWT data was required.

Drawings have been used as a research tool to study children because their pictures can be revealing. Cherney *et al.* (2006) describe children's drawings as a "mirror to their minds" (p. 127) offering glimpses into unconscious and authentic self. Korzenik (1995) recognises that a drawing leaves "a trace, a record that could be analysed long after its production" (p. 17), while, Koppitz (1968) acknowledges that:

Long before youngsters can put their feelings and thoughts into words, they can express both conscious and unconscious attitudes, wishes and concerns in drawings. (cited in Fury *et al.*, 1997 p. 1154)

It is this "trace" that attracts voice researchers to visual methods believing that it is "possible to uncover the 'authentic' voice of the child" by revealing "conscious and unconscious attitudes" (Eldén, 2012, p. 67). Mayaba and Wood (2015) consider that visual participatory methods provide a data generation method as well as a powerful intervention "with cognitive and psychosocial benefits" (p. 3).

Although this method has flaws, children's drawings have been extensively used to measure intelligence in typically developing children. Conversely, drawing skills have been used to evaluate cognitive abilities and identify a range of psychological and emotional impairments. The DWT data produced by the secondary-age pupils identified with CMN contained recurring features more typically attributed to much younger children. A developmental understanding

of children's drawings is important in Early Years education partly because of the curriculum focus on evolving writing and drawing skills in relation to developing cognitive and fine motor and grapho motor skills. However, focus on the developmental sequence of drawing usually becomes less important as pupils progress to secondary education and their images typically become increasingly more complex and are described as 'Art'. It became apparent at the early stages of data collection that there was a need to interpret pupils' drawings through an Early Years lens and a requirement for a visual vocabulary to describe the pictorial content.

Existing literature relating to the analysis of children's drawings can be summarised by three distinct approaches (Holliday, *et al.*, 2009). The first centres on developmental stages and the second on the psychological meanings depicted. Both are characterised by the scoring systems that involve predetermined baselines, whereby a child's drawing is classified and levels of development, or personality, identified. The third approach moves away from considering the product of drawing to focus on the process and the meaning-making perspective of children's drawings. Below, I summarise each of these approaches.

#### **4.2.2 The Developmental Approach**

Children's drawings have been studied since childhood began to be considered a distinct stage of development. Indeed, drawing development was included in Darwin's (1877) case studies known as the Baby Biographies. The developmental approach to drawing describes typically developing children's progress through distinct stages identified by certain characteristics, or the sophistication of their artwork, and these are linked to chronological age.

Luquet's (1927) developmental model is still considered relevant today. Luquet's stage model became influential when Piaget used this as an illustrative technique for his theories of spatial cognition and through the writings of Piaget and Inhelder (1956), in their book *The Child's Conception of Space*.

Luquet proposed that typically developing children's drawings progress through stages of realism, from drawing what they know to drawing what they see. According to Luquet the "goal of drawing would be a realistic translation of the

visual properties of objects into graphics" (Krampen, 1991, p. 38). From the ages of two to three years, typically developing children are at the scribbling stage in which people are typically depicted with a circle for the head and two dangling lines for legs that resemble a tadpole. Luquet describes this stage as Fortuitous Realism. The second stage is termed Failed Realism and appears around the ages of four to five when children begin to experiment with different ways of drawing figures and may depict the humans without arms or legs. The third stage is Intellectual Realism when children draw what they know rather than what they see. For example, children at this stage might depict the outside of a house as well as the inside, because they know that furniture is there. This is called transparency or X-ray drawing. Between the ages of seven to nine, children in the final stage attempt to make their pictures conform to Visual Realism.

However, it is argued that Luquet's developmental stages are too strict. Cox (2005a) notes that while general trends can be observed in children's drawing development, it is difficult to confirm a systematic progression of stages. Roland (2006) considers that there can be overlap between stages and that a child may revert to a previous stage before progressing to the next one, or combine and enter sub-stages where drawings demonstrate the characteristics of more than one stage. Therefore, it is likely that pupils will be at varied points in their graphic development and Luquet's stage theory should not be understood to represent linear progression. Theories relating to stages of drawing development were conjectured in relation to typically developing children and fail to consider physical or sensory impairments.

Furthermore, Cox contends that culture may play a role in influencing drawing:

Picture-making is not simply an automatic consequence of maturation but involves a learned set of abilities which, although related to children's developing motor and cognitive skills, is also influenced by culture in which they live. (Cox, 2005a, p. 289)

Therefore, differences in sophistication of children's drawings may be because of cultural exposure to graphic models. The context in which children draw and the availability of materials may also be important. Research has shown that when young children are shown the drawing process they can improve (Pemberton and Nelson, 1987, cited in Pemberton, 1990).

Luquet's work influenced theorists such as Kellogg (1970, 1979). Kellogg produced a detailed study of children's drawings and documented her own 5-stage theory in *Analyzing Children's Art* (1969). She catalogued 20 different kinds of scribble forms which she considered to be the building blocks of drawing development and the basis for human drawings. One of the stages described by Kellogg is the Mandala, Sun, and Radial Stage which she suggests provide a transition from abstract work to more pictorial work, because the lines radiate outward to form arms and legs. She concludes that children in all cultures follow the same graphic evolution in their drawing from scribbles through to representational drawings. One of the difficulties with Kellogg's theory is that it imposes an adult view on the children's drawings and ignores the meaning ascribed by the child.

Luquet's work was influential because it posited that a child's drawing of an object is related to their concept of that object and could therefore be used as a measure of cognitive development. Goodenough (1926) quantified this development of intelligence in her book *The Measurement of Intelligence by Drawings*. Goodenough (1926) devised the *Draw-A-Man* test (DAM) which scored a child's ability to reproduce proportional human features. This test assumes that intellectual development is a main determining factor in the quality of children's drawings and will improve with age. Goodenough also claimed that the DAM test revealed personality traits and by the 1930s and 1940s the DAM test was used to give insight into an individual's intellectual maturity, personality or mental health.

Harris (1963) later updated the test, which became the Goodenough-Harris test, and adapted this for adolescents, but the test was found not to be reliable beyond the age of 11 or 12 years. Furthermore, because the DAM test focused on realism, it placed importance on the finished drawing to the detriment of the process of drawing. The DWT approach is interested in the drawing produced but significantly the accompanying 'tell' process is considered important as well.

Developmental stage theories are linked to chronological age, particularly from 18 months to 10 years. The pupils in the study are aged 15-19, by which stage pupils would be expected to have achieved visual realism. However, as the pupils in the study have cognition, learning, fine and gross motor difficulties and



visual impairments, it is not surprising that features associated with the early stage of the drawing process appear in the pictures they produce. While I acknowledge that in the past researchers have used a developmental stance and scored drawings to identify intellectual or emotional deficiencies, I consider this contentious in the context of this study. However, I frequently reference the developmental stages in the interpretive dialogue that accompanies each drawing in order to aid interpretation.

#### **4.2.3 The Psychological Approach**

The interpretation of drawing has a long history in therapeutic circles and this second approach to understanding children's drawings centres on the psychological content. Human Figure Drawings (HFD) have been used in psychiatry, psychology, and art therapy to assess, evaluate and support children's psychological development or psychological disorders (Holliday *et al.*, 2009). Machover (1949) discussed the use of HFDs as a technique for personality assessment in her book *Personality Projection in the Drawing of the Human Figure*. Individual features of a drawing are given clinical significance with specific interpretation and attached meanings. For example, the head is symbolic of intellectual power and social dominance, the face reflected the interpersonal relationships of the person, and toes a sign of aggressiveness bordering on the pathological.

Machover's research initially interpreted adult patients' drawings' but Koppitz (1968) developed the Draw-A-Person (DAP) test to reflect on the emotional maturity and personality of children. The approach is built on the premise that when children draw they convey something of themselves and therefore their pictures can be utilised by psychologists and therapists as indicators of their personality and social and emotional development (Di Leo, 1973, Malchiodi, 1993). Koppitz (1968) concluded "The person a child knows best is himself; his picture of a person becomes therefore a portrait of his inner self, of his attitudes" (p. 5). HFD has been used as a diagnostic tool despite the difficulty of accurately or objectively scoring children's drawings. A further difficulty with this approach is that it assumes that trained adults are experts in determining and scoring HFD. Infact Hiler and Nesvig (1965) discovered that formal training is not necessarily related to interpreting HFD and identified that there was no

differences in performance between psychologists and non-psychologists.

However, when I attempted to score a HFD for chronological age, I found the procedure subjective and difficult to score accurately. Additionally, any scoring aspects of the HFD or DAP test are irrelevant to this research because all the participants have been assessed as having a range of SEND. It was not anticipated that pupils would produce HFD as part of the DWT sessions, nor that the drawing would be used for diagnostic purposes. Critically, it should be noted that the pupils were never formally asked to draw a person. In fact, they were given an ambiguous drawing activity and therefore the inclusion of human figures is coincidental. Had I asked pupils to specifically draw a HFD they may have had a clearer understanding of the task and produced a HFD that included more details. Nevertheless, many of the drawings produced included figures or shapes representing the human form. I did, however, use the DAP framework to provide a vocabulary to aid the identification of body parts and record features that were included in the drawings.

#### ***4.2.4 The Meaning-Making Approach***

The third, more recent discourse considers children's drawing as a meaning-making process and constructs children as experts. The term meaning-making, when related to a pupil's drawing, is the process of considering messages created in and through the child's drawings to communicate perspectives, thoughts and intentions. (Holliday *et al.*, 2009, p. 252). While the 'tadpoles' and stickman depiction of human figures drawn by the 15-19 year olds in the study are of interest, what I required was an approach that, in line with my research methodology, recognised that pupils are the expert informers.

Rather than assessing the cognitive or emotional aspects of the pictures or the pupil's ability to conventionally draw, my study is attempting to include pupils' views through their drawing, writing and utterances. Both the developmental and psychological approaches fail to capture the communicative nature of children's drawings (Tay-lim and Lim, 2013) and this aspect is fundamental when eliciting pupils' perspectives. Therefore, the meaning-making approach is of significance because it emphasises drawing as a process, rather than a product and allows pupils to express and communicate feelings and views in or through their images. Cox (2005b) states that the meaning-making perspective

recognises drawing “as a constructive process of thinking in action, rather than a developing ability to make visual reference to objects in the world” (p. 123). For pupils, meaning-making may refer to the drawing process in which they attempt to make sense of experiences and their world for themselves. Wright (2010) comments that typically developing children “draw to create meaning and to communicate this with others” (p. 23). Einarsdottir *et al.* (2009) note that it is the “narratives”, created during the drawing process that record the “journey of their construction of meaning” (p. 219), that offer insights into children’s understandings. Therefore, the process of drawing, as well as accompanying talk, may convey meanings. Mayaba and Wood (2015) assert that drawing and talking provides a method to understand how children “make meanings” (p. 3) and construct realities. Within the context of my research, the purpose of considering pupils’ drawings and verbal and non-verbal comments is specifically to gain a more complete understanding of the meaning pupils attach to their experiences of attending the EHCp meetings. Therefore, meaning-making seemed an apt approach to provide a window into lived experience.

As noted in Chapter 3, children’s drawings have been used in research to access children’s views (Brooks, 2009; Coates, 2002; Cote and Golbeck, 2007; Dockett and Perry, 2005; Driessnack, 2006; Tay-Lim and Lim, 2013). These studies aim to ensure “interpretation belongs with the child, rather than the researcher” (Dockett and Perry, 2005, p. 515). The Mosaic approach views “Young children as meaning makers” (Clark and Moss, 2011, p. 5) and is underpinned by multi-methods that include drawings but also maps, audio recordings and tours of childhood settings as a framework for listening to young children and eliciting their experiences. Tay-Lim and Lim comment that the discourse on meaning-making has directly “led to the adoption of a new paradigm that looks into the integration of perceptions and meanings in children’s drawing processes” (2013, p. 69).

Although there is a great deal of research relating to young children’s drawing, there is scant research on meaning-making involving disabled pupils. Research undertaken by Holliday *et al.* (2009) is of significance because it details the analysis procedures undertaken with children identified with communication difficulties. Holliday *et al.* considers that “meaning-making approaches can also

benefit from systematic consideration of key features, or focal points” (2009, p. 256) and their research identifies six key features of children’s drawings. Facial expressions, accentuation of body features portrayal of talking/listening, colours used, conversational partners and sense of self can be used when analysing children’s messages in their drawings. The Holliday *et al.* study presents one of the most detailed accounts of the procedures used to support the analysis of drawing process, but it should be remembered that while the CYP in this research have communication difficulties they do not have CMN. In this respect, my research is unique.

#### **4.2.5 The Complexities of Interpreting Drawings**

There are challenges connected with the use of drawing as part of meaning-making in research. Firstly, drawing is a distinctive form of meaning-making and it is not just the content but how the drawing was created and the colour, line and materials selected. Drawings invite multiple interpretations and the challenges associated with interpreting a visual image are reinforced by Collier (2001) who states that “All elements of an image may be important sources of knowledge through analysis, if only we can identify them and sort them out” (p. 5). Secondly, Holliday *et al.* (2009) acknowledges the need to consider the reliability of interpreting drawings:

Adults may misinterpret children’s meanings, placing emphasis on features that were accidentally enlarged, colours that were inadvertently selected and so forth. Additionally, it may not be valid to make meaning from one drawing as it may not be representative of the child’s full account. (p. 58)

Thirdly, children’s drawings do not always ‘conform’ to adults’ expectations and can be easily misinterpreted (Hall, 2009, p. 187). Researchers should not assume that they possess the interpretive power to understand what children have drawn. Eldén (2012) cautions that using visual methods to uncover authentic voice can be “messy” and require “self-critical reflection of the research process” (p. 68). If researchers consider the process of interpreting the drawing of typically developing children to be challenging, the process is likely to be considerably more complex for pupils identified with CMN.

Having considered the complexities of interpreting pupil’s drawing, I now turn to the difficulties of transcribing and interpreting the ‘tell’ element of the DWT data.

### **4.3 The Complexities of Interpreting DWT Data**

My research presented a series of unique challenges relating to transcription. At the same time as I was grappling with interpreting the pupils' drawings, I was tackling the task of accurately transcribing the accompanying field notes. Significant challenges emerged because of the paucity of information relating to the transcription of DWT data. The available research does not make the data transcription process explicit and there are no guidelines about how non-verbal communication, which plays a central role in my research, is to be recorded. Just as drawing is a distinctive form, by the same token both the verbal and the non-verbal content is pivotal because they are used by children to convey meaning (Wright, 2007). The process of recording and systematically transcribing accurately what was said, signed, written and drawn and how this transpired was a complex task. The lack of precedents resulted in an unconventional style of transcribing and interpreting data.

#### **4.3.1 Transcription of the DWT Field Notes**

My aim was to produce a verbatim transcript of the DWT session that was accessible. According to Duranti's (2007) definition the DWT sessions did not constitute a transcription because a transcription entails a translation of sound/image from a recording to text. Nevertheless, transcription is the transference of spoken language to written language (Kvale, 1996). Importantly, I required a transcription approach that captured an accurate record of words spoken, but also recorded any non-vocalised language. Essentially a transcription approach that recorded both what was 'said' and how it was 'said' while preserving a sense of the encounters with the pupils.

Translation literature notes the need for researchers to be transparent and explicit as the interpretive process can be approached in several different ways (Bucholtz, 2007). Bucholtz (2000) considers that there are two extremes of transcription practice with naturalised at one end of the continuum and denaturalised at the other. Davidson (2009) argues that researchers usually apply one of these two methods of transcription. Oliver *et al.* (2005) outline the differences between these two methods. Denaturalism is described by the authors as the removal of "idiosyncratic elements of speech" (p. 1273-1274), such as unnecessary or unintentional words, to make transcriptions easier to

read. Denaturalised transcription also aims to produce verbatim transcripts, but the accuracy relates to the essence of the interview, the meaning and the perceptions that are created during discourse. The naturalised approach attempts to provide a “real world” (ibid p. 1274) account and capture as much detail as possible and include pauses in speech, gestures, body language and utterances such as laughter, mumbling, stutters, snorts or involuntary sounds. An advantage of the naturalised transcription is that it results in more detail because spoken and non-vocalised features of the voices are preserved affording a more complete, reliable and valid picture (Forbat and Henderson, 2005). There are several disadvantages of the naturalised approach. Firstly, the transcriber could wrongly interpret the voices and secondly, the transcription is more detailed which could make it difficult to read.

Due to the epistemological orientation of my study, it was important to take an explicitly naturalised stance to transcription to support the capture of authentic pupil voices and the complex nature of the interactions. According to Duranti (2007) researchers frequently use a hybrid of these two approaches resulting in a “muddle in the middle” (Lapadat, 2000, p. 207). Indeed, whether researchers use a naturalised or denaturalised approach, or a combination, it can be difficult to preserve the qualities and characteristics of spoken language such as intonation, emphasis, voice, volume and body language (Poland, 1995). Indeed, the data captured in the first AR cycle is a combination of both methods.

It was critical that the transcription was transparent because I held a great deal of power as the researcher and the transcriber. The advantage of being both the researcher and the transcriber meant that the number of people making decisions that might compromise transcript quality or authenticity was reduced. My deliberations over transcription practices during the first cycle of data capture meant that I attempted various approaches (Appendix 5) before finding one that was best suited to recording the various elements of the DWT process. For example, I had to make decisions about how to transcribe Makaton, which is both signed and spoken, and how to treat ostensibly incomprehensible segments of speech which were still part of the expression and impregnated with meanings. This culminated in a rather unusual layout (Appendix 5) that

employed a colour coded system to denote the different DWT activities as well as standard transcription notation. After careful deliberation a process evolved that included a commentary alongside the text in which I interpreted or explained the meanings the pupils were making.

One of the advantages of being explicit about my approaches, however idiosyncratic, meant that during the first AR cycle I developed a clearer transcription notation strategy and gained a better understanding of authentic pupil voice. This also has the potential to support practitioners working with pupils identified with SEND to transcribe contributions as part of the EHCp review process.

#### **4.4 Interpretation and the Role of Reflection, Reflexivity, Insider Knowledge, Tacit Awareness and Intuition**

Prior to the second data capture, I intended to turn my attention to the analysis of the emergent content. However, I began to question the credibility and trustworthiness of my interpretive approach from a traditional academic standpoint. I felt a sense of unease and these concerns caused me to retreat into a dark, perplexed space that kept me awake at night worrying about how to explain what appeared to be a lack of interpretive rigour. My research diary notes my concerns:

*I stood gazing into a chasm that appeared impossible to leap. Once again, my dreaming self was facing an obstacle like the hero in Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade... (10.1.17)*

The above extract details my quest to seek a deeper, more trustworthy approach to questions relating to interpretive rigour. It references Kiley and Wisker (2009) who describe “learning leaps” that move the individual “beyond the fact finding and questioning to the conceptual level work which problematises, questions fixed 'truths', and starts to enhance deep learning, understanding, making a contribution to knowledge at a conceptual level” (p. 432). In the end, my eureka moment or learning leap came with the realisation that I had used a combination of reflexive practice, situated knowledge, tacit understanding and intuition to support interpretation of the DWT data. I only truly understood that AR is “a reflective and recursive process” (Ely *et al.*, 1991, p. 179) and a vital component of each stage of the research journey when I had

completed several recursive cycles.

McTaggart (1994) reiterated that AR “is a form of self-reflective enquiry” (p. 317) which needs to be viewed as an ongoing, continuous and cyclical endeavour. At each stage of the think cycle I was engaged in reflective and reflexive practice. Reason (2006) asserts the AR process is “full of choices” (p. 187) and argues that quality is improved when the choices made at each stage of the inquiry are transparent and this includes choices made in relation to interpretation of data. Etherington (2004) considers that reflexivity can enable objectivity to flow through research and be used as a primary methodological tool to portray the meanings made by participants. Yet this call for objectivity is difficult to reconcile because it assumes that research relationships are straightforward and detached and suggests a positive positioning. Shaw recommends researchers:

...deny objectivity and instead focus on the intersubjective realm; that is, what happens in the interactions between us and our world, the context in which we come into contact with objects (reality) and the way in which our descriptions (representations) of them are bound by time and place. (Shaw, 2010, p. 234)

Although, initially I had difficulty reconciling this, I came to understand the credibility of my thesis would be enhanced if the interconnections between the participants and the researcher were made explicit and the intuitive and tacit nature of the interpretive phase fully acknowledged. Indeed, Hellawall (2006) contends that this “ability to objectively stand outside one’s own writing” and be reflexive regarding your research practices is a “hallmark of a good thesis” (p. 483).

#### ***4.4.1 Reflection, Critical Reflection and Reflexivity***

Reflection and reflexivity are concepts central to qualitative research methodology and the AR process, but Finlay (2008) asserts that reflection, critical reflection and reflexivity “are often confused and wrongly assumed to be interchangeable” (p. 6). Finlay and Gough (2003) suggest these concepts form a continuum. Reflection, defined as thinking about something after the event, comes at one end, and reflexivity involving continuing self-awareness at the opposite end, while critical reflection lies somewhere in between. Nevertheless, Finlay considers the terminology contested and suggests that it can be applied in myriad ways. Given this ambiguity I considered the differing concepts.



Although Finlay acknowledges that reflexivity can be full of “muddy ambiguity and multiple trails” (2002, p. 212), it is generally agreed that both reflective and, reflexive processes have the potentiality to enable new understanding to emerge. Sandelowski and Barroso (2002) consider reflexivity to be “a hallmark of excellent qualitative research” (p. 222) that can be understood as a process of continual reflection involving the examination of assumptions and preconceptions as well as the conscious scrutiny of research methodology. The implication is that reflection is considered an immediate activity and reflexivity a later stage of the process. However, “in practice these activities may be blurred” (Dallos and Stedmon, 2009, p. 6) or even contradictory. Thompson and Pascal (2012) argue that “reflexivity is a key part of making sure that reflective practice is critically reflective practice” (p. 319). Research undertaken by Lambert *et al.* (2010) examined the concept of reflexivity within midwifery and their findings suggest that “reflective practice encourages the process of reflexivity” (p. 325). Reflexivity and reflection can be understood as far from straightforward concepts. Not only is the terminology used synonymously but there appears to be no consensus or clear definitions.

The term ‘reflection’ comes from Latin roots, meaning ‘back’ and *flectere* meaning ‘to bend’ (Dallos and Stedmon, 2009, p. 1). Therefore, taken literally, to be reflexive means to bend back upon oneself, which would require researchers to become contortionists. Mead (1934) proposes that reflectivity involves “the turning back of the experience of the individual upon himself” (p. 134). From this perspective reflexivity can be understood as a process that encourages self-awareness and seeing oneself differently. Thus, it could be argued that reflexivity involves self-analysis and the ability to revisit and reflect on actions and come to a better self-understanding.

Sometimes the reflexive process seems to require individuals to bend inwards as opposed to backwards. For example, the heuristic approach suggests self-researchers turn their gaze inward and engage in “indwelling” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 24) and from this viewpoint the reflexive process involves introspection. Meanwhile Sandelowski and Barroso (2002) assert that a researcher needs to be able to bend in all directions. They suggest that to be reflexive “implies the ability to reflect inward toward oneself as an inquirer;

outward to the cultural, historical, linguistic, political, and other forces that shape everything about inquiry; and, in between researcher and participant to the social interaction they share” (p. 222). This implies that the act of reflexivity involves the ability to dig below the surface and reflect on the wider social context as well as the interactions with research participants. Smyth (1992) comments that “...reflection can mean all things to all people” (p. 285). I postulate that different stages of the research process call for different reflexive approaches and that these were vital to the research journey. My experience was that I had to bend every which way and introspection involving critical examination and deep conscious thought felt very different from the self-awareness that stems from intuitive tacit reflection undertaken as an education practitioner or during AR cycles.

#### **4.4. 2 Reflective Practice**

The term ‘reflective practice’ has multiple connotations, but the expectation is that teachers in the UK will be reflective practitioners. Reflective practice is widely endorsed, and it is an explicit goal of initial teacher training and a professional standard. Larrivee suggested that a critical stance is essential:

Unless teachers develop the practice of critical reflection, they stay trapped in unexamined judgments, interpretations, assumptions, and expectations. Approaching teaching as a reflective practitioner involves fusing personal beliefs and values into a professional identity. (2000, p. 293)

Some years ago, Dewey (1933) defined reflection as “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 118). For Dewey, reflective thinking moves away from routine thinking towards reflective action and his ideas provided a basis for the concept of “reflective practice” as part of professional development. Schön’s (1983) seminal work identified ways in which professionals could become aware of their implicit knowledge and learn from their experience. Crucially, Schön made the distinction between two types of reflection: reflection-on-action (after-the-event thinking) and reflection-in-action (thinking while doing). For Schön, reflection is an interactive and interpretative process and reflection-in-action is the core of “professional artistry” where teachers draw on both practical experience and theory as they think on their feet, improvise and act both intuitively and creatively. Schön believed that as professionals become more expert in their

practice both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action allows teachers to revise, modify and refine their expertise. Schön's work has drawn criticism and Ekebergh (2007) argues that it is not possible to distance oneself and reflect in the moment because to achieve real self-reflection you must stand back and reflect retrospectively.

Although in practice the division between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action may not be straightforward, I believe it is possible to reflect in the moment. Schön (1983) provides the example of jazz musicians who reflect-in-action on the music they are jointly making and on their individual contributions to this "through a feel for music" (p. 56). My own example comes from a drama lesson in which a pupil produced an unexpected action and I intuitively changed the direction and focus of the lesson to incorporate the pupil's idea. This lesson was observed, and the feedback commended my ability to be 'flexible' and 'creative'. Drama teachers need to be able to adjust their practice and incorporate the unexpected in order to facilitate improved teaching and learning. Schön describes the musicians' reflection-in-action as a reflective conversation. I confess that I do often have a running inner dialogue when I am teaching drama because the lessons have a habit of deviating from a lesson plan. This ability to reflect instinctively and adapt while teaching is difficult to articulate but is part of the tacit understanding of the expert practitioner. Schön asserts that there are two meanings of artistry; one being intuitive knowing, the other 'reflection-in-action' on intuitive knowing. This is reflection that enables immediate decision-making based on individual interpretation of the situation. Therefore, I brought to the research process my practitioner knowledge and this implicit, tacit understanding was incorporated in the AR cycles to support new insight and to interpret the voices of pupils identified with CMN.

#### ***4.4.3 Situated Knowledge***

My positionality within the study needs to be recognised. As an action researcher, conducting research within my own school I situate myself in the participant's world. As a teacher in a special school I have some understanding of pupils' subjective experiences (although I cannot claim to understand what it is to be a disabled child). I used this insider perspective and prior knowledge to interpret the emerging data. In qualitative research, it is impossible to remain

'outside' of your research and researchers are considered part of the process. Steedman notes that "knowledge cannot be separated from the knower" (1991, p. 53) and therefore the researcher's perspectives and positionality affect and influence the research. Spyrou (2011) contends that to "...appreciate the social and cultural significance of children's voices, researchers need to become familiar with the discourses that inform children's voices" (p. 160). This insider perspective affords a privileged understanding of the context and pupils' lived realities. I acknowledge that my insights played a role in my ability to interpret data and write an interpretive dialogue that attempts to make sense of the meanings the pupils were making.

Using my situated knowledge was very much an intuitive process as was writing the accompanying interpretive dialogue which emerged naturally. Being a reflective practitioner is a professional imperative. Sometimes this occurs formally, but having taught for over 35 years, I do not always consciously consider the act of reflection. Reflection is almost second nature and is an ongoing activity and it is part of my knowing-in-action (tacit understanding) that reflecting in-and-on-action will improve my practice and the outcomes for the pupils. I applied this intuitive and instinctive approach to the research process when, for example, conducting the DWT sessions. Reason (2006) concurs that in AR ways of knowing "start from a relationship between self and other, through participation and intuition" (p. 195). Nevertheless, due to the subjective nature of this process I felt an obligation to acknowledge my intuitive and tacit interpretive approach and formally scrutinise my research choices.

#### ***4.4.4 Intuition and Tacit Understanding***

Intuition and tacit understanding are less trusted than other sources of knowledge, but acknowledging this provides a means of addressing the predicament. Being open and reflexive about the interactions between myself and participants and the interpretive process helps to enhance trustworthiness and transparency.

AR can assist practitioners "to affirm aspects of their practice and their tacit knowledge" (Arnold and Norton, 2018, p. 10). In heuristic self-inquiry, tacit knowledge and intuition are believed to be vital features of searching for knowledge and understanding. Moustakas (1990) invites researchers to come

to a deeper understanding of phenomenon being investigated and engage in “spontaneous self-dialogue and self-searching, pursuing intuitive clues and hunches, and drawing from the mystery and sources of energy and knowledge within the tacit dimension” (p. 28). Intuition, according to Moustakas is the “internal capacity to make inferences and arrive at a knowledge of underlying structures or dynamics” (p. 23). Moustakas identifies tacit knowledge as “unique perceptions, feelings, intuitions, beliefs, and judgments” (p. 32). Moustakas considers that if a researcher is open and receptive to tacit knowledge and intuition, illumination will occur, and this will lead to new insights or understanding.

Polanyi (1966) encapsulates the spirit of tacit knowledge by proposing that a tacit way of knowing is one in which “we know more than we can tell” (p. 4). According to Polanyi, all knowledge has a tacit component. Implicit, unconscious knowledge is rooted in people’s minds but is not easy to transmit because of its empathetic quality. Renshaw (2009) maintains that tacit knowledge is difficult to put into words because it has “...a personal quality that makes it impossible to formalise and describe discursively” (p. 35), but “is central to the whole process of coming to know experientially within any practical context” (p. 36). Schön (1983; 1987) believes professionals learn from practical experience by actively building knowledge and drawing on intuitive and implicit procedures acquired ‘on the job’ to guide their decisions and actions. This practical and personal sense of ‘know-how’ or tacit understanding guides day-to-day ‘professional’ practice in a dialectical process between knowing and doing.

It is exactly this tacit knowledge, gained through my experience of being a reflective classroom practitioner, that explains my intuitive approach to interpretation. However, I only realised this and could articulate how I used my tacit professional knowledge following a period of critical introspection. Ingram (2014) argues that critical introspection is a meta-reflective activity that incorporates both reflection and “reflexion” and this enables tacit awareness to surface that is not necessarily possible to articulate through reflection alone. Although not aware of it at the time, I came to understand that because reflecting-in-and-on-action are key elements of my professional practice I

instinctively incorporated this way of engaging to enable me to gain new insights, interpret and make sense of the meaning pupils were making. This may explain why my initial approach to interpretation felt instinctively like the right way to proceed.

#### **4.5 Summary**

In this chapter I “review (look again), reflect (reanalyze), and re-act” (Stringer, 2014, p. 9). I explain how I navigated through recursive cycles of AR to produce an interpretive dialogue. I outline my “reflexivity quest” (Shaw, 2010, p. 242) and the journey to the “secret garden of reflexivity” (Hellowell, 2006, p. 492). Finally, I scrutinise the role of insider knowledge, tacit awareness and intuition to make my interpretation choices transparent.

In the following chapter, I discuss the data arising from the first AR cycle and present the key findings.

## CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS – DATA COLLECTION

### 1

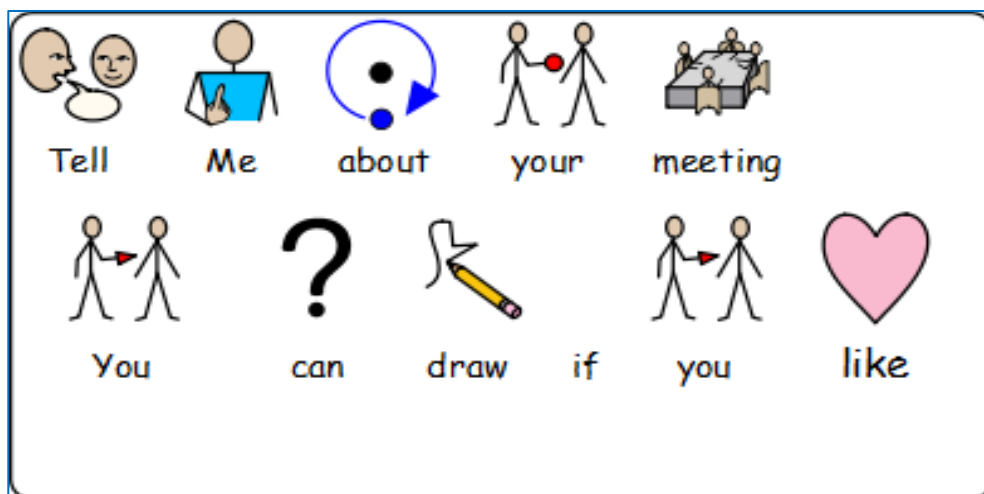


Figure 2 Communicate in Print Instructions

### 5.1 Introduction

The overarching aim of this research is to evaluate and better understand what constitutes authentic voice and participatory practices within the framework of the SEND CoP (2015). In this Chapter I present the key findings and analysis of the data in order to answer the first two research questions:

- What constitutes authentic voice and how is participation experienced by pupils identified with CMN in a special school during the EHCp process?
- How are the principles of voice and participation being experienced as intended by the SEND CoP? (2015)

Pupils were not asked specific questions, but invited to ‘tell me about’ their experiences of the EHCp process. The open-ended nature of this invitation generated rich insights into their individual experiences while privileging the voices of the pupils themselves as meaning-makers. The drawings and what the pupils communicate are integral and it is important that interpretations take account of the context and the “specific social encounter” in which they occurred (Eldén, 2012, p. 78).

### **5.1.2 Data Analysis Procedures**

My intention had been to use thematic analysis to scrutinise the data. This involves “identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 6). The researcher examines the data and records anything that appears interesting or relevant to the research question. During the early stage of writing the interpretive dialogue open codes did indeed emerge. I noted a recurrent theme was linked to pupils’ goals, education, training and employment. This was categorised as “future selves” and became a focus of a case study (Brett, 2016). Several thought-provoking themes, including friendships and family, emerged during the first data collection. It had been my intention to undertake a systematic analysis to ensure that I had identified all emergent themes and note any inconsistencies. However, before this could be accomplished I embarked on data collection 2.

On returning to the DWT data collected during the first cycle of the AR months later, I had to recommence the process of piecing together and cross-referencing a considerable wealth of information. By bringing together all the findings, pupil participation began to crystallise as a distinct theme. Clark and Moss (2011) argue for “crystallisation” when working with multiple forms of data. When the data collection was completed the extent to which pupils had referenced participation, their involvement in the EHCp process, experiences of contributing, and use of visual aids to support communication became apparent. I then used constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to subdivide the emergent themes. Each subdivision was accompanied by quotations or drawings to ensure it was honed against the data and fully and accurately grounded in the pupils’ experiences. This process is akin to “assembling a jigsaw puzzle” (LeCompte, 2000, p. 147) whereby a clearer picture gradually emerged of how pupils understood and experienced voice and participation. I was then able to examine and interrogate the pupils’ contributions.

This process revealed several emergent themes but, owing to limitations of scope and because it was so pertinent to the primary research question, I focused solely on participation. I now present the findings based on the analysis of data collection 1 and draw conclusions.



## **5.2 Finding 1: Support to Participate Prior to the EHCp Meeting**

*Section A* of the EHCp has been welcomed as a potentially important change. However, *All About Me* is an imposed structure that defines what questions pupils are asked during the EHCp process. Just because the SEND CoP (DfE, 2015) has deemed that previously marginalised voices of the disabled need to be heard, it does not necessarily follow this will ensue.

### **5.2.1 Support to Complete Section A**

Having stated that the DWT data produced rich data, it is ironic that I commence with an omission. DWT makes very limited references to *Section A*, although this was hailed as an important change. Part 3, Section 19 of the SEND CoP (DfE, 2015) requires LAs to facilitate the full participation of CYP and their families in the construction of EHCp. There are two ways in which pupils can contribute either prior to or during the EHCp meeting. *Section A* of the EHCp provides a significant departure from the statement process and aims to include pupils' views more effectively prior to the EHCp meeting. However, I have concerns regarding how a formulaic approach that privileges the spoken and written word could lead to meaningful participation without being tokenistic. My relatively small-scale research indicates that 100%, i.e. all 19 of the pupils, were involved in the EHCp process prior to the EHCp meeting and supported to contribute to *Section A*. *All About Me* adopts a 'one size fits all' pro forma approach that outlines exactly what questions pupils are asked. This was undertaken by staff at the special school who knew the pupils well and could take account of a pupil's preferred method of communication. The class teacher or TA supported the pupil to respond to a series of questions and recorded comments. None of the participants could undertake this task independently and in many cases the questions had to be further simplified using visual cues. Interestingly, families were asked the same series of questions and significant numbers, for various reasons, had to seek help from the school's family worker or from independent organisations to complete this task.

Although school professionals said they were committed to the principles of equal participation, it was noted that there was a tendency for adults to either answer the questions for the pupils or transcribe single word responses as a full sentence. This raised concerns about how pupils were participating and

how voices were being recorded. Staff indicated that *Section A* was time-consuming and onerous, and the school had to allocate specific time and further training to support pupils to complete *Section A*.

The SEND CoP (DfE, 2015) demands LAs facilitate full participation of CYP and their families in the construction of EHCp and my small-scale study notes 100% of pupils required support. This figure contrasts sharply with the DfE survey (Adams *et al.*, 2017) which reported that only 41% of CYP were offered support to help make their views known (p. 10). This begs questions about how effectively CYP are being included using the ‘one size fits all’ proforma that expects pupils “to fit into adult ways of participating” (Prout, 2003, p. 32). But more alarmingly, despite recent policy change, *Section A* appears to have rendered pupils identified with CMN dependent on the support of school staff to participate. *Section A* may delimit voice and participation by acting as a script that imposes restrictions on what pupils can say and thereby constraining authenticity. This arrangement of giving voice is imposed; it acts to normalise voice and ironically it may wrest the power of voice from pupils by imposing ideals and aspirations that are not of pupils’ own making or interest.

Tellingly, pupils made limited reference to this supposedly flagship aspect of the EHCp process. Nevertheless, participants frequently use the words “All About Me”. It is also conceivable that the pupils in this study did not comment on this aspect of participation, simply because *Section A* was completed in advance of the meetings and they did not recall it or because a direct question was not asked. Therefore, it may be important to recap in the EHCp meeting to ensure that this aspect makes sense to pupils.

### **5.2.2 The role of Visual Aid Produced Prior to the EHCp Meeting**

Although limited reference is made as to how school staff supported participants to complete the pro forma questions in *Section A*, the DWT data indicates other ways in which staff prepared pupils to participate prior to the EHCp meeting. The pupils used person-centred approaches (PCA) such as computer-generated pictures or photographs, collages, power point presentations, short film or Talking Mats to support communication and, interestingly, pupils refer to these visual materials as “*my pictures*” in figures 3, 4, and 5.

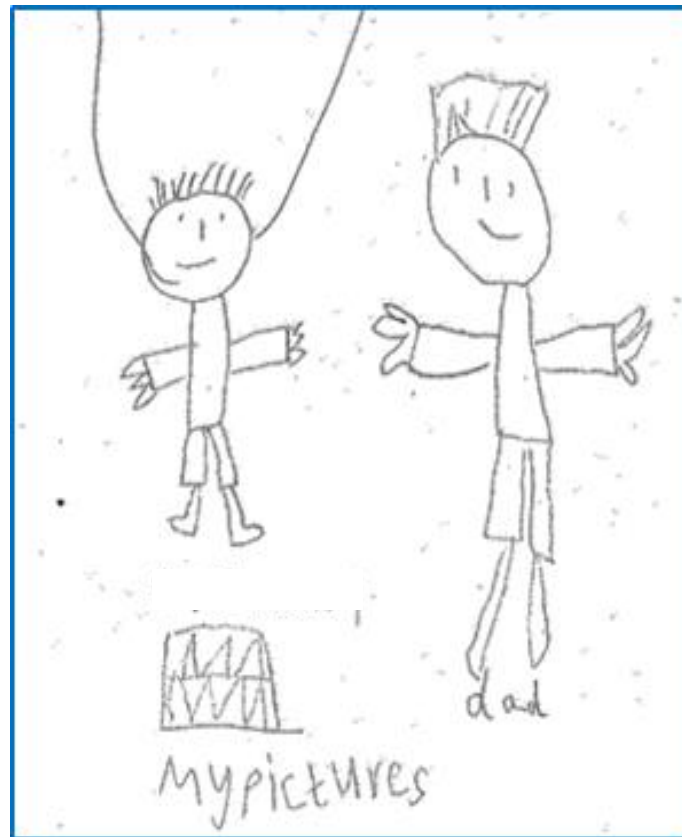
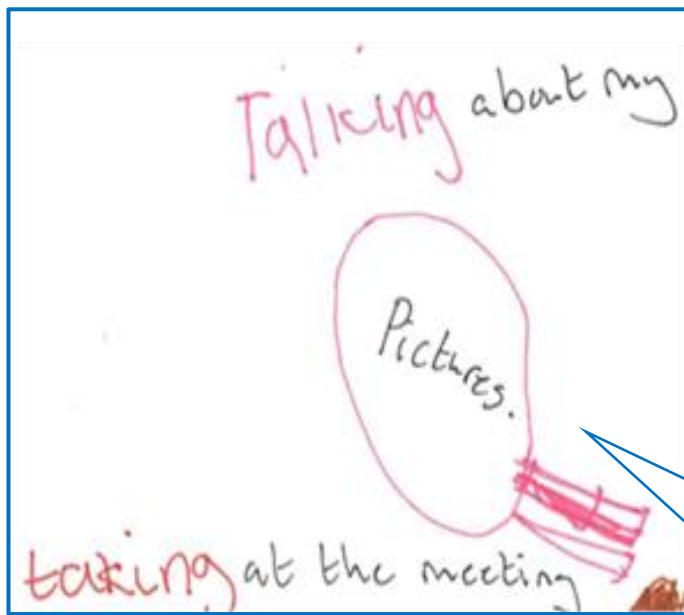


Figure 3 Tahir's Drawing

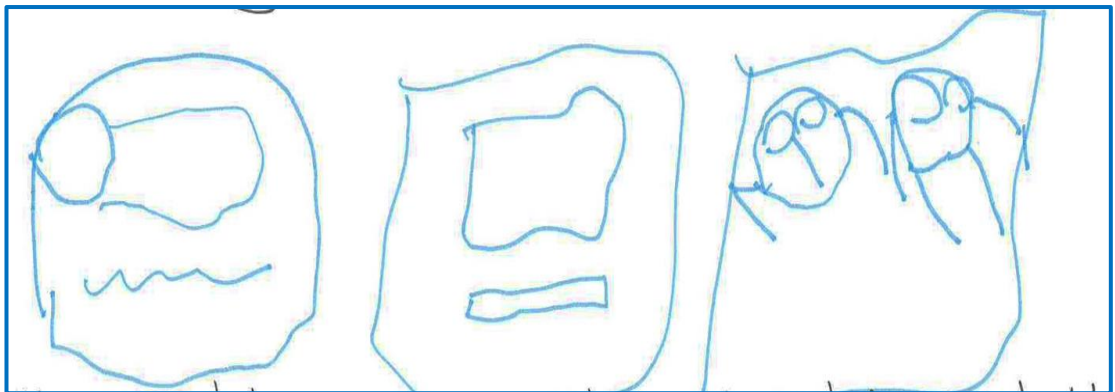
"My pictures.....yeah I'll feel more confident.....yeah I fink o...um...um...to...(shrugs) talk to people about how I feel"



"Yeah.....at meeting I talk about my...pictures..."



Figure 4 Deana's Drawing



"My pictures helped me to talk and remember what I wanted to say"



Figure 5 Anthony's DWT Data

The DWT data makes specific references to how the visual materials supported communication during the EHCp meeting. Figures 6, 7, 8, 9 illustrate the importance of this for each pupil.

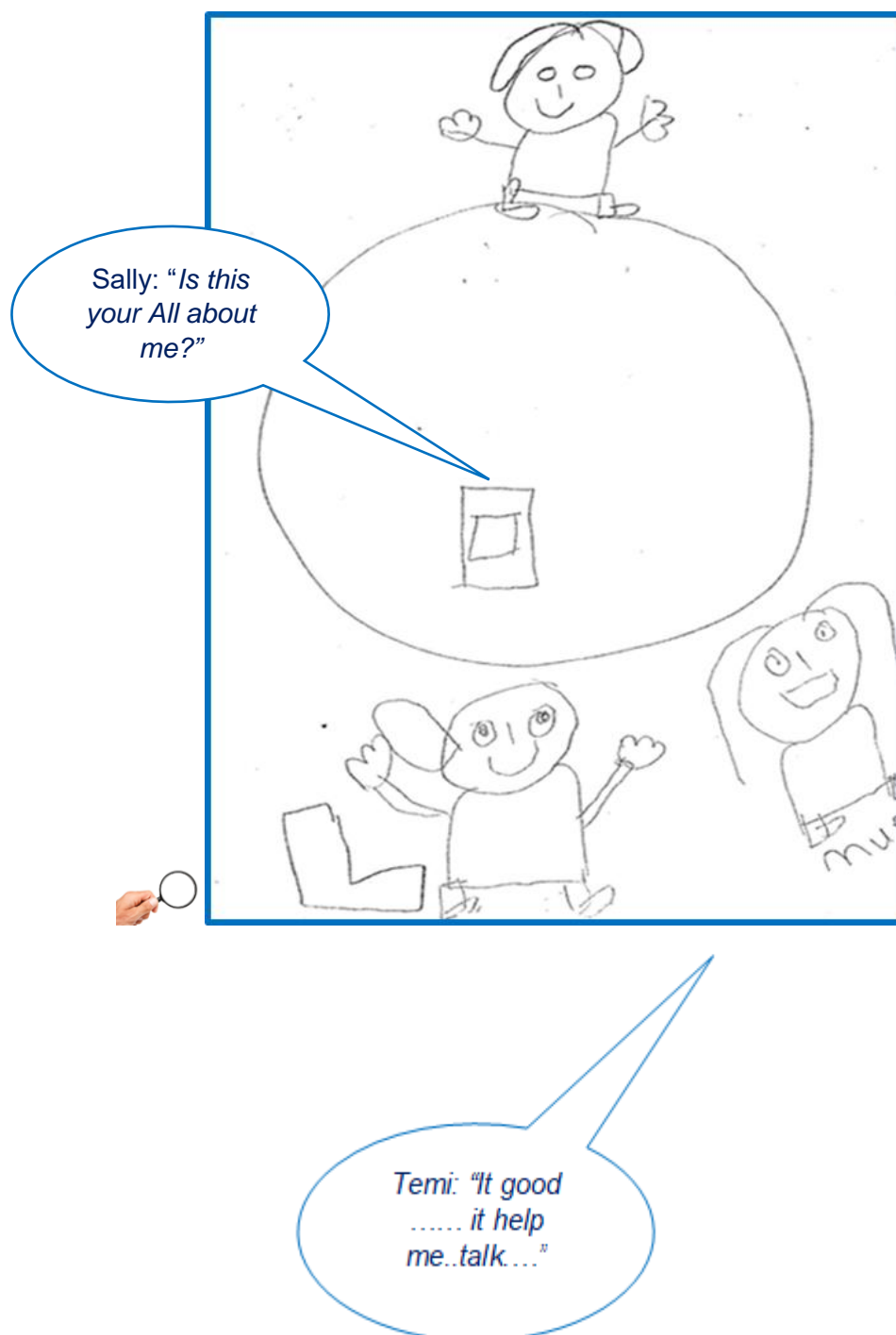


Figure 6 Temi's DWT Data



Figure 7 Amare's Drawing

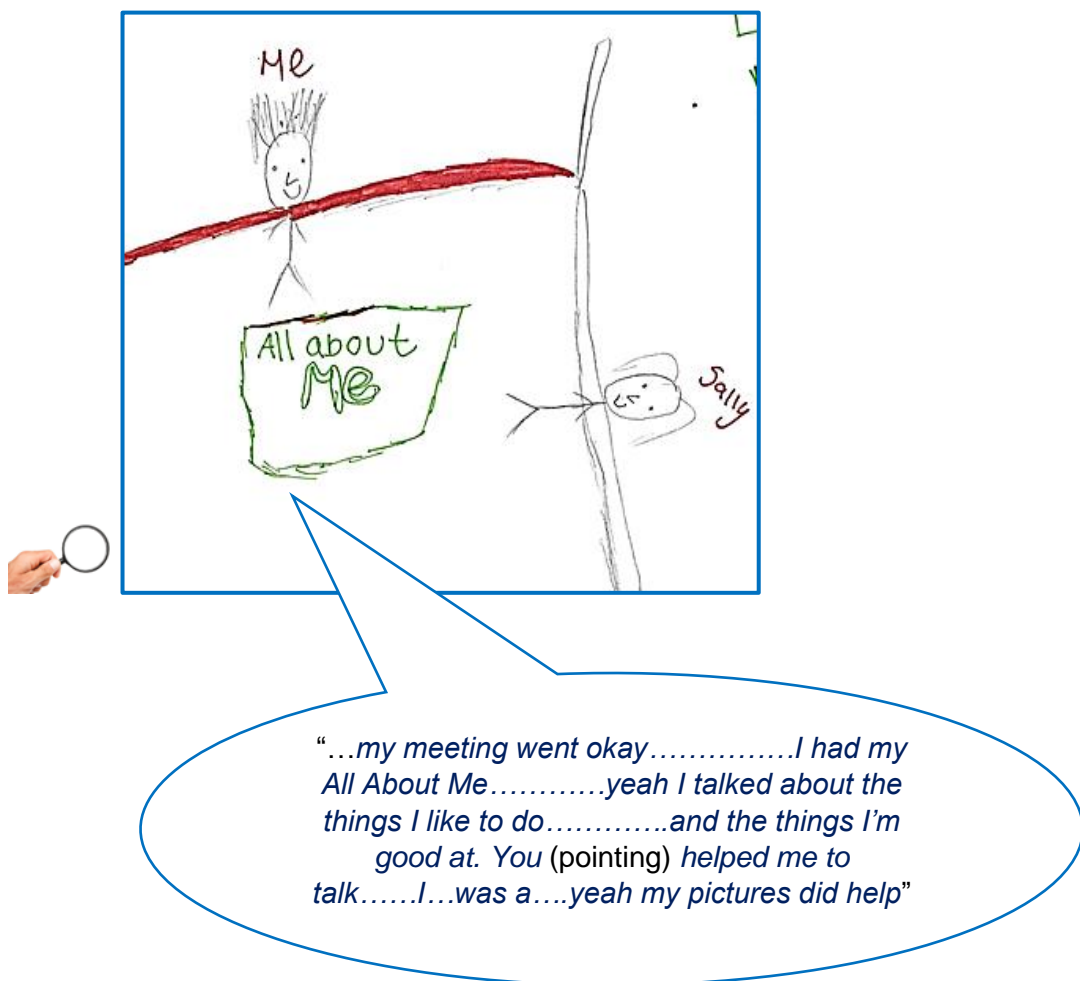


Figure 8 Joshua's DWT Data

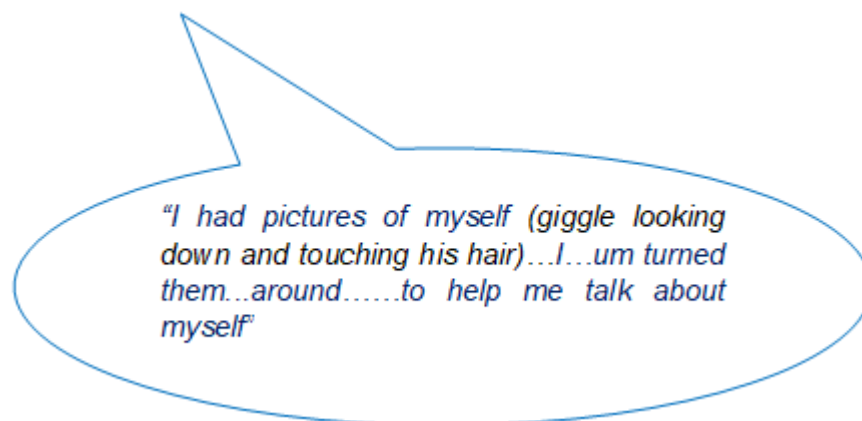


Figure 9 Imran's DWT Data

Significantly, the data highlights the importance of this pre-prepared, person-centred approach with 63%, i.e. 12 out of the 19 pupils, making direct comments or references to these pre-prepared materials in their drawings.

In figure 10, Sheriff has drawn his “pictures” and the EHCp paperwork on the table in a prominent position. Indicating that for him his visual aids played a memorable and an important part of the meeting.

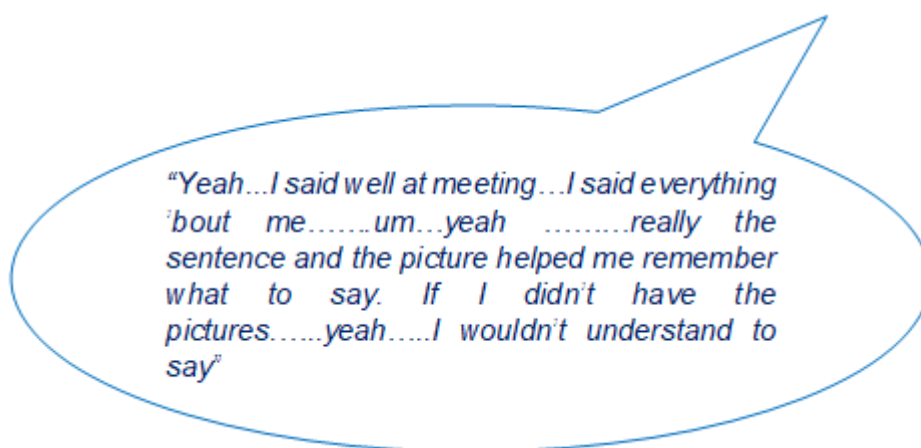


Figure 10 Sheriff's DWT Data

The DWT data makes it apparent that the visual material played a substantial role in supporting voice and pupils could articulate that it supported “talk” and gave them a voice. Sheriff specifies in figure 10 that “the sentence and the picture helped me remember what to say” while others indicated that it enabled them to talk about themselves and or the activities they enjoy. This is significant



because it underlines the important role visual materials play in supporting participation by acting as a prompt for participants. It appears that a range of accessible approaches are needed to ensure CYP participation.

The DfE survey (Adams *et al.*, 2017) asked specific questions about how participation was facilitated but concluded that only 19% were “given choices of how to take part” (p. 92). Indeed, the survey indicates there was a “lack of tailoring” to the individual:

...one in ten parents and young people said they had needed some specific forms of support during the process but had not been offered them (an advocate: 12%, visual aids: 10%, communication aids: 10%). (Adams *et al.*, 2017, p. 101-2)

Therefore, even when a need for support was identified “in between a quarter and a third of cases” (*ibid*, p. 95) it was not forthcoming and CYP were not given an opportunity to put across their views through their preferred method of communication. There is evidence that adults are simply not acting in a way that enables CYP to be active contributors. However, a substantial minority of respondents (17%) specified that giving CYP choices of how to take part was not applicable, which suggested “they felt there was no need for such choices to be offered” (*ibid*, p. 92) and it is quite possible that CYP without speech, language and communication needs would not require alternative or individually tailored approaches. The DWT evidence suggests that the use of PCA, such as those suggested by Sanderson and Lewis (2012), may be incredibly helpful and can significantly increase participation for pupils with CMN who, in effect, may have been otherwise excluded from the process. However, a word of caution needs to be added. There is no legal obligation to prepare pupils for the EHCp meetings using visual or PCP materials. Clearly the use of visual aids and the PCA to support communication was embedded within the philosophy of the special school setting. However, this practice may be viewed as an add-on to *Section A* and might explain why the DfE survey noted that only 19% of CYP were offered choices about how to participate. This suggests that across the UK participation is merely a tokenistic policy ideal.

In the light of these findings the current effectiveness of the prescribed bureaucratic structures in *Section A* needs to be revised because it appears to be posing unforeseen barriers to eliciting participation and pupil voice. My

### 5.2.3 Fostering Pupils' Participation Prior to the EHCp Meeting

The Pupil Advisory Group can support you

with your EHCp.

We are here to listen to everything you

have to say.

Come and see us for more information.

We can help you with every

step of the EHCp process.

Page | 86

The DfE survey (Adams *et al.*, 2017) notes that 41% of CYP reported being offered support from an advocate to help make their views known (p. 95). However, the report does not specify at what stage in the process advocacy was offered and the figure of 41% could pertain to support prior to or during the EHCp meeting. All participants in this study were given support by school staff to complete *Section A* and offered a trained pupil mentor.

The school actively encouraged attendance and promoted active participation at every stage of the EHCp process. All pupils were issued with an invitation that informed them in advance of the meeting date, time and place. To reduce pupil levels of anxiety and apprehension they were also reminded about the meeting the day before.

### **5.3 Finding 2: Pupils' Experiences of Participation and Inclusion**

The 19 participants in the sample were included in the EHCp meetings and attended in person. Two pupils' EHCp meetings were conducted with the support of the SaLT who used a pre-prepared talking mat which has proved successful in enabling pupils with more severe communication needs to voice their views. However, this is heavily reliant on the expertise of SaLT and may only provide a snapshot and not necessarily include what the pupil wanted to say. Most of the pupils preferred to use a mix of speech, Makaton, signing, and gesture to communicate. Participants typically used the words "talk", "talked" or "talking" to describe their active engagement in the EHCp meetings. Participants frequently expressed great pride with the way in which they contributed. Pupils' writing references being "*happy and proud because I talked loud*", or being "*pleased because I talked at my meeting*". In figure 12 the participant wrote "happy talking" across his paper. Both the drawings and the accompanying written comments express powerful emotions regarding participation and self-esteem.



Figure 12 Jayden's Drawing

Dwayne drew two pictures. In figure13 he depicted himself prominently and appears to be holding court. He describes how he enjoyed having a “chat” and his written comments confirm that he had a seat at the table and a voice in the proceedings.

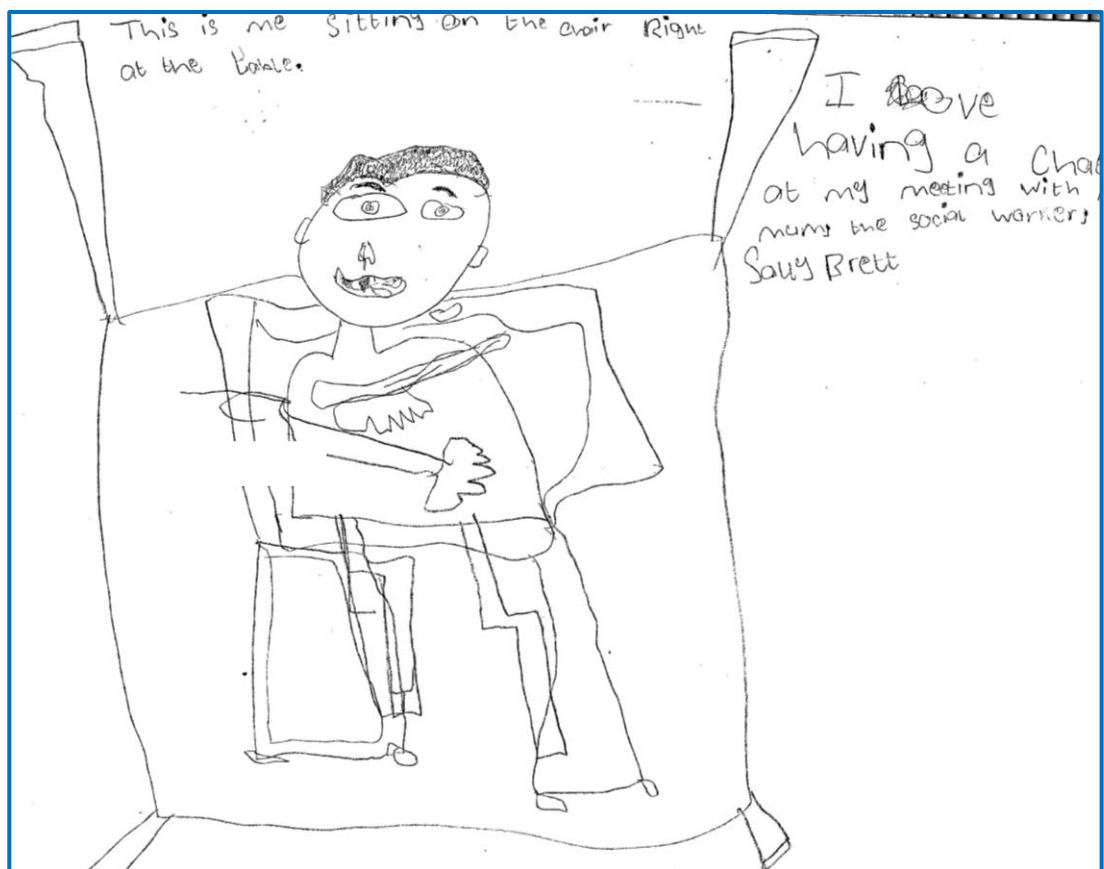


Figure 13 Dwayne's Drawing

In figure 14, Dwayne writes independently across the top of his drawing: "At the meeting I told everyone all about me. This is me saying loads of words at the meeting". He uses a series of speech bubbles that radiate from his face to communicate his views.

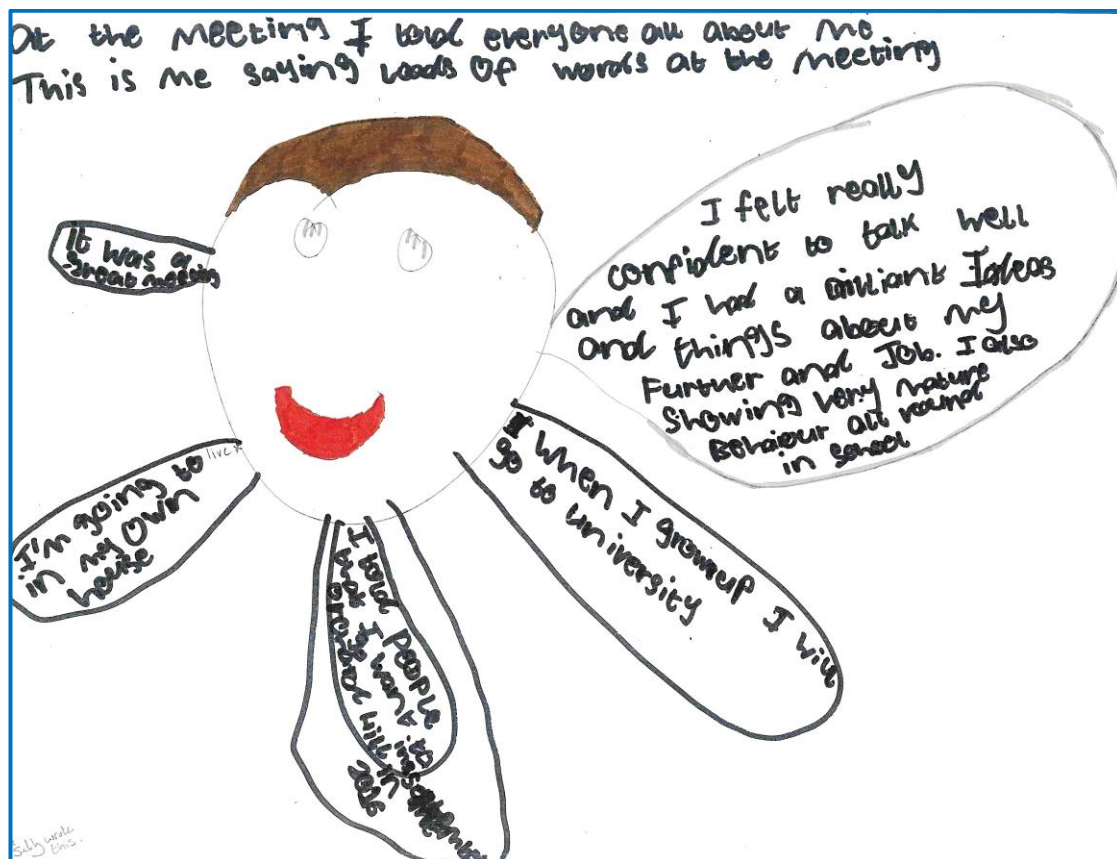


Figure 14 Dwayne's Drawing

Pupils frequently utilised speech bubbles to convey the impression of 'talking' or have words and/or letters emanating from a mouth. Speech bubbles, as in figure 14 and 15 are accentuated and drawn out of proportion, which gives the

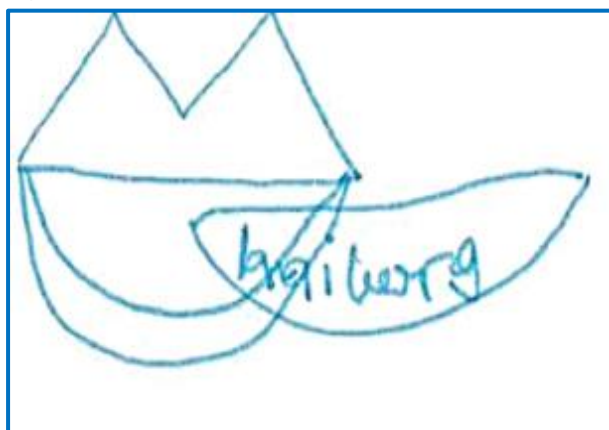


Figure 15 Abdel's Drawing

impression that the act of communication is important. The DWT findings make it apparent that many of the pupils felt that they actively participated and contributed to their meetings.



In figure 16 Anthony has drawn a yellow circle emanating from his mouth and the letters of the alphabet represent the words. It is evident that he is “*proud*” of his contribution.



Figure 16 Anthony's DWT Data

In figure 17 Jamari has depicted himself with a beaming smile and the speech bubble coming from his head specifies that he felt “proud”.



Figure 17 Jamari's DWT Data

In figure 18 Alex has drawn a large accentuated mouth. Within this he wrote the word “*talking*”. This serves to emphasise that he had a voice at the meeting.

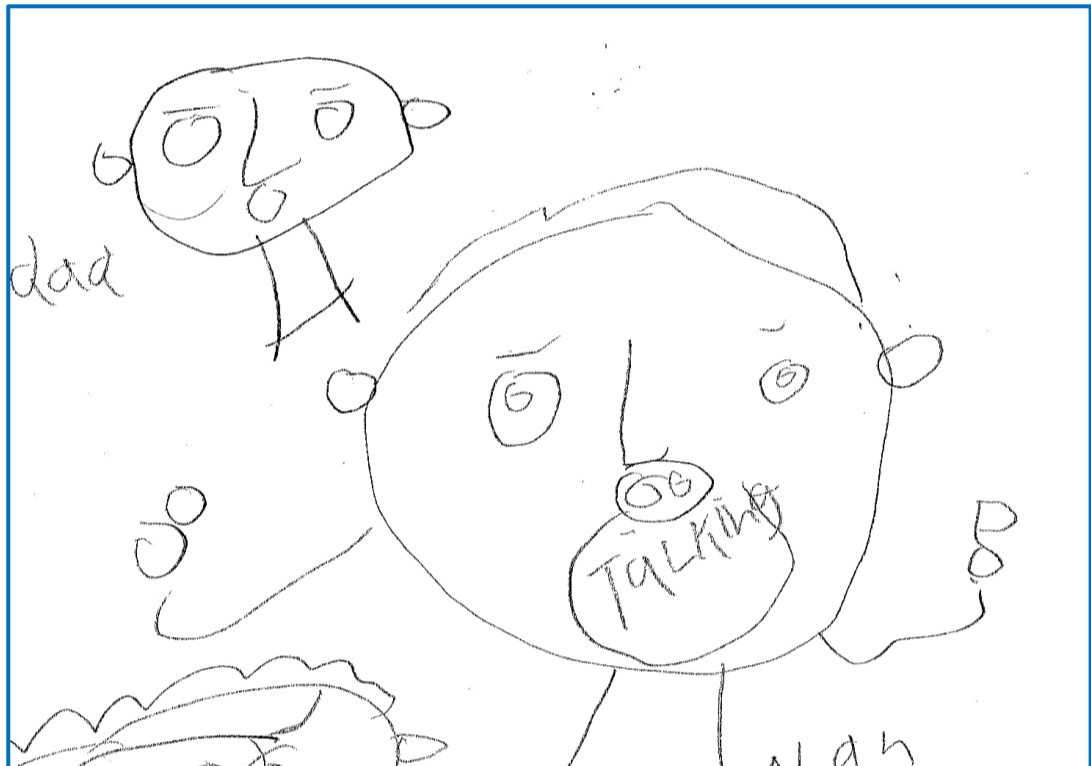


Figure 18 Alex's DWT Data



Interestingly in figure 19 the people are minuscule, while the chairs, table and the speech bubble emanating from Javier's head is, in comparison, massive. This conveys the impression that the act of "talking" at the meeting was significant. Javier later describes how the EHCp meeting acted as a catalyst for change.

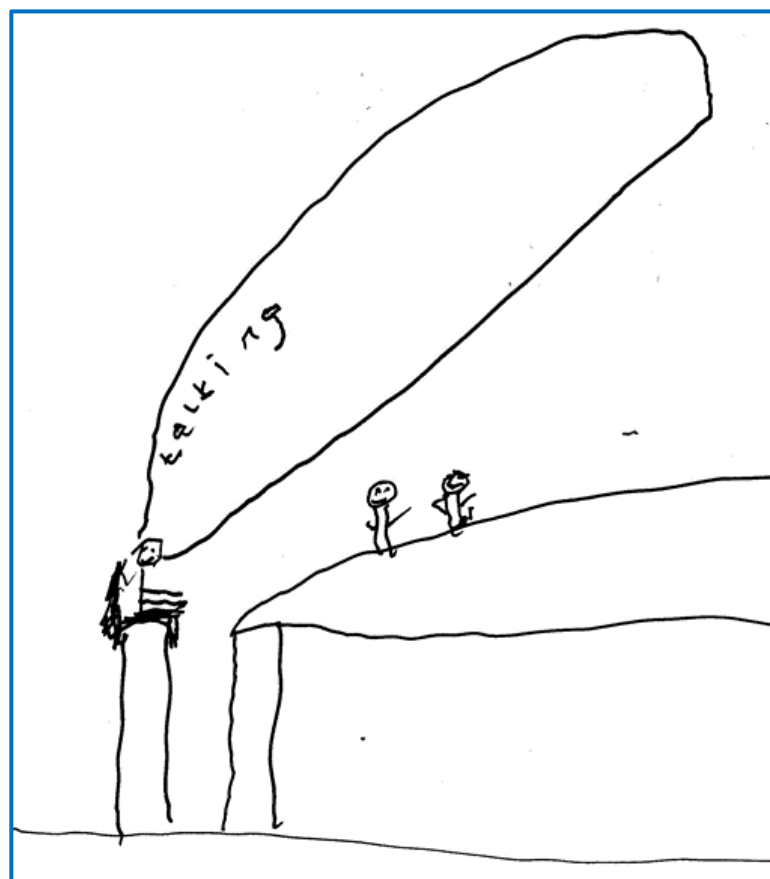
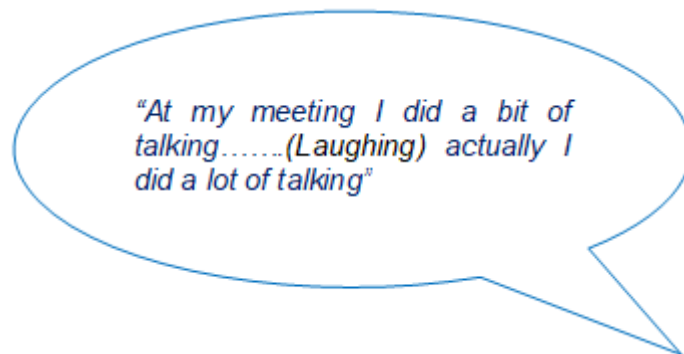


Figure 19 Javier's DWT Data

In figure 20 Temi has an empty speech bubble emanating from his mouth. The drawing creates the impression that the act of communicating is joyous. Temi has his arms raised triumphantly and a huge smile. It is almost as if talking has been an uplifting and redemptive experience.

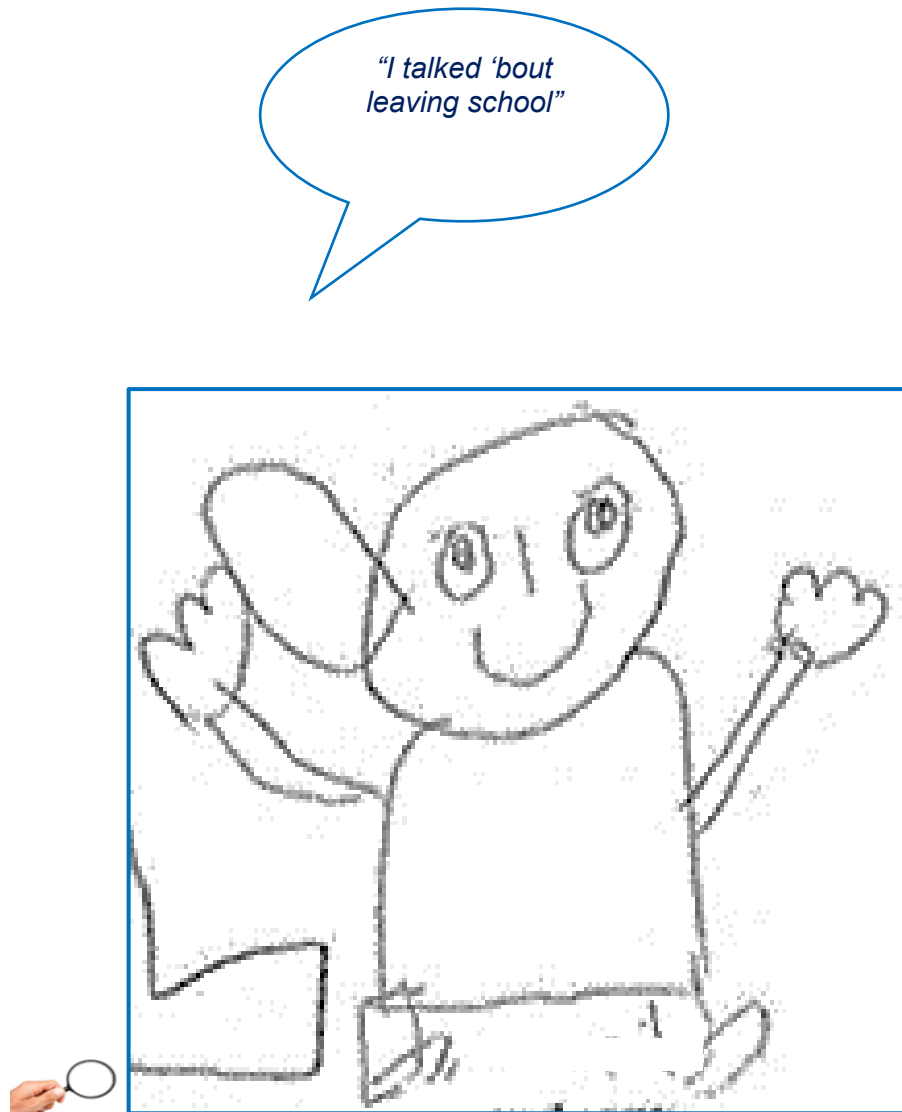


Figure 20 Temi's DWT Data

In figure 21 Imran writes “*words myself about*” in a speech bubble. Although he describes the act of participation as feeling “good”, in his depiction he looks apprehensive and anxious.



Figure 21 Imran's DWT Data

In figure 22 although Tahir states in his speech bubble that he is “*pleased*” he “*talked*” at the meeting but his facial expression does not particularly convey this emotion.

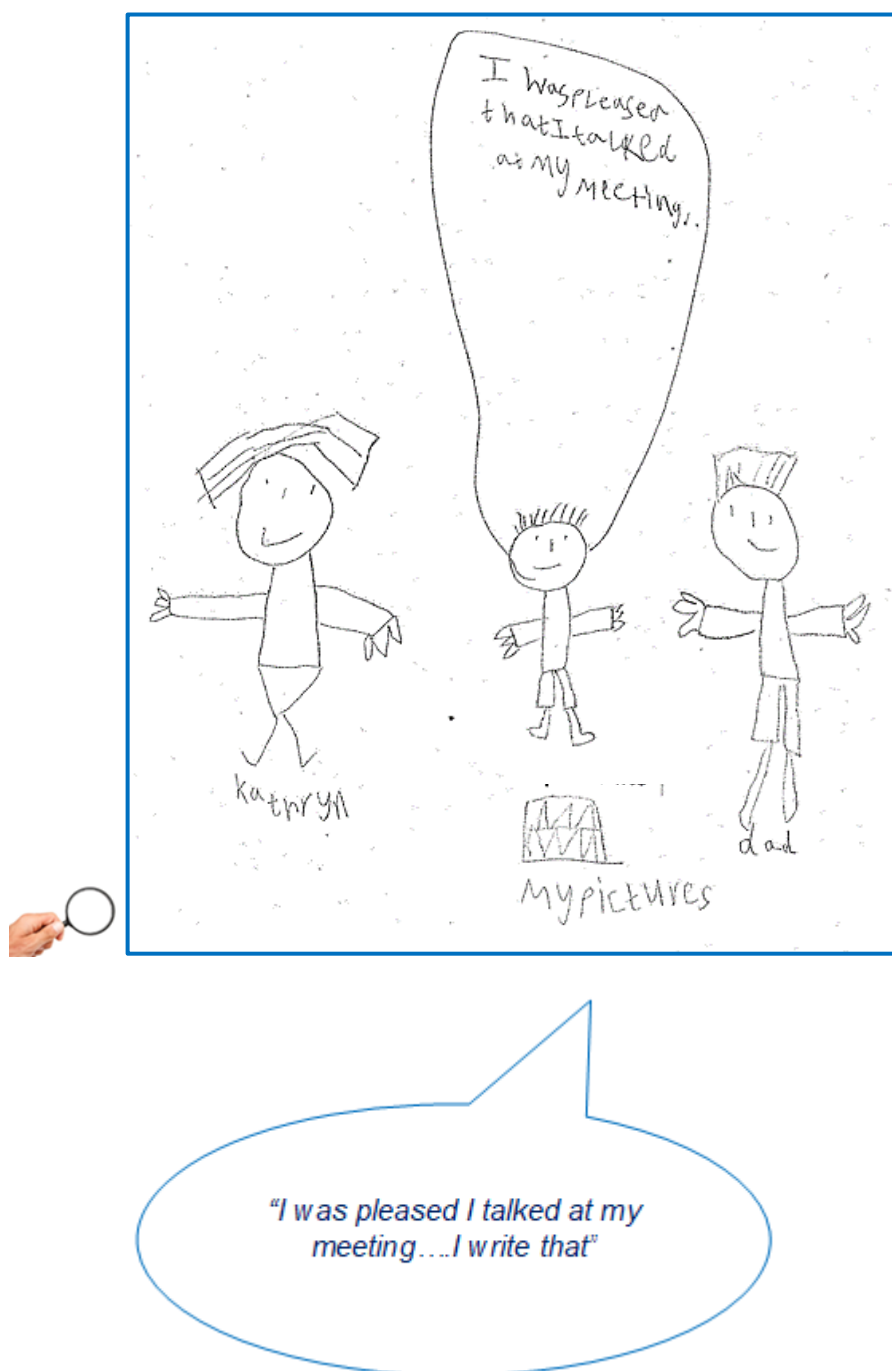


Figure 22 Tahir's DWT Data

It is evident that many pupils either allude to talking in their drawings or refer to the experience of speaking at their EHCp meeting. Interestingly, my findings concur with Holliday *et al.* (2009) who identified that children with

communication impairment often portrayed talking or listening by using “sound waves, speech bubbles or written words to portray a conversation” (p. 257). In addition, the data gives the impression that there was a real determination to be heard and that talking is valued by the participants. Improved communication is a key aim in the school in which the research was undertaken and all the pupils have communication and interaction targets. Therefore, a possible reason the participants comment on the act of talking is that for pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties, as the data testifies, it is a monumental feat. For many adolescents attending a formal meeting and talking coherently about yourself would be considered an achievement, but for the participants it appears to be a liberating experience almost akin to an act of deliverance.

DWT data evidences that 100%, i.e. all 19 pupils in the sample attended and expressed their views at the EHCp meeting. Surprisingly, the DfE findings noted that just over half (51%) of CYP were included in the meeting (Adams *et al.*, 2017, p. 92). The significantly higher figure noted in my data could be attributed to the age of the pupils who were all in KS4 or 5, whereas the DfE research sample contained a broad spectrum of ages. The DfE survey noted the likelihood of CYP being included does increase with the age and observed that among young people aged 11 to 25 “steps were being taken to include them in the process” (Adams *et al.*, 2017, p. 25). This higher participation figure in my study could be explained by the involvement of the PAG who encouraged participation and generally encouraged attendance.

Qualitative data suggests that KS4 and 5 pupils identified with CMN can actively participate when steps are put in place to encourage attendance and support communication, as well as ensuring that a sense of agency and belief that voices are valued is fostered.

#### **5.4 Finding 3: Pupils’ Experiences of Being Listened to During the EHCp Meeting**

The literature highlighted the need to listen and take account of verbal and non-verbal communication. Listening is not a “passive process” but an “active form of communication” (Holliday *et al.*, 2007, p. 246) and it is essential skill during the EHCp process. The DfE survey asked direct questions about being listened

to and 58% of respondents felt that an “effort had been made to listen to the child/young person and understand their views” (Adams *et al.*, 2017, p. 92). According to “They still need to listen more” (OCC, 2014) being listened to and taken seriously is important and is an ongoing concern for disabled CYP. There is limited information in the DWT data regarding being listened to. Only 3 out of 19 (16%) pupils make a direct reference to this. However, where pupils mention being listened to, the insights are fascinating, and it is evident that pupils felt empowered by their experiences of being heard. The DWT data indicates that from the pupils’ perspective empowerment is characterised by feeling listened to by professionals and having their contributions valued.

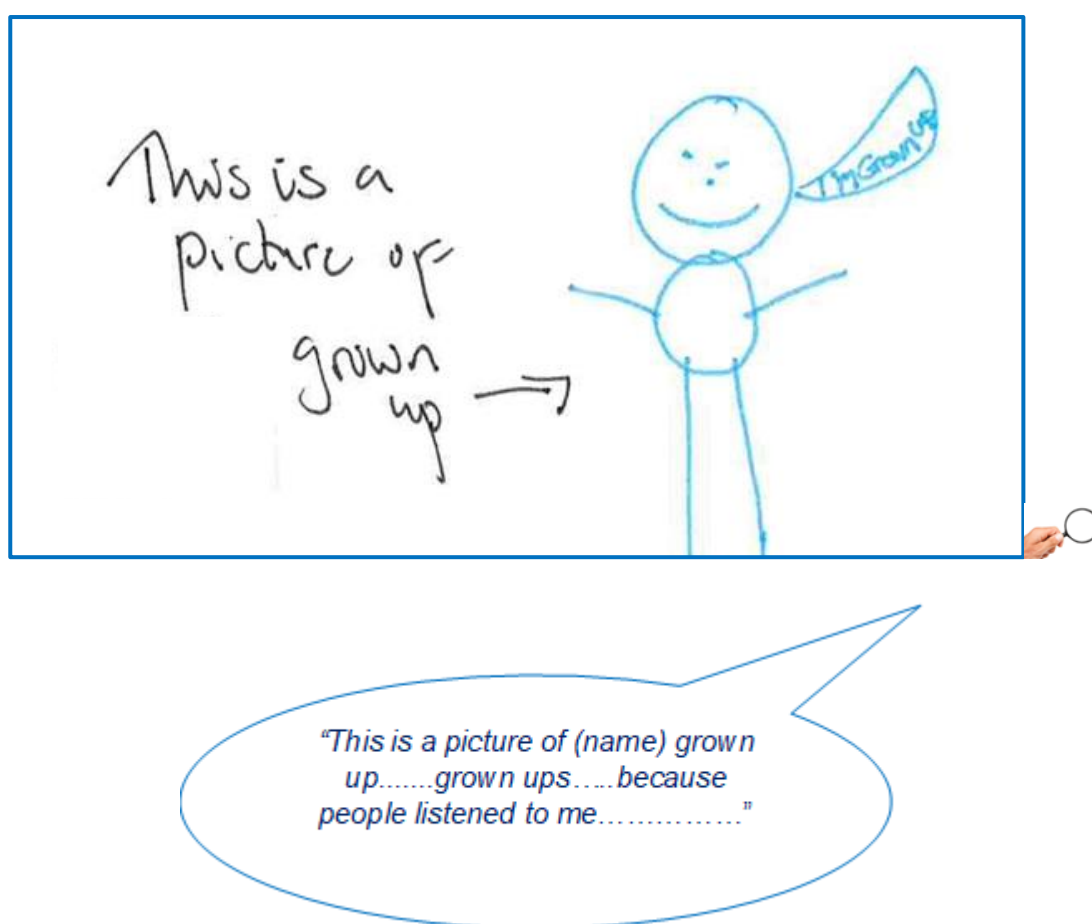


Figure 23 Abdel's DWT Data

In figure 23 Abdel expresses that he enjoyed the meeting because he felt that he was treated like a “grown up” and “listened to”. Abdel’s comments appear to suggest that his experience of participation was positive and that he was “happy” to have been given the opportunity to express his ideas and felt listened to by the adults at the meeting.

In figure 24, Deana has depicted herself smiling. She remarks that she “*talked loud*” at the meeting. Her comments record that she also felt that she was listened to.

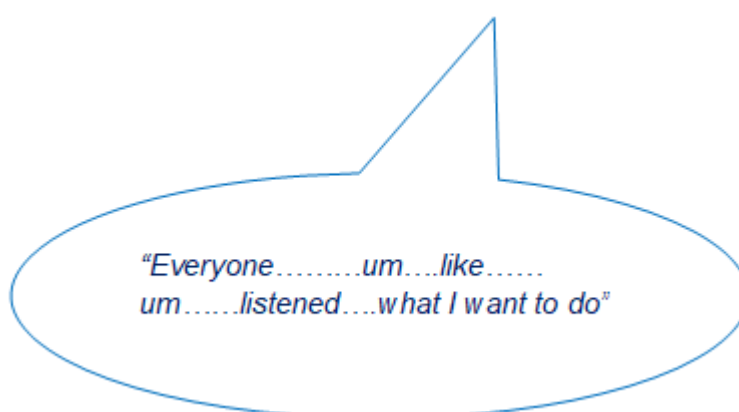
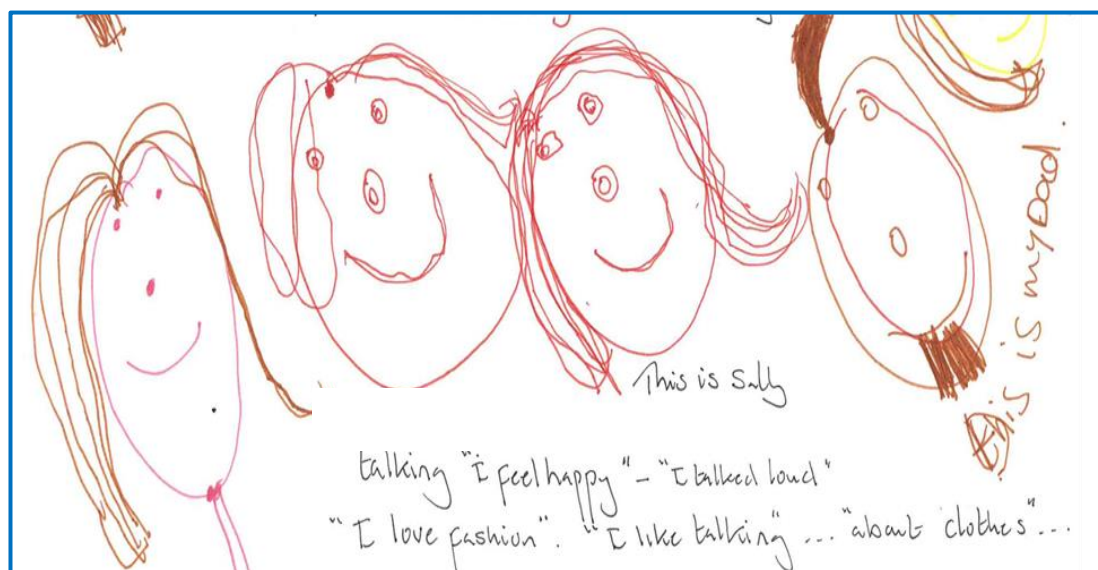


Figure 24 Deana's DWT Data

Deana articulates that she was given the opportunity to explain what she wants to do when she leaves school, which in this case was at odds with her family's aspirations. It is quite possible that what Deana is trying to express is that she spoke up for herself, as opposed to meaning that she spoke in a loud voice, and that her family listened to what she had to say.

Another important insight into a pupil's experiences of being listened to is documented in figures 25 and 26 in which the participant wrote “*the meeting went ok because I talked talked and they listen*”.

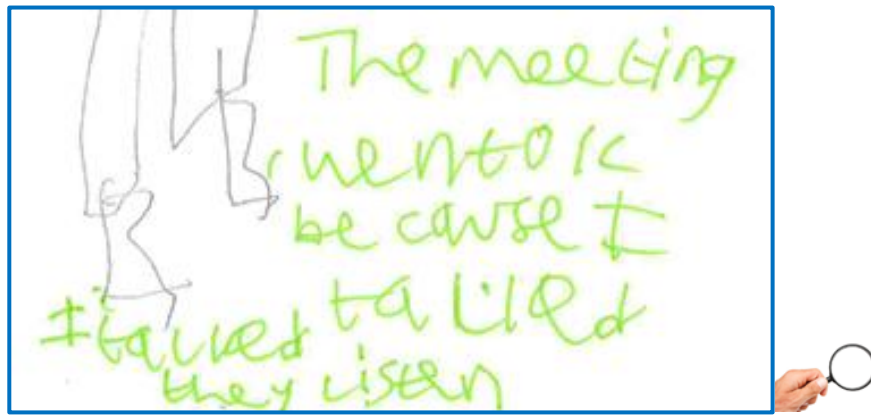


Figure 25 Bakari's Written Comments

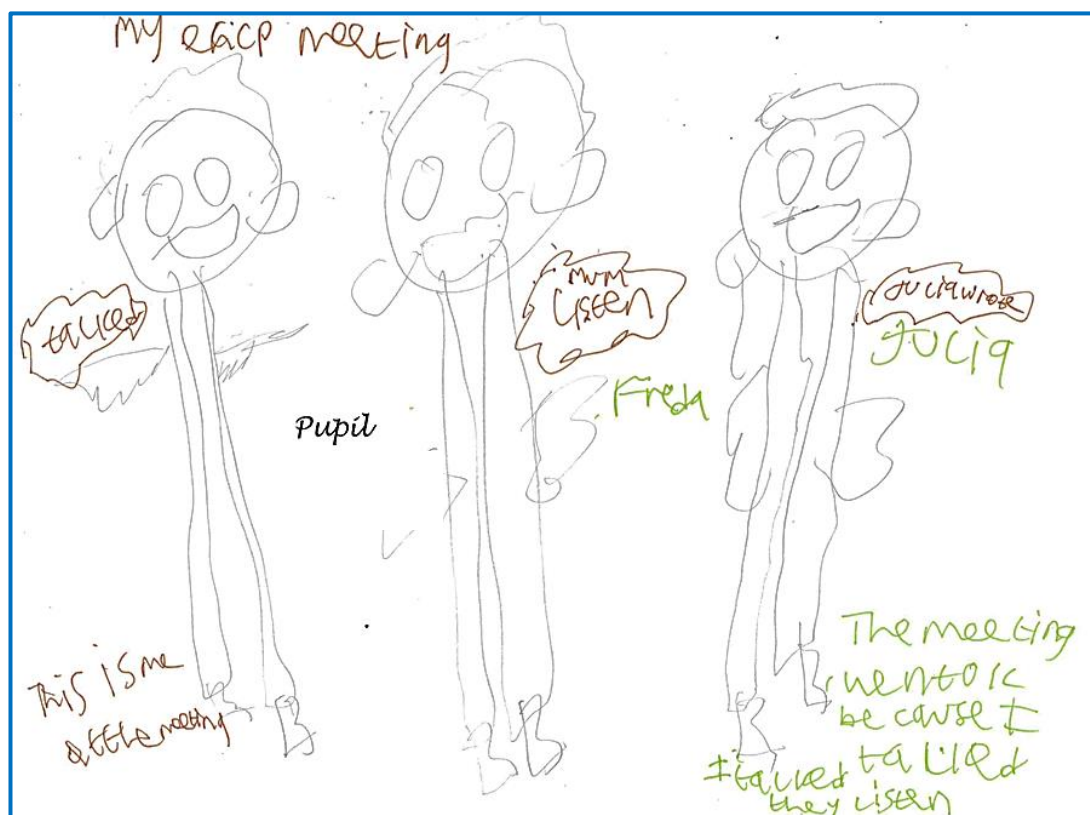


Figure 26 Bakari's Drawing

In Bakari's drawing 3 figures dominate but they are depicted as the same size and a similar shape and the conversational partners are portrayed as having equal status. The participant selected a green felt tip and independently wrote each person's name next to each drawing. With a brown felt tip he wrote "My ehcp meeting" and "This is me at the meeting". He added I "talked", "Mum listen" and "X wrote". In the corner of the page he commented: "the meeting went ok because I talked they listen". It is apparent from the drawing that Bakari felt he had been an active participant and that when he talked he had been



listened to. This suggests that he placed importance on the act of “talking” and being listened to. There may be an implication based on the use of the word “*because*” that this had not been the case in his previous special school. Bakari ascribes specific roles to each of the people at the meeting: the participant “talked”, while mum listened and the AHT “wrote” down what he said. It is evident that the EHCp meeting provided an opportunity in which the participant was central to the EHCp process and he understood his voice was being taken seriously.

Even though only three participants made direct comments about listening, the DWT data suggests that being listened to and having their views taken seriously was important to the pupils. The OCC (2014) noted that disabled young people wanted “people to take time to listen to them” (p. 20) and concluded that not taking time to listen was a barrier to communication. The DfE survey states that in approximately “three-quarters of cases relating to plans for 16-25-year olds, parents and young people felt that efforts were made to listen to the young person” (Adams *et al.*, 2017, p. 93). The DfE survey gives the impression that in the case of 16-25 year olds, being listened to during the EHCp process is now less problematic. However, the report’s conclusions are contradictory because as pupils with speech and communication difficulties were frequently not given opportunities to have their say it is mind-boggling to suggest that they were listened to.

#### **5.5 Finding 4: Importance of the Physical Environment**

The literature notes that the way that pupils are positioned in their relationships with adults can pose barriers to eliciting voice and participation (Kubiak, 2017). Schools are structured and highly controlled settings and adults frequently control power and determine what is asked, when it is asked, and by whom. Therefore, it is vital that EHCp meetings are in a physical environment that is conducive to pupil participation and that professionals and families actively listen to the voices of pupils. The participants’ drawings in figures 27-30 depict groups of people sitting around a table. This conveys the impression that the people represented are involved in a dialogue with their conversational partners. In two of the drawings the participants are depicted as the same size and in three they are spaced equally around a table. Holliday *et al.* (2009) note

that the distance between the people drawn may “represent how comfortable a child feels talking” (p. 257). The impression given in the drawings below is that the meeting has been organised in a way that gives equal status and encourages and facilitates both free expression and dialogue in which pupils’ voices are being listened to and considered. The DWT data appears to indicate that the physical and formal setting of the meeting and the predisposition of the professionals to actively listen may be important if pupils are to have positive experiences of participation.

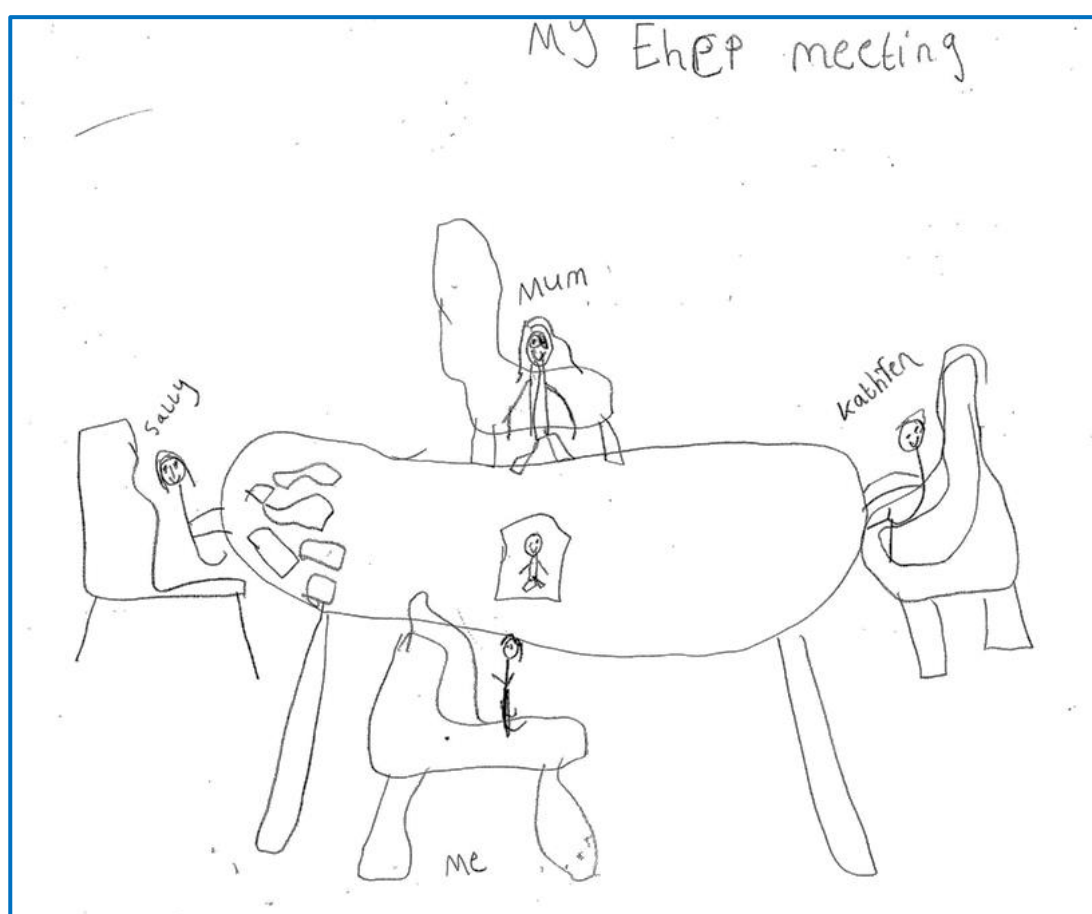


Figure 27 Amare's Drawing



Figure 28 Temi's Drawing

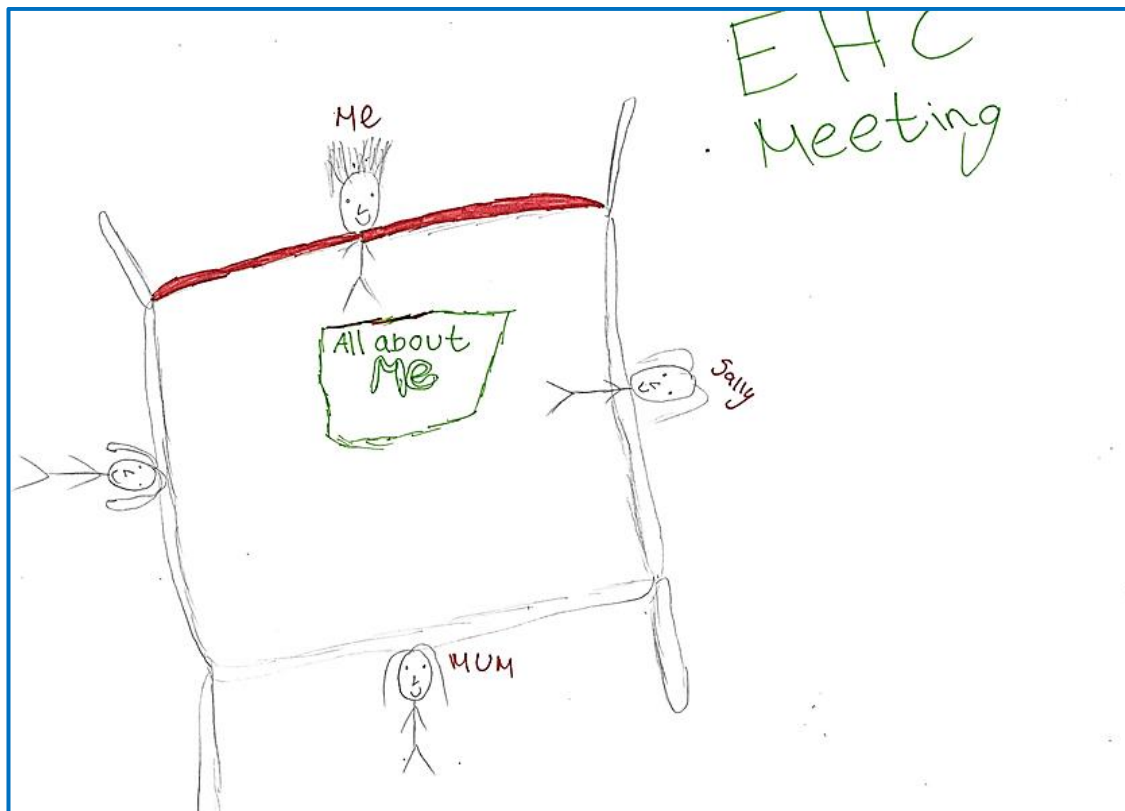


Figure 29 Joshua's Drawing

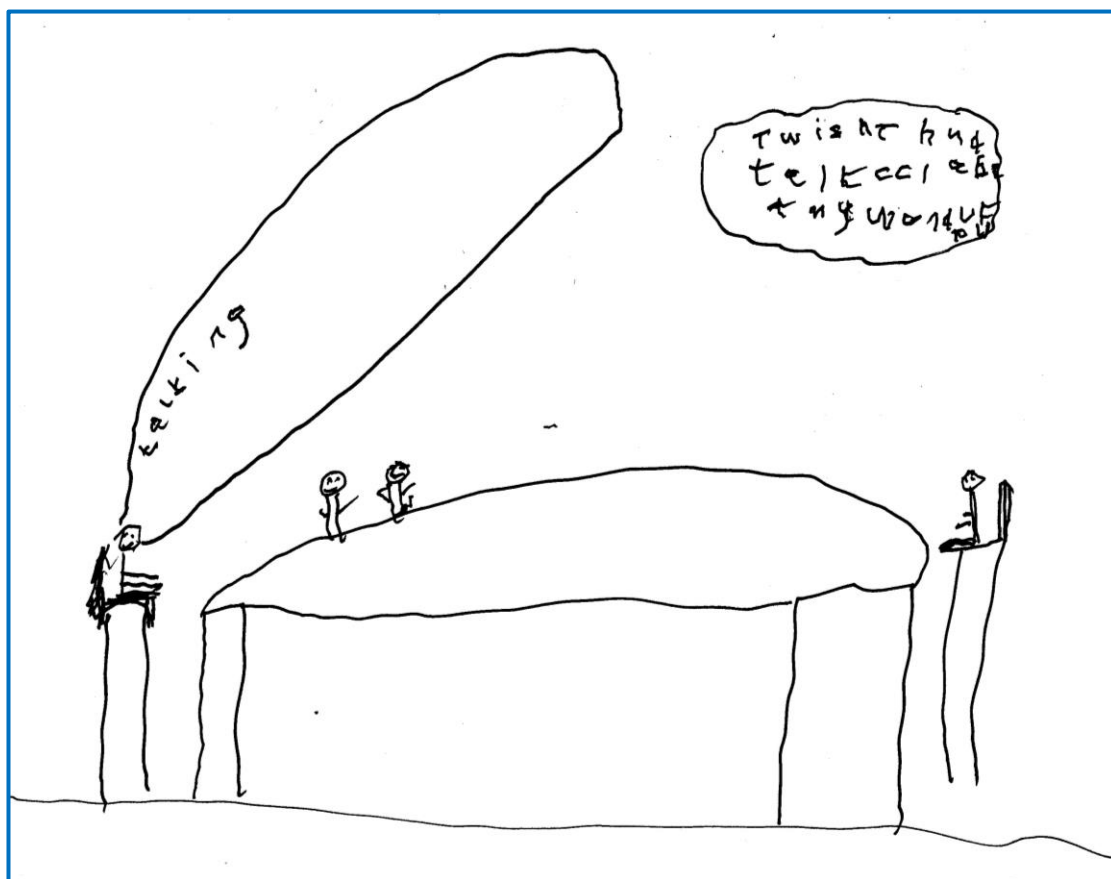


Figure 30 Javier's Drawing

What is interesting about figures 27-30 is that pupils' recall of the physical setting is not always accurate. For example the drawings depict a square, round and rectangular table. While the pupils' drawings often capture the essence of the formal setting they are not visually precise. For example, pupils have drawn participants or themselves looking outward when in reality everyone would have been facing each other. However, the drawings illustrate that for the pupil the physical environment and formal setting of the meeting was important.

Overall the DWT data indicates that 6 pupils (31.5%) referred to the physical environment or the meeting space in their drawings. Several pupils offered suggestions about how the physical environment could be enhanced to improve the EHCp experience.

Abdel had his EHCp meeting in a space not usually accessed by pupils. The room has photographs of pupils on display relating to work and enterprise projects. He indicated that he enjoyed his experience:



Figure 31 Abdel's Comment

In figure 32 he made an interesting suggestion about how to improve the meeting and make them more informal.

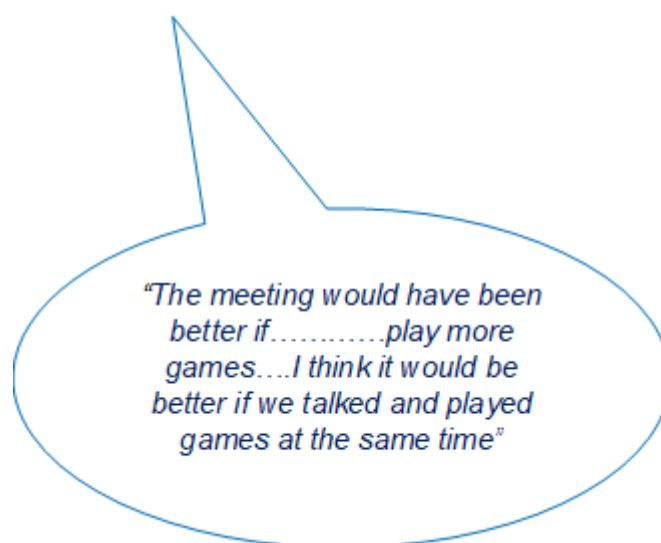
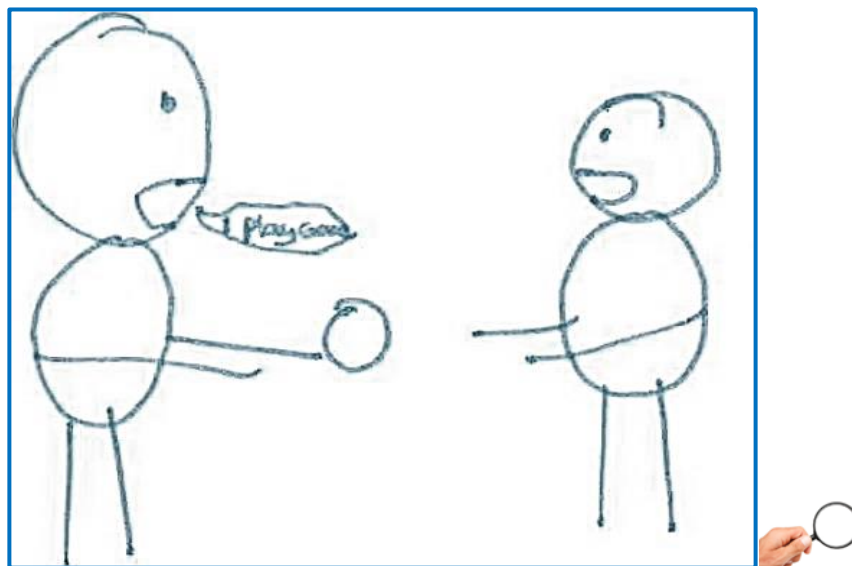


Figure 32 Abdel's DWT Data

Kerran appeared to have produced a drawing in figure 33 totally unrelated to either the prompt question or the physical environment. The participant has Down's Syndrome and a diagnosis of Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder and Oppositional Defiant Disorder. To some extent this may explain why he drew a house in response to the prompt question.



Figure 33 Kerran's Drawing

However, when asked a direct question about his picture he comments:

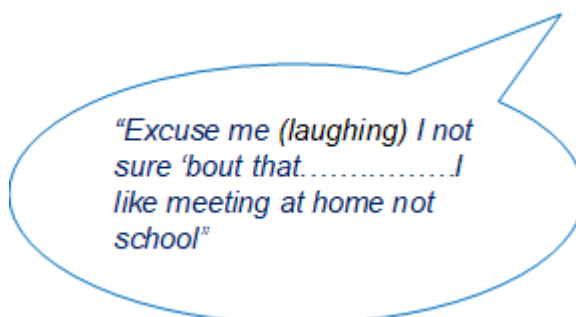


Figure 34 Kerran's Comment

Perhaps the participant did not feel comfortable having his meeting at school and would have preferred it to have taken place at home. However, his drawing

and comments are just as likely to reflect his disposition at that moment in time. Nevertheless, Kerran's drawing reminds us that the concept of space is an important issue and that conducting meetings within a formal school setting is not necessarily conducive to eliciting authentic voice. Physical space may therefore act as a barrier to participation.

Conversely, the DWT data also notes that one pupil felt that having the meeting in spaces usually reserved for adults gives them added significance. Joshua's comment in figure 36 acknowledges that the EHCp meeting "*felt special*":

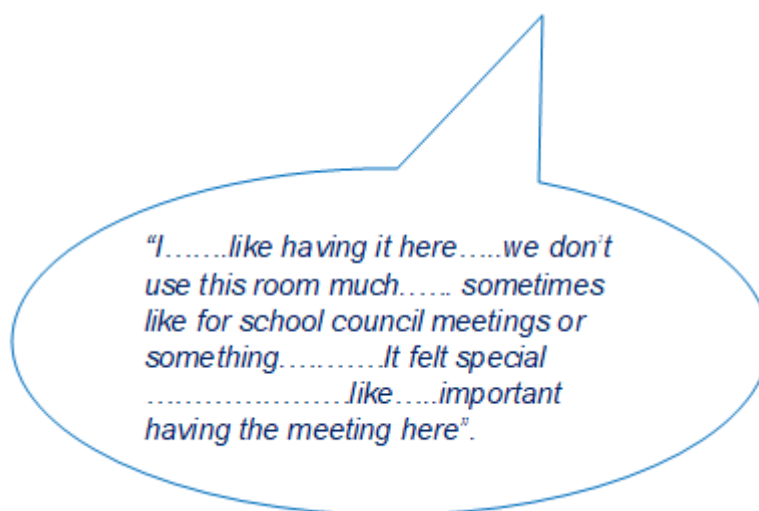


Figure 35 Joshua's Comment

It is possible that, for this pupil, the meeting room represents access to the adult world. This room is associated with growing up and signifies the importance of talking about steps towards adulthood.

The DWT data gives the impression that Sheriff positively enjoyed his meeting:

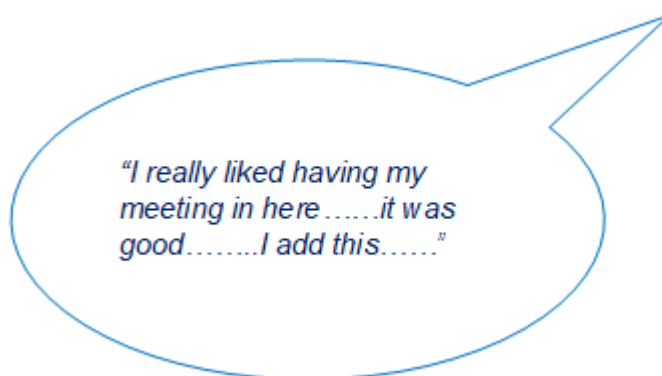


Figure 36 Sheriff's Comment

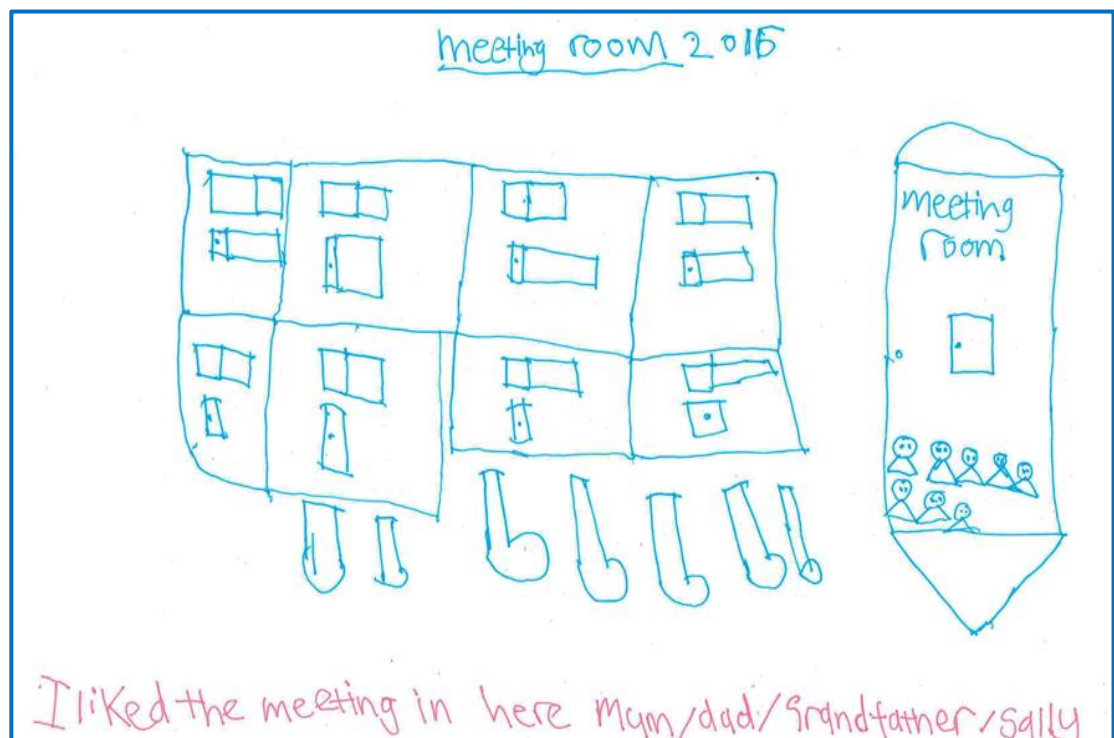


Figure 37 Sheriff's Drawing

Sheriff's depiction of his EHCp meeting in figure 37 is interesting because objects such as tables, chairs and paperwork seem to dwarf the people attending the meeting. My interpretation is that the 8 shapes joined together represent the table in the meeting room and he has placed empty chairs around one side, while the oblong shapes on the table represent the EHCp paperwork. The physical environment of the meeting room dominates his drawing and is drawn with a great deal of attention to detail. This gives the impression that the physical environment is more important than the people who by contrast, are depicted by small triangle shapes topped with a circle for a head and two dots for eyes. It is also possible that the participant who presents with severe receptive and expressive language difficulties associated with Down's syndrome may have interpreted the prompt question literally to mean, "tell me about the meeting room".

Another reason why many drawings refer to the physical environment is because pupils may have a preference for the tangible and the concrete (Preece and Jordan, 2010). However, these illustrations serve to highlight that the formal procedure and setting of the meeting may for some pupils act as a barrier to participation.



## 5.6 Finding 5: Positive and Negative Experiences of Participation

The DWT data records that significant number of pupils professed to have positive experiences of the EHCp meeting and felt actively involved. The drawings often convey the pupil's ability to express their feelings about the EHCp process through facial expression such as an upturned smile or a sad mouth. Dockett and Perry (2005a) define drawing as “a nonverbal avenue of expression” (p. 512). Certainly, the drawings and the comments combine to convey emotions or feelings that may otherwise have been difficult to express.

### 5.6.1 Positive Experiences

Anthony drew a picture of a smiling mouth giving the overwhelming impression that his experience of participation was very positive. He explains that “*talking*” made him feel like an adult with valid opinions and “*fings to say*”.

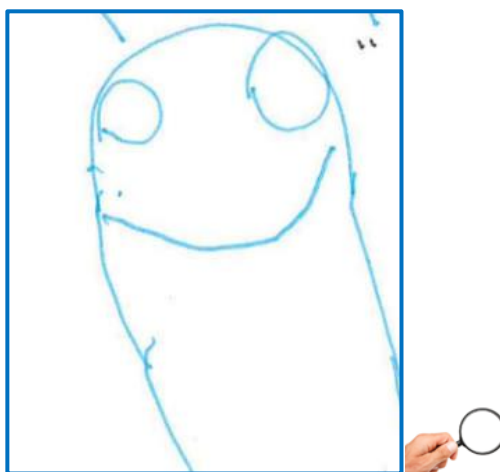


Figure 38 Anthony's Drawing

Anthony's drawing of an accentuated smiling mouth conveys his pride and pleasure and combined with his comments it is evident that he valued the experience because he refers to “*my talking*” at the formal meeting:

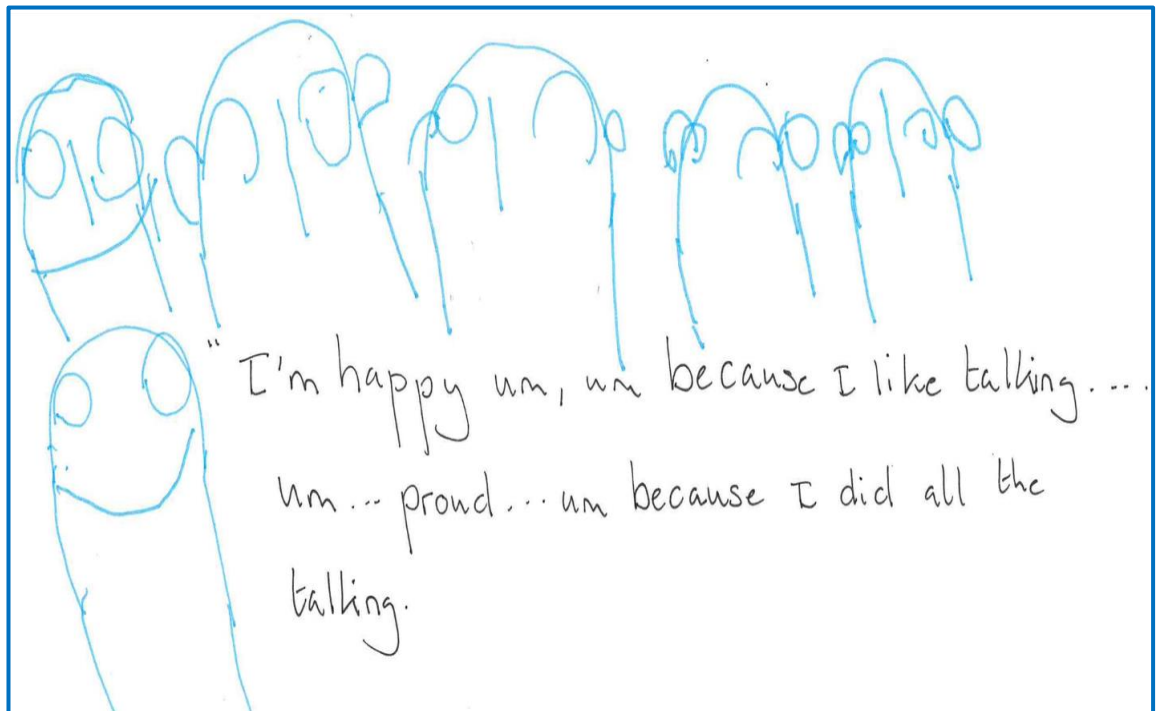


Figure 39 Anthony's DWT Data

In figure 39 Anthony is “proud” of finding his voice and is taking ownership of what was said, and this is surely tantamount to having an authentic voice.

Dwayne's self-portrait in figure 40 dominates the page and conveys a striking sense of self. Clearly he felt that he was central to the process and what he said was valued. He spoke positively about his experiences of participation and the use of the word "chat" indicates that he felt relaxed and at ease.



*"I loved having a chat at my meeting. I had lots of words. (excited tone of voice). My meeting was great"*

Figure 40 Dwayne's DWT Data

Alex's drawing in figure 41 suggests that he felt at the heart of the meeting. The large mouth and the word "talking" indicate he was an active participant, while his comments reinforce the positive nature of the experience.

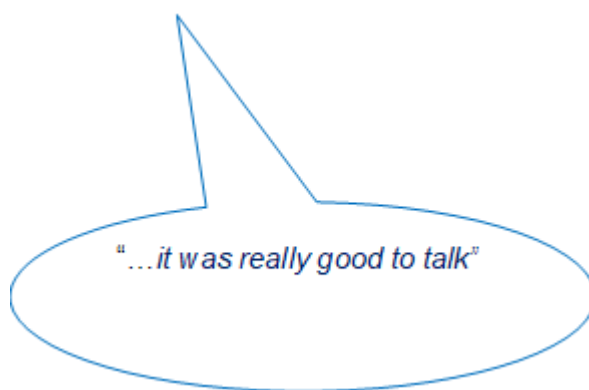
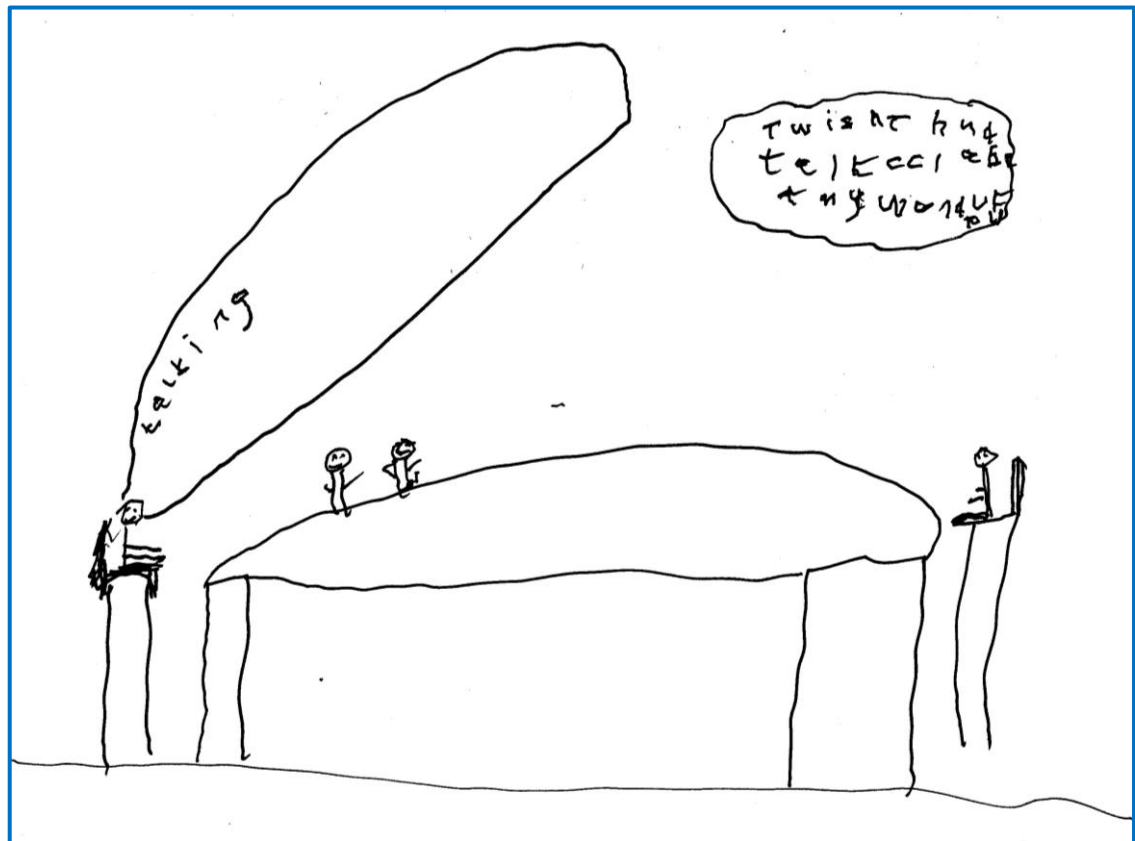


Figure 41 Alex's DWT Data

Javier's drawing is interesting because the people are portrayed as miniscule while the tables and chairs are enormous. Therefore, the picture in figure 42 could be interpreted to mean that the participant felt dominated by the proceedings. The speech bubble is also accentuated and contains the word "talking". The pupil corroborated that far from being silenced by the meeting he felt liberated. In fact, the experience of talking at the meeting is described as almost cathartic.



"It was a good meeting. It made me feel like things will get better in the future.....I don't have too much to worry about. I feel happier now I said all those words at the meeting. I came to the meeting feeling sad.....at the end of it I felt a bit better....."

Figure 42 Javier's DWT Data

Javier attended the EHCp meeting after a period of absence following two family bereavements. The following day he returned to school. Mayaba and Wood's (2015) research undertaken with children in Africa similarly noted that the process of "draw-and write/talk" can be both "cathartic and healing" (p. 3).

Figure 43 conveys the impression that the EHCp was a positive experience for Martin because he was given the opportunity to express his opinions and say “words” about myself. Martin is smiling in the self-portrait. He began talking about his positive experiences on route to the DWT session. Later he employs a gesture to indicate that he enjoyed the meeting:

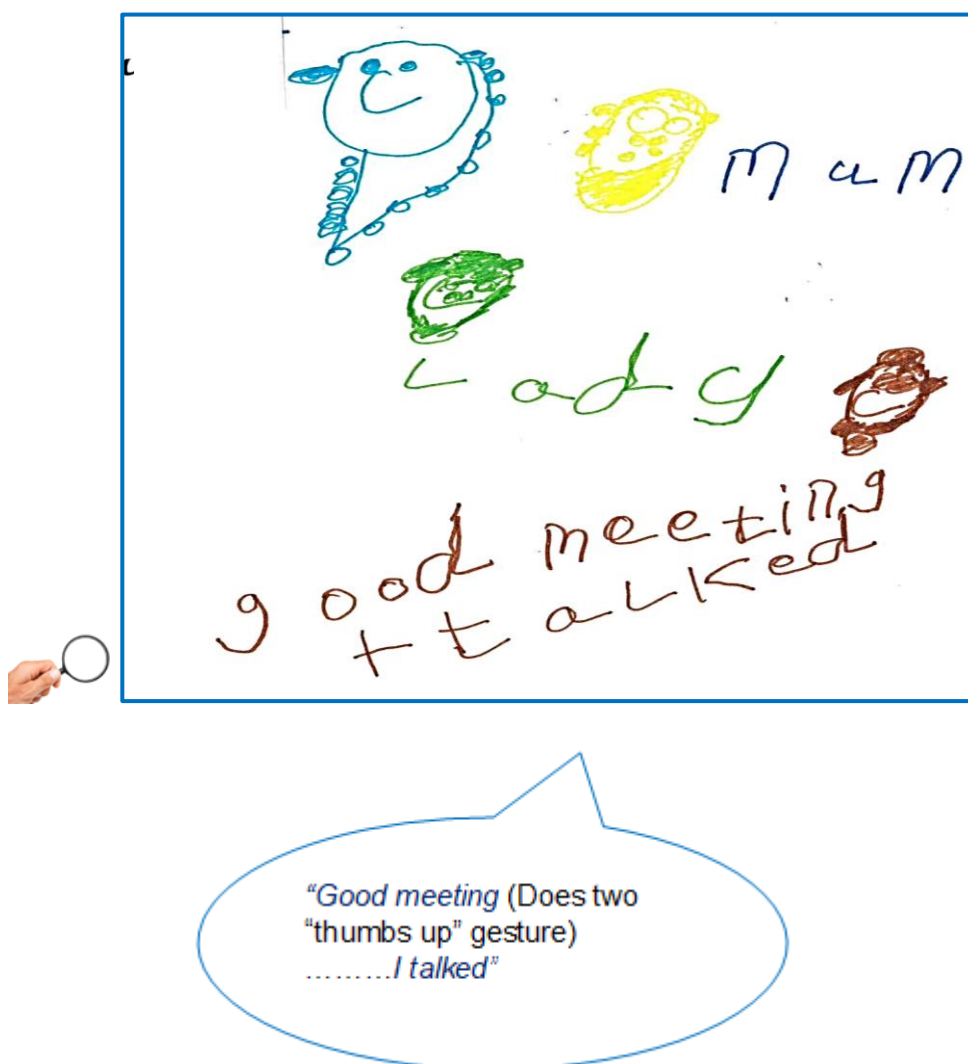


Figure 43 Martin's DWT Data

The use of the double thumbs up sign emphasises that his intended meaning is that the meeting was great. Additionally, his use of vibrant colours in his drawing further evokes this sense of positivity.

In figure 44 it is evident from the use of bright colours and the emphatic statement, "Happy talking" that Jayden's experience of participation was positive. The huge beaming smiles reinforces the impression that participation was enjoyable. The people in the drawing are depicted as roughly the same size and this adds to the impression that the participant felt that he was of equal status and was comfortable to express his opinions.

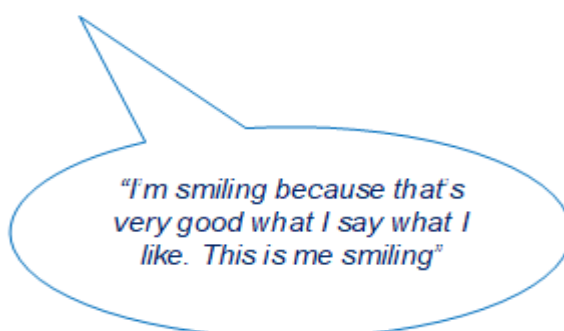


Figure 44 Jayden's Drawing

The DWT data frequently evokes a sense of positivity and the overall impression of the participant's experiences of participation appears on the surface to have been pleasant and enjoyable.

### 5.6.2 Negative and Positive Experiences

Jamari's beaming smile and comments in figures 45 and 46 indicate that he enjoyed his meeting.

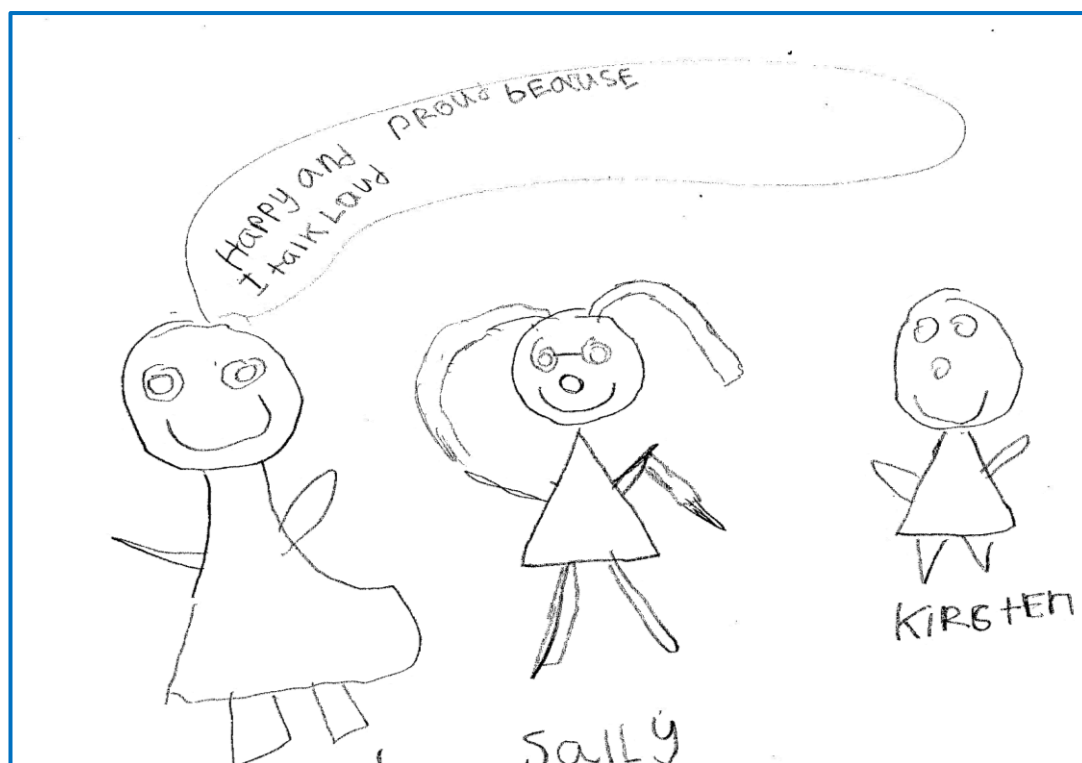


Figure 45 Jamari's DWT Data



Jamari expresses excitement, happiness and pride when he talked about his experiences. He concluded with a thumbs up sign to indicate that it was a “good meeting”.

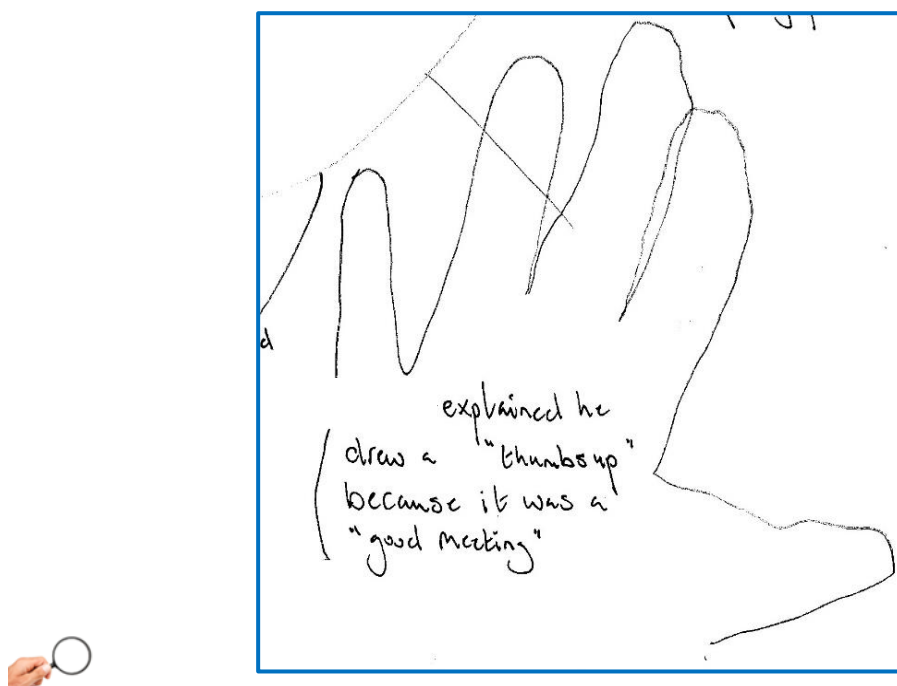


Figure 46 Jamari's "thumbs up" Drawing

However, when I looked back at my field notes they told a slightly different story.

*“The participant is generally described as having a happy disposition, but he will frequently opt out of activities and/or act as if he is distressed when he perceives an activity or learning task is too difficult. He arrived at the EHCp meeting looking very anxious and apprehensive. If his mum and a member of the Transitions Team had not been on hand to encourage him to attend, it is quite feasible that he would have refused point blank to enter the meeting room. He looked like he might make a run for it!*

Paradoxically, when Jamari reflected on the experiences of his EHCp after the event any apprehension he may have felt prior to the meeting was forgotten. The discrepancies in the data are likely to have occurred because of his struggles to recall events accurately.

Other pupils expressed negative emotions in relation to their pre-experiences of the EHCp meeting. In figure 47, Abdel drew a self-portrait with a turned down smile that he described as a “worried face”. I asked a direct question about his drawing and it transpired that he had been apprehensive about going to the meeting because people might “talk about things about me.....that I didn’t like”. He added that “I was worried that I had done something bad.” This participant was the first in his class to have an EHCp and may not have been adequately prepared. He was also the first person to undertake the DWT activities.

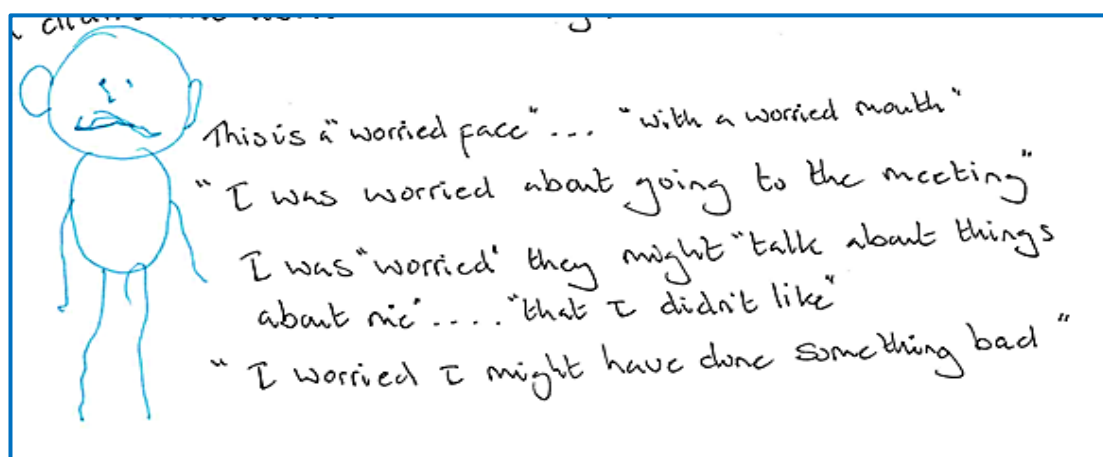


Figure 47 Abdel's "worried face" Drawing

In stark contrast, in figure 48 he also drew a human figure with a happy face. Next to it he wrote that the meeting made him “happy”. He added, “I think I worried for no reason.” It is evident that Abdel experienced negative emotions prior to the EHCp meeting but positive emotions having participated.



Figure 48 Abdel's "happy" Drawing

Heightened levels of anxiety and apprehension were noted by Deana prior to her EHCp meeting. In figure 49 she drew a self-portrait with a sad mouth.



Figure 49 Deana's "shy face" Drawing

Clearly Deana was concerned, prior to the EHCp meeting, that she would be too "shy" to speak.



Figure 50 Deana's "happy" Drawing

Deana explained that after the EHCp meeting she felt "*happy*" because she "*talked loud*" at the meeting. She depicted herself with a broad smile.

Imran also expressed dual emotions. His comments in figure 51 give the impression that it felt "*good*" to be given the opportunity to speak.

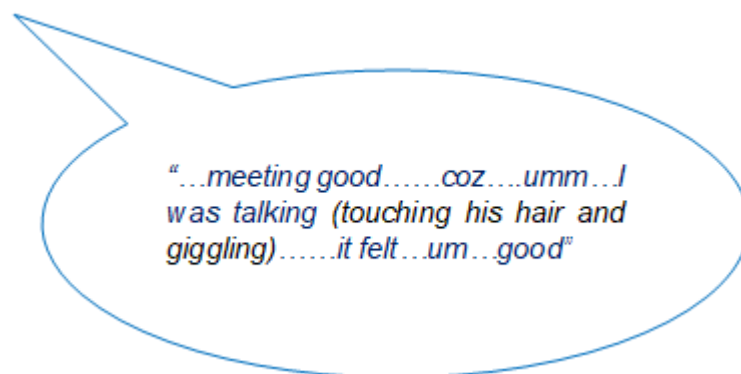


Figure 51 Imran's Comment

Imran's drawing, figure 52 does not convey the impression that he enjoyed his meeting. His facial expression could be interpreted as one of apprehension and unease. In fact, Imran did find the meeting challenging and struggled to express his opinions, even when using the pre-prepared visual prompts.

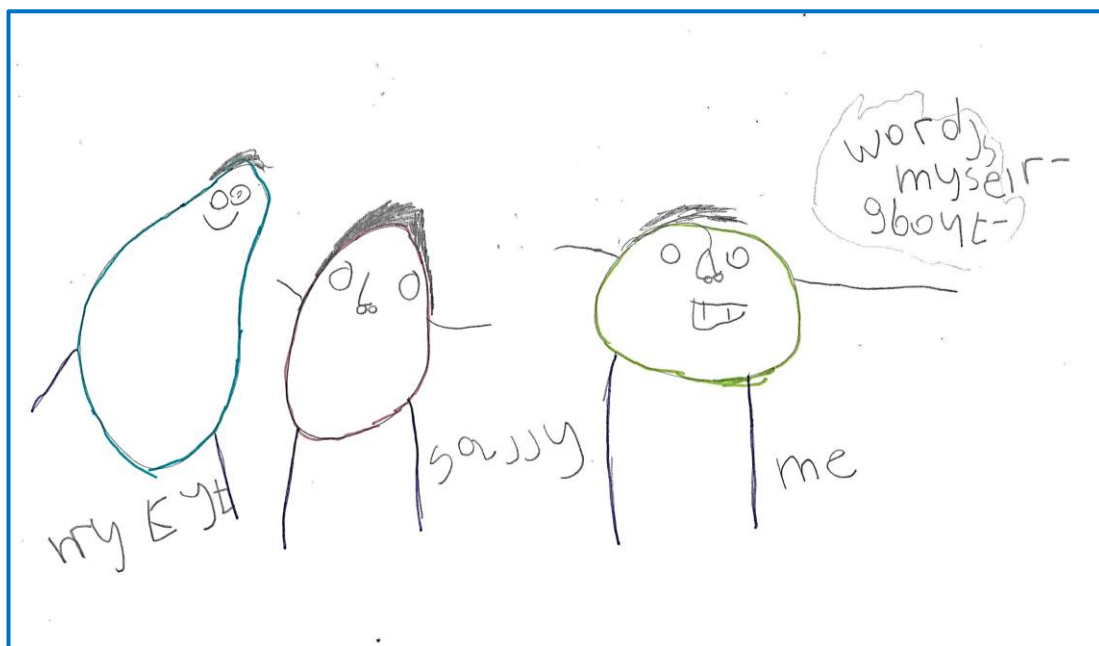


Figure 52 Imran's Drawing

Conversely, in figure 53 Chloe wrote the word "good" on her picture despite expressing discomfort during the meeting. The pupil has a long-standing history of language and communication and social interaction difficulties and tends not to speak when she finds activities challenging. At the EHCp meeting she presented as uncommunicative and uncooperative and gave only single word responses to questions and avoided eye contact. In fact, she behaved very much as you would expect a typical teenager to when asked to talk about herself in a formal context.

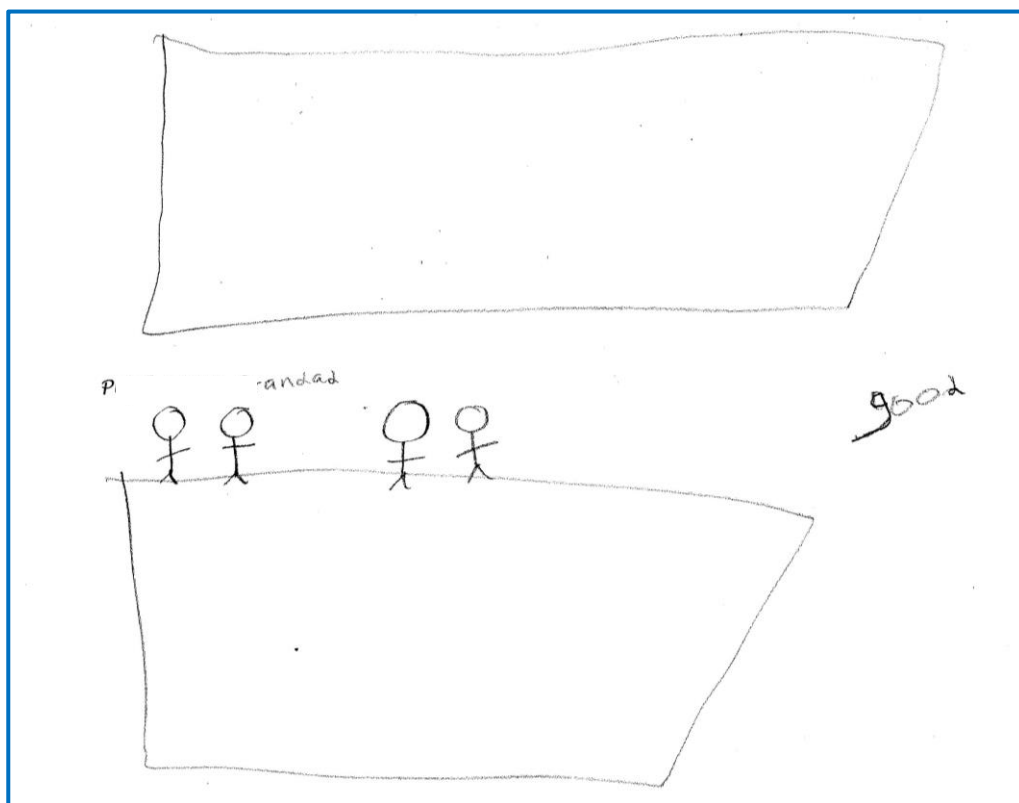


Figure 53 Chloe's Drawing

However, during the DWT session she did begin to open up and said:

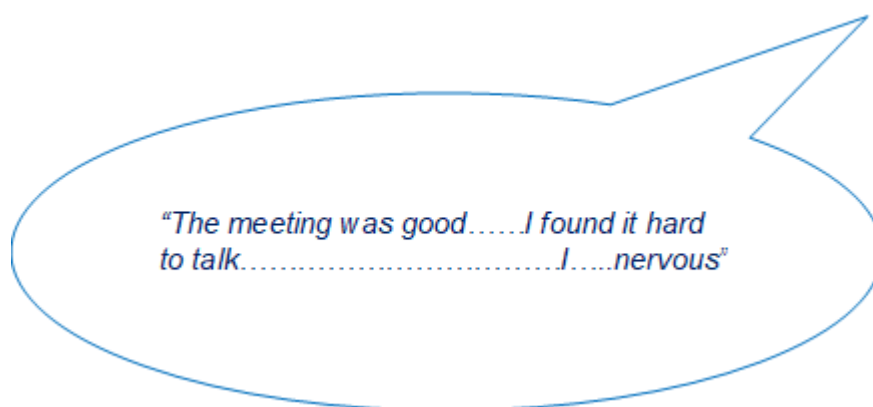


Figure 54 Chloe's Comments

Chloe explains that her experience of the meeting was “good” but it made her feel “nervous” and that is why she “found it hard to talk”.

Joshua acknowledges that the meeting was “okay” and that in some respects it was positive because he was given an opportunity to talk “about the things I like to do.....and the things I’m good at”.

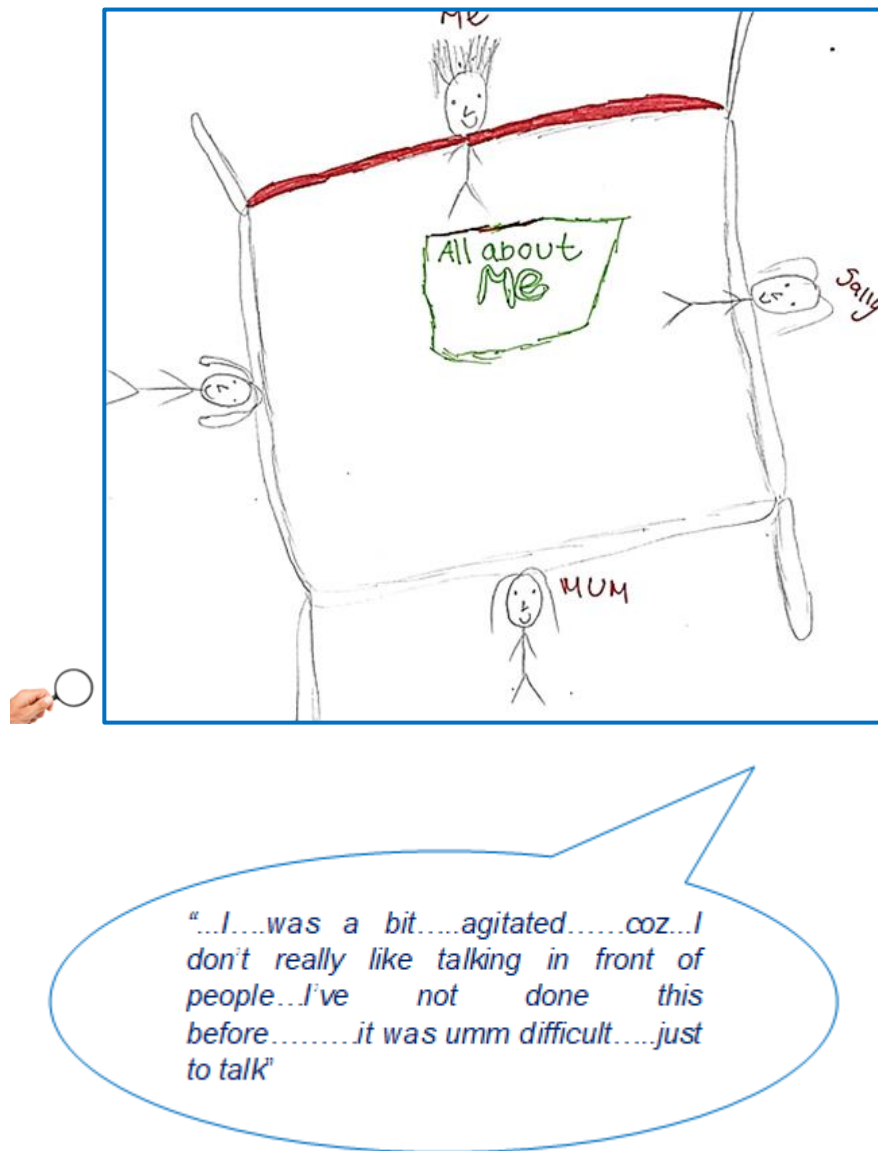


Figure 55 Joshua's DWT Data

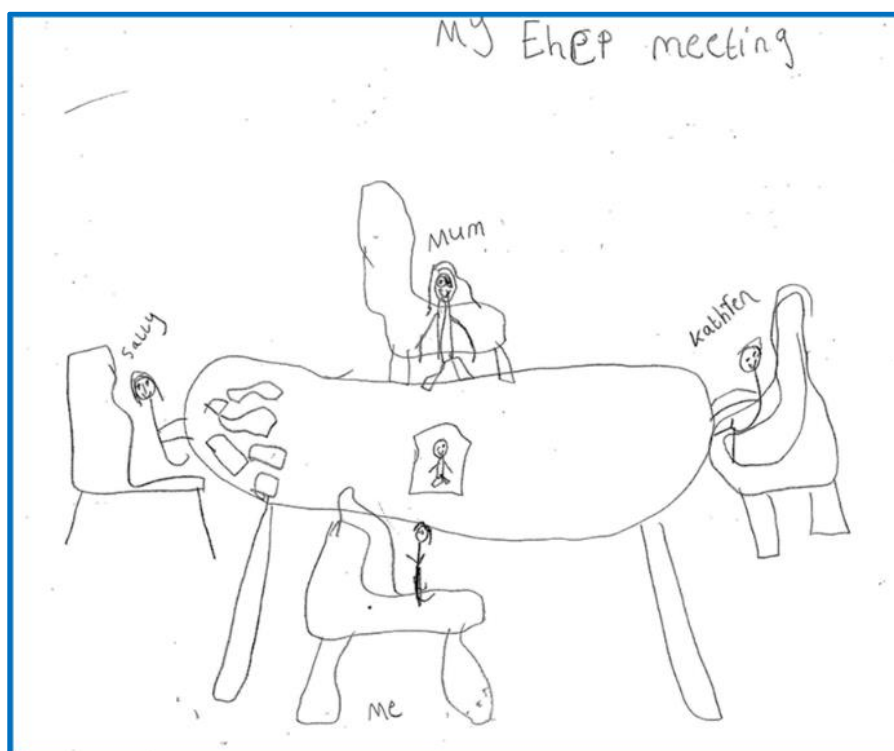
The participant recalls in figure 55 that he felt “*agitated*”. He explains his feelings and exactly why he found talking at the meeting “*difficult*”. Joshua reveals that the experience of speaking openly “*in front of people*” at the meeting was challenging. Joshua can use expressive language to articulate inner emotions and his comments are insightful. This is pertinent because it reveals the extent of his high levels of anxiety during the EHCp meeting.

The data indicates that Chloe and Joshua enjoyed the meeting even though participating made them feel anxious. Conversely, other pupils felt nervous

prior to the meeting but expressed feelings of empowerment after their EHCp meetings.

### 5.6.3 Negative Experiences

Amare perceived that the EHCp meeting was “difficult” and he found it challenging to express himself coherently.



"Mm...I found it a little bit difficult to talk at the meeting. Yeah it was hard to talk.....I could have spoken more at my meeting...but (shrug of the shoulders) .....um.....bit nervous lost.....my confidence"

Figure 56 Amare's DWT Data

In figure 56 Amare reflects honestly on the difficulties he encounters interacting and expresses a desire to be more confident and “less...shy” in social situations. This is an astonishingly frank and poignant admission from an



adolescent. He has depicted himself as the smallest figure and perhaps that reflects his low self-esteem. In fact, the pupil, despite being nervous, did acquit himself well at the EHCp meeting, although, he did find it easier to open up during the DWT session. It is possible that the presence of his mum or the EHCp co-ordinator may have made it more “difficult” for him to express himself and I imagine it would be tough for an adolescent male to speak confidently at a meeting with three women.

The data highlights that anxiety can act as a barrier to inclusive participation. Giving pupils opportunities to express their views but requiring them to attend an adult-centred meeting, does not fully consider pupils’ heightened levels of apprehension. Ridout’s research (2016), using creative methodologies to enable the voices of autistic young people and adults, noted “high levels of anxiety” (p. 46). Consideration needs to be given to the formal context of the EHCp meeting because stress and anxiety may be creating obstacles to participation.

#### **5.6.4 Discussion**

The 19 research participants reveal a wide range of experiences and perceptions about what took place at the EHCp meetings. Not all the pupils in the DWT sample mention whether their experience of the EHCp meeting was positive or negative and this is to be expected as there was no requirement to do so. In this sample, 10 pupils reflect that the meeting was a positive experience and 1 found it negative. Interestingly, 5 pupils described both negative and positive aspects of the experience and in doing so made some very honest insights. One pupil reports that the experience was very positive, but my field notes record that the participant refused initially to attend the EHCp meeting. Conversely another pupil willingly attends then refused to actively participate, but reflects that it was a “good” meeting.

The DfE survey (Adams *et al.*, 2017) asked participants a specific question about their overall experience of the EHCp process and noted:

Two-fifths felt the process was a positive experience for the child/young person and one in ten felt it was negative. Just over half said that it was neither a positive nor negative experience (23%) or that they did not know (23%). The proportion agreeing that it was a positive experience increased with the age of the child/young person. (p. 15)

This seems to suggest that CYP surveyed felt generally ambivalent about their experiences of participation. Dockrell (2004) suggests that it may be difficult to recall emotions precisely after the event. The participants in the DWT sample often have forthright views and are very frank about their experiences of participation. Over a quarter expressed simultaneously both negative and positive experiences. Spyrou (2011) commented that the reflexive researcher needs to take account of “the complexity behind children’s voices” (p. 151) and acknowledge ambiguities.

Interestingly, the DfE survey (Adams *et al.*, 2017) remarks that a notable characteristic associated with more positive experiences of the EHCp process was whether the CYP was being converted from a statement to an EHCp. The survey notes that this cohort was more likely to state that involvement in the process was “very easy/easy” (p. 24) and more inclined to be positive regarding the achievement of outcomes. The prevalence of CYP reporting to have positive experiences when a statement had been in place previously is not surprising because pupils did not have to battle to secure an assessment but were automatically transitioned to an EHCp. However, positive experiences in my study are more likely to be due to the direct steps undertaken by school staff to support pupils to make choices about how to participate and ensure pupils used their preferred method of communication. This indicates the need to orientate the EHCp process around the pupil to reduce barriers to participation. Negative experiences were linked to high levels of anxiety about communicating in an unfamiliar adult setting. Nevertheless, my findings make it apparent that when pupils had positive or partially positive experiences of participation these were liberating, empowering and occasionally cathartic.

#### **5.6.5 Episodic Memory**

A limitation of this study and the much larger DfE survey (Adams *et al.*, 2017) is that both are dependent on the perceptions of CYP after the incident rather than actualities of what occurred during the EHCp process. Porter (2009) has cautioned researchers regarding the dangers of interviewing children about past activities and suggests that they need to “...consider the time lag between events” (p. 351). My study sought to limit this by conducting DWT sessions as soon after the EHCp meetings as possible.

My research considers that pupils identified with CMN often experience a range of difficulties with procedural memory skills, including episodic memory. Porter (2009) recognises that interviewing pupils places demands on “cognitive skills” and especially memory (p. 351).

Episodic memory records the details of an experience and can last for several days. Pupils with weaknesses in their episodic memory, when questioned about their daily experiences of school may find it difficult to provide specific details or describe a lesson, they may forget when things are going to happen or have happened. Research undertaken with pupils identified with autism found that they frequently present with a distinct memory profile of strengths and weaknesses (Boucher and Bowler, 2008). Episodic memory and free recall are typically reduced (Boucher and Lewis, 1989; Bowler *et al.*, 2011; Millward, *et al.*, 2000), as is memory for person-related and personally experienced events (Boucher and Bowler, 2008; Boucher and Lewis, 1989; Millward *et al.*, 2000). To mitigate against this, I undertook the DWT sessions as soon after the EHCp meeting as was feasible. Examples of reduced episodic memory are evidenced throughout my research. Jayden undertook the DWT session 25 minutes after his EHCp but appears to have forgotten when his meeting took place: “*I draw myself at the meeting. Was it the morning?*” Jayden seems confused and it is only when he starts to draw that he recalls the meeting and who attended and states, “*I remember*”. In this case it seems that the drawing activity aided recall of salient points of the experience.

Conversely the DfE survey (Adams *et al.*, 2017) invites CYP to recall personal experiences of the EHCp meeting long after the event and in some cases a considerable time would have elapsed. This would make it difficult to recollect details for many people but may act to exclude pupils with CMN because of their reduced procedural memory skills. The questionnaire method also assumes that the EHCp process is memorable enough to become a significant autobiographical memory that is strong enough to be recalled at will. For families and some pupils the EHCp may be so significant that details can be vividly evoked, but for pupils labelled with CMN it is very likely their experiences of the EHCp meeting would be at best hazy or completely forgotten. This casts

doubt about the reliability of the information contained in the DfE survey, *Experiences of Education, Health and Care plans* (Adams et al., 2017).

Partly due to my concerns about episodic memory I speculated that drawing activities conducted during the EHCp meetings might more effectively support recall and active participation. After a period of reflexivity, I implemented a further AR cycle and commenced data collection 2.

### **5.7 Finding 6: Pupils' Participation and Contribution to Preparation for Adulthood**

A transition process that would support more independent adulthoods for disabled CYP is an area that has been noted as meriting more research (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 4). One of the aims of the SEND reforms from Year 9 upwards is to give voice to pupils and focus on future aspirations and preparation for adulthood from the end of KS3 and in KS4 & 5. A key requirement of the EHCp is to be forward-looking and to take account of important transition points in the pupils' lives and to set goals for the future. The SEND CoP (DfE, 2015) emphasises that high aspirations, coupled with support for CYP, can achieve success in life in four key areas: higher education and employment, independent living, participating in society, and being healthy. The assumption appears to be that, if transition is viewed as ongoing rather than a single occurrence, the process can be enhanced. My findings reveal a striking amount of information and insight into individuals' aspirations and goals for the future and extends what is known about transition.

Prior to the meeting, school staff completed *Section A* and recorded information pertaining to pupils' goals for their future, education, employment and preparation for adulthood. My findings demonstrate that pupils could express unique opinions about their next moves in life both prior to and during the EHCp process.

#### **5.7.1 Future Selves**

Early research findings indicated that pupils identified with CMN can voice their hopes for the future (Brett, 2016). During adolescence, typically developing young people are increasingly able to think in more abstract ways (Piaget, 1964) and make hypothetical plans in respect of their futures. Possible selves

theory developed by Markus and Nurius (1998), describes future selves as “individuals ideas about what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming” (p. 954) and shows how individuals are defined by past experiences. Possible future selves are “not just any set of individual imagined roles or states of being. Instead they represent specific, individually significant hopes, fears, and fantasies” (1986, p. 954). Future selves theories posit that possible selves are defined by past and present experiences. When pupils are faced with making important decisions regarding their future they strive towards these by devising and enacting realistic plans to achieve their goals. However, pupils labelled with CMN cannot always understand abstract concepts such as past, present and future. Shar *et al.* (2006) acknowledges that “very little is known about the way in which disabled children, make sense of their identities, and create a sense of their past and their imagined futures” (p. 2). Critically, no specific research has been undertaken which investigates how pupils identified with CMN perceive their possible selves and make choices concerning their future. Therefore, what pupils say about transition is fascinating.

I wrote about future selves based on the drawing in figure 57 (Brett, 2016).

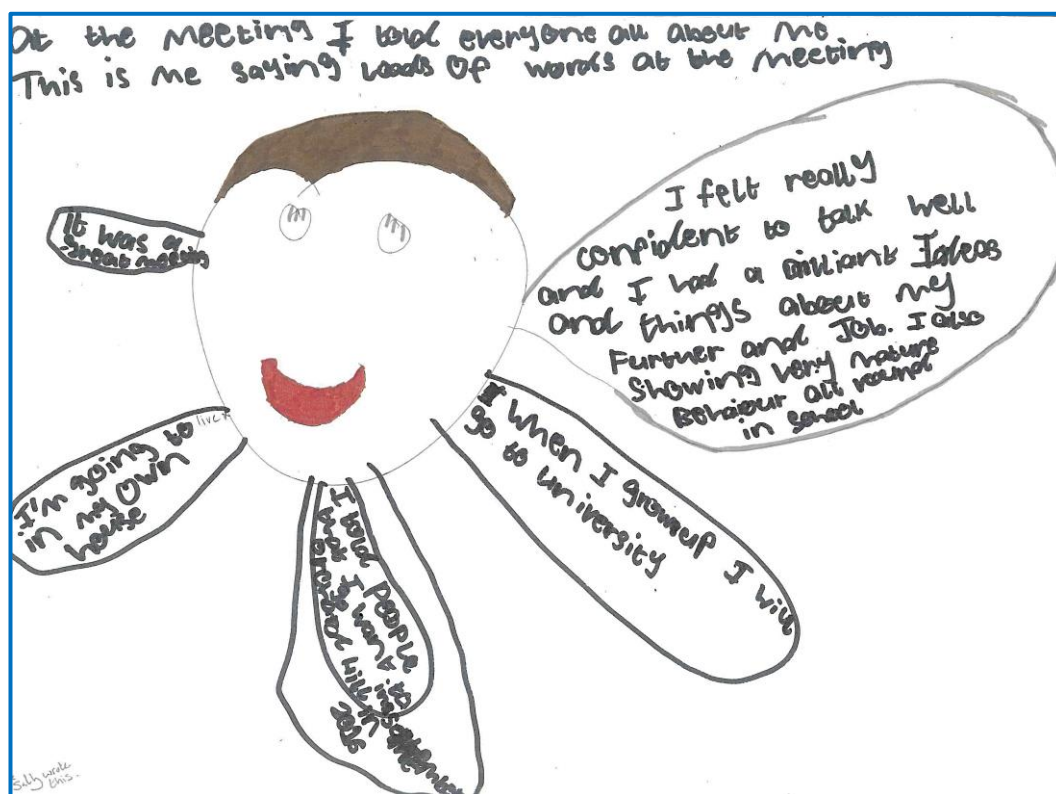


Figure 57 Dwayne's Drawing

When Dwayne was asked about his aspirations and goals prior to the EHCp, he could express his preferences:

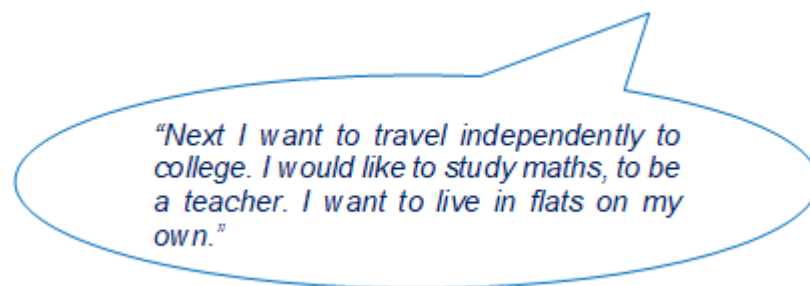


Figure 58 Dwayne's Comment

After the EHCp meeting Dwayne drew a large smiley face surrounded by a series of speech bubbles and wrote "*I felt really confident to talk well [and had] brilliant ideas about my further [future]*". He scribed in one of the speech bubbles "*I told people I want to go to X in September 2016*". This is a designated provision that caters for pupils with SLD. Clearly, he is aware that he is leaving school at the end of the academic year and transitioning to college. Dwayne drew a speech bubble and wrote "*When I grow up I will go to university.*" At the EHCp meeting, he specified that he wants to "*study maths*" and become "*a teacher*". The participant has functional literacy skills and emerging numeracy skills. He enjoys repetitive worksheet activities that involve additions to 10 and these number activities help to keep "*him calm*". Clearly his career choice is not realistic, and he demonstrates no understanding of the steps required to attend university. While the participant has the vocabulary and language skills to express his choices, he lacks the cognition skills required to undertake a university course and is unaware of the difference between further and higher education. Dwayne demonstrates frequent echolalia, repeating words and phrases that he hears. However, his comments should not be dismissed out of hand or seen as invalid. Instead, professionals need to come to an understanding of what Dwayne means when he says "*university*".

As the example above illustrates there is considerable dissonance between articulation and conceptualisation of a realistic possible self. Throughout the findings there is substantial DWT data to evidence that, while pupils could express unique opinions about their next moves in life they have a fragile,

unrealistic or fanciful perception of their future selves as demonstrated in figure 59.

Kerran uses a combination of Makaton signing and speech to communicate. and his speech and social communication can vary depending on his mood. His responses recorded his aspirations and goals for the future and indicate that for him fact and fiction are somewhat blurred.

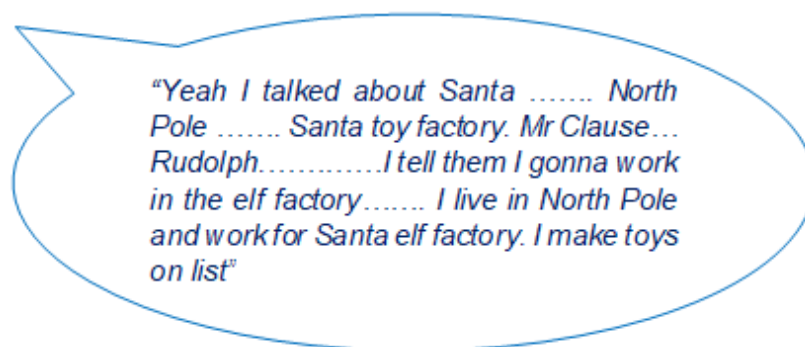


Figure 59 Kerran's Comment

Benzon (2015) notes that young children frequently have difficulty distinguishing between reality and fiction and will make up imaginative stories. Kerran's responses give a flavour of his authentic voice and should not be dismissed as unreliable but viewed as evidence that he still enjoys the world of make-believe.

Chloe expresses both concrete and dream aspirations in figure 60.

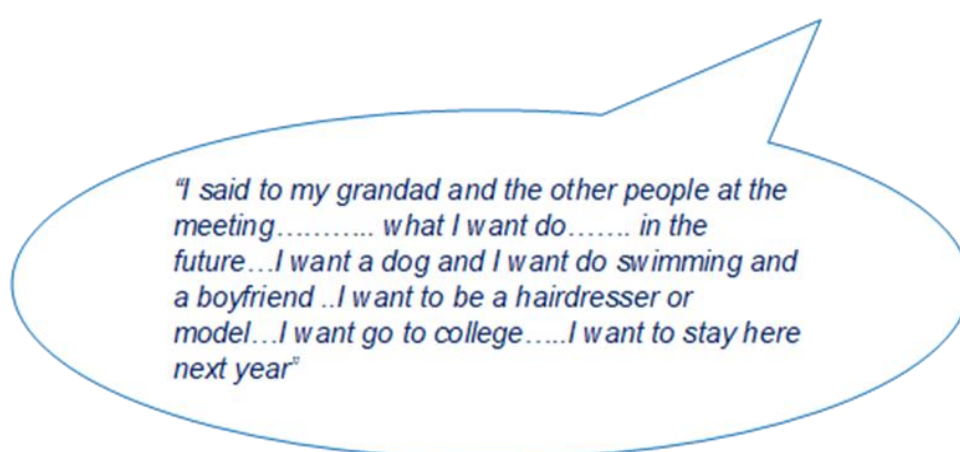


Figure 60 Chloe's Comment

Despite not feeling able to contribute during the EHCp meeting, the DWT data notes that Chloe can list her hopes and dreams for the future and has

ambitions. She is emphatic about the jobs she wants to do in the future, one a realistic possibility, the other perhaps rather more fanciful. She explains that she would like to stay at school in KS5 and then go to college. Perhaps in the less formal setting of the DWT session Chloe felt confident to express herself and became more forthright. However, she abruptly stopped speaking and turned her face away and looked in the direction of the floor indicating that the conversation was over. Her body language suggests that she simply had no more to say on this subject.

Typically developing young children often respond to questions about what they want to do in the future with a mix of both tangible and dream aspirations. Temi comments in figure 61 suggest that he is struggling with real and dream future goals and is undecided about what he wants to do next:

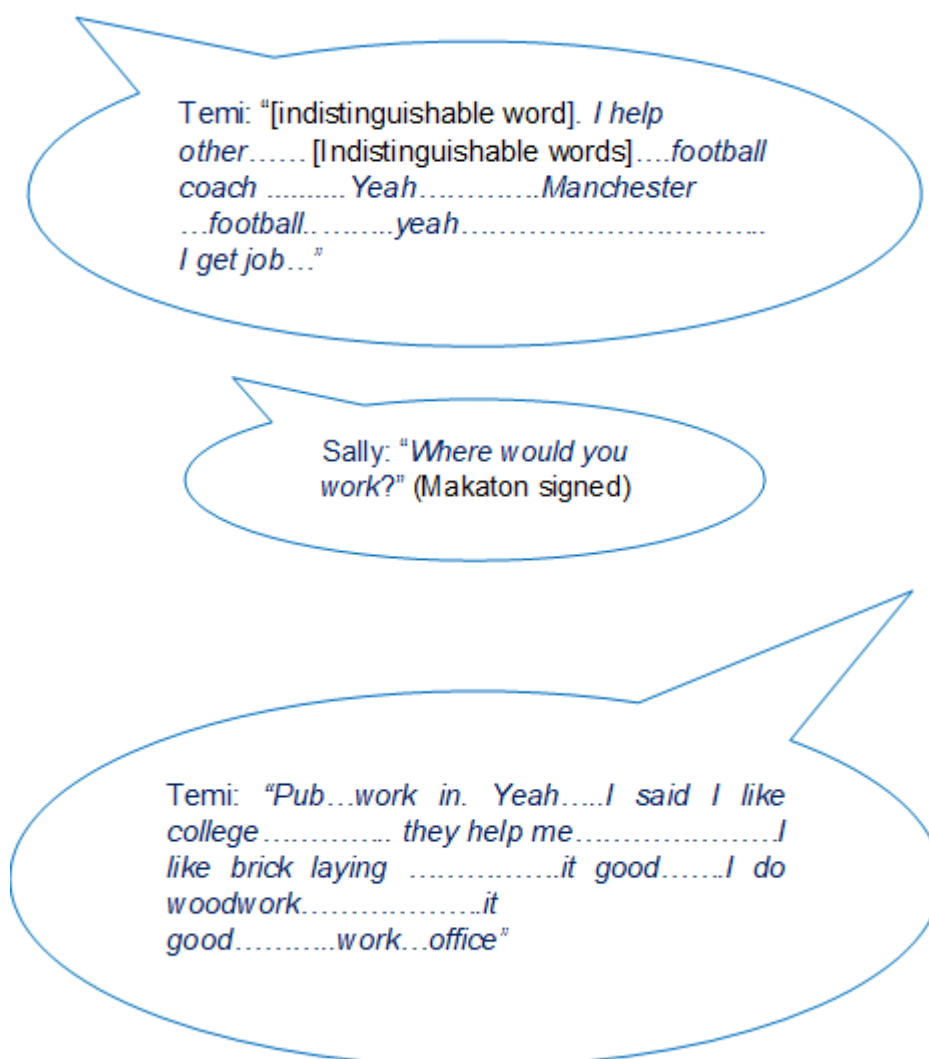


Figure 61 Extract from Interpretive Dialogue



Temi experiences articulation difficulties and these are impacted by his hyper nasal tone of voice, which can affect the intelligibility of his speech. His responses highlight his difficulties with expressive language and his struggle to articulate his plans for his future and transition. When he mentions “*football coach*”, is he saying he wants to be a football coach or he likes to play football or both? What is very noticeable is the disparity between how his teacher recorded his aspiration for the future for *Section A* and the exchange noted in figure 61. It records his desire to “be a *football manager*”, “*work with children*” and “*go to college after school and do woodwork*”. *Section A* of his EHCp gives the impression that Temi can speak in coherent grammatically correct sentences. Nevertheless, it is very easy to see how adults could interpret what pupils say by transposing their adult interpretive perspectives (Spyrou, 2011).

Temi likes “*chatting*” but his articulation is sometimes unintelligible and his attempts to communicate are unconventional and when he cannot make himself understood he frequently acquiesces. Finlay and Lyons (2002) suggest that pupils with ID will answer “yes” to questions and display acquiescence when a question is not understood (Sigelman *et al.*, 1981). Temi is a keen communicator with lots to say about his future goals but language is a barrier to making himself understood and he has clearly learnt to agree when he fails to make himself heard or to express his thoughts.

Martin talked about activities and interests using a combination of Makaton signing, gesture and speech to communicate. Martin has Down’s Syndrome and has learning and cognition difficulties specifically regarding aspects of perception, memory, reasoning and strategic thinking. As the exchange in figure 62 illustrates, he displayed an impressive desire to communicate but a limited understanding of the future.

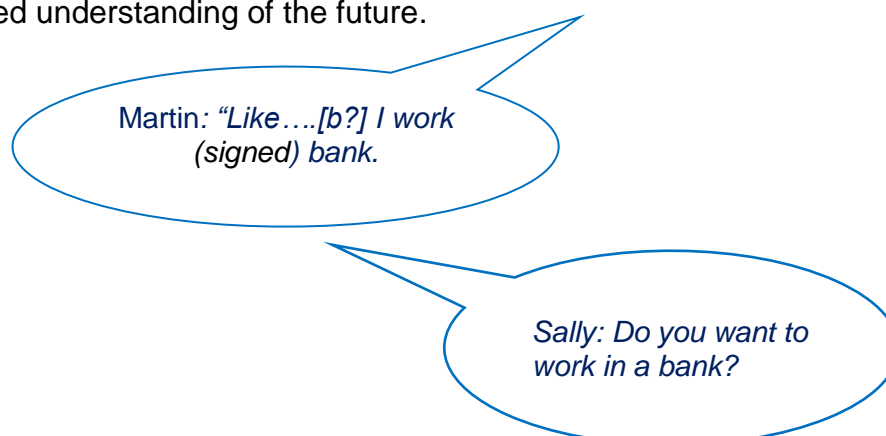




Figure 62 Extract from Interpretive Dialogue

Martin Makaton signed “*work*” but his articulation of the word “*bank*” was unclear and it was difficult to follow his communications. I attempted to establish if the participant was expressing a wish to work in a bank. He was unable to articulate reasons why he might like to have a job in a bank. However, he did explain that he recently visited a bank. This was part of a business link school project and the group were given chocolate money by the bank staff. As Martin explained during the EHCp meeting he loves “*chocolate and pizza*”. It is quite possible that he conveyed a desire to work in a bank because he perceives that you get paid in chocolate money. I have some empathy with this response. At the age of 10, I was asked by the Deputy Head of my primary school what I wanted to be when I grew up. I replied that I wanted to “*work in a chocolate factory*”.

Prior to the meeting Deana told her class teacher:

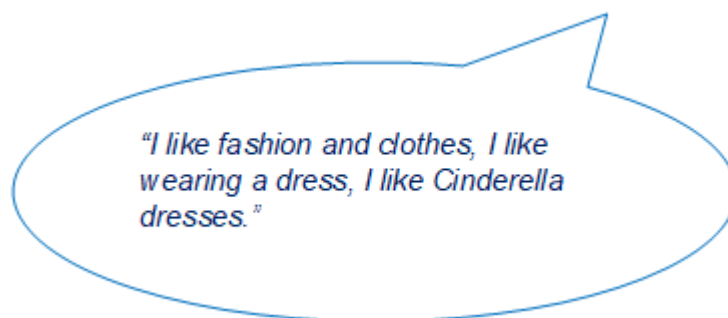


Figure 63 Deana's Comment

Indeed, Deana likes shopping for clothes with her older sister. She is always smartly dressed and likes to wear fashionable clothes. Nevertheless, her response in figure 63 indicates that she inhabits a fictional story world in which

she is transformed from a disabled child into a Cinderella figure. When asked about her future aspirations and goals for the future she said:

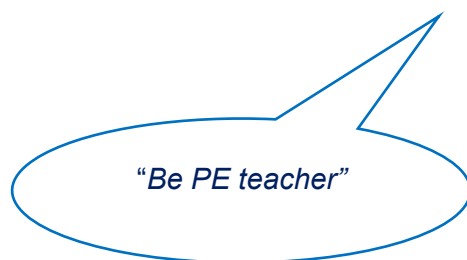


Figure 64 Deana's Comment

This contrasts with her family's expectations of *"going to university to do technology or go to college to do fashion"*. This comment highlights that Deana's family have aspirational but unrealistic plans for her future. During the EHCp meeting her father demanded that she undertake a work placement connected to the fashion industry. Deana expressed her love of fashion and made a comment about a *"fashion office"* after her meeting:



Figure 65 Deana's Comment

This begs questions about whether this is Deana's authentic voice or if she is echoing her parents' desires for the future? This highlights the need to move beyond reliance on parental perceptions to ascertain pupil voice. In Deana's case there is a disparity between what she likes and what she 'wants' to do. It sounds like an adult has decided that because she likes shopping and clothes she should be working in fashion and her family are talking on her behalf. Her interests might be better served by having work-experience in retail thereby enabling her to have an opportunity to work with things she likes. It should also be noted that in her *All About Me* she expressed a wish to become a "PE

teacher”, although she had not demonstrated any interest in sports activities and has significant gross and fine motor difficulties that impact on her mobility. It is evident that the EHCp process enabled Deana to express aspirations, but she, like many young people, is still undecided about her future.

Figure 66 illustrates that Anthony is clear about his aspirations and goals for the future.

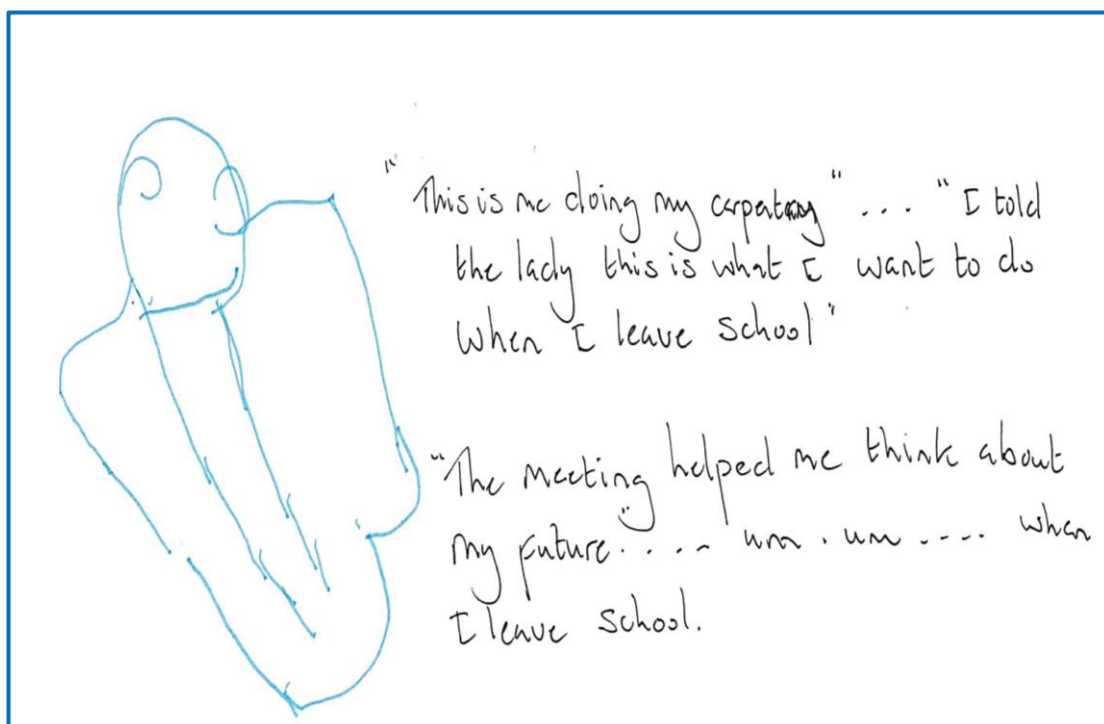


Figure 66 Anthony's Drawing

The DWT data notes that he expresses his preferences and voices opinions about his future. Anthony attends college and has undertaken a construction course and this may shed light on his choice. The DWT data clearly indicates an awareness that he will be leaving school and transitioning to training or employment. However, given this pupil's significant fine and gross motor skills difficulties, he may find it challenging to operate tools or machinery and therefore such a vocation is not a realistic option. Interestingly, Anthony and Deana both select careers that demonstrate that their future career choices are not limited by disability. Perhaps like typically developing young children they have insufficient or unrealistic understanding of the world of work and the skills set required.

At the EHCp meeting Alex explained that he would like to be a chef and specifically cook “pizza”. Figures 67 and 68 illustrate that Alex was able to expand on his career plan to become a chef during the DWT session.

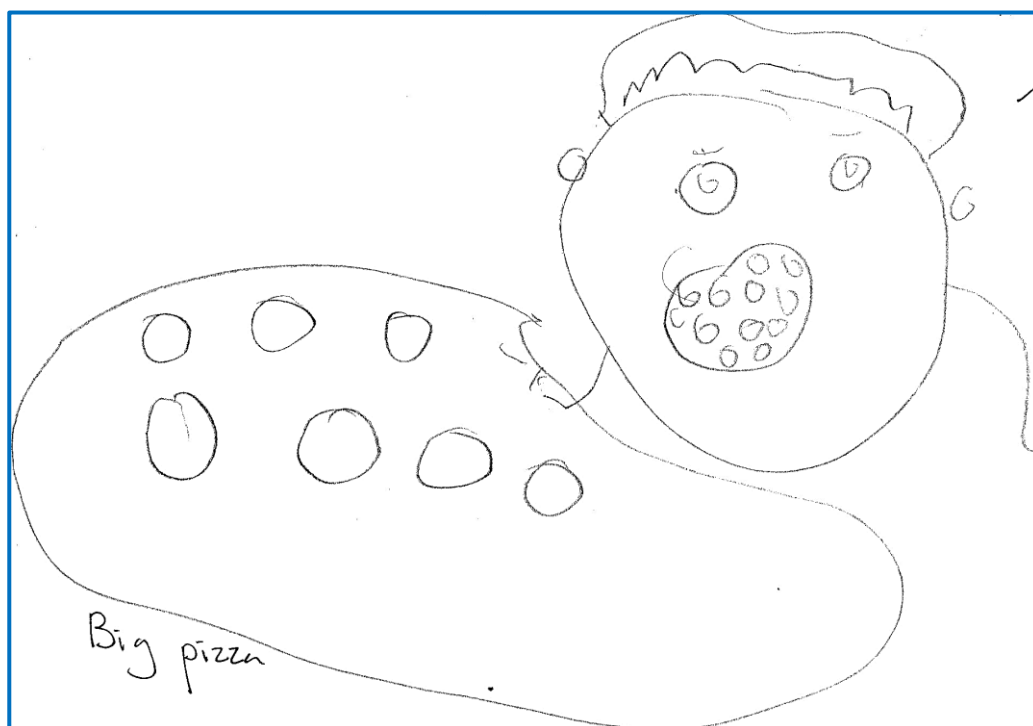


Figure 67 Alex's Drawing

Alex talks about his work placement and can articulate some of the steps towards making his future career a reality.

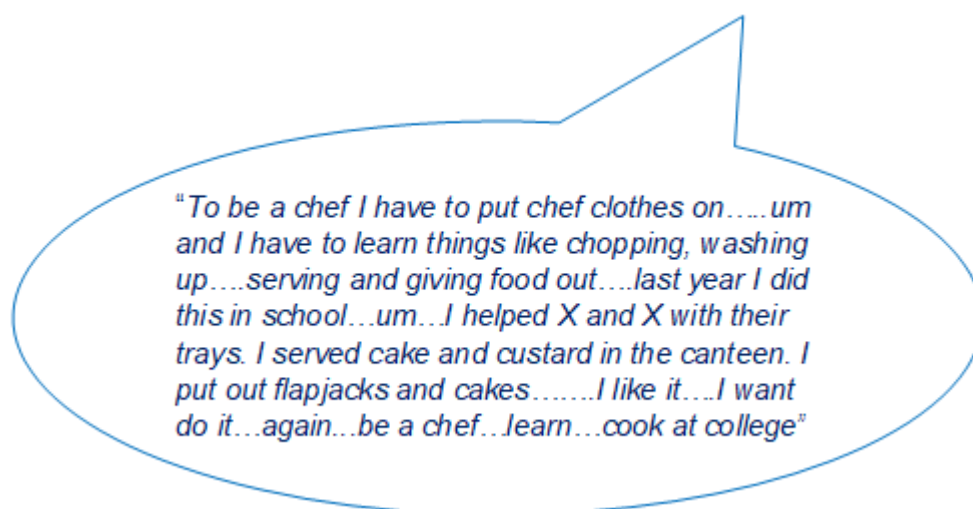


Figure 68 Alex's Comment

Alex has completed successful work placements in the school kitchen and a café. Alex has a degenerative eye condition that may ultimately make his career choice unfeasible. Alex demonstrates that like Anthony and Deana his future career choice is not limited by his disability.

At his EHCp meeting Jamari communicated that he would like to stay another year at school and then undertake a vocational catering course because he wants to be a “*chef*”. Figure 69 evidences his aspirations:

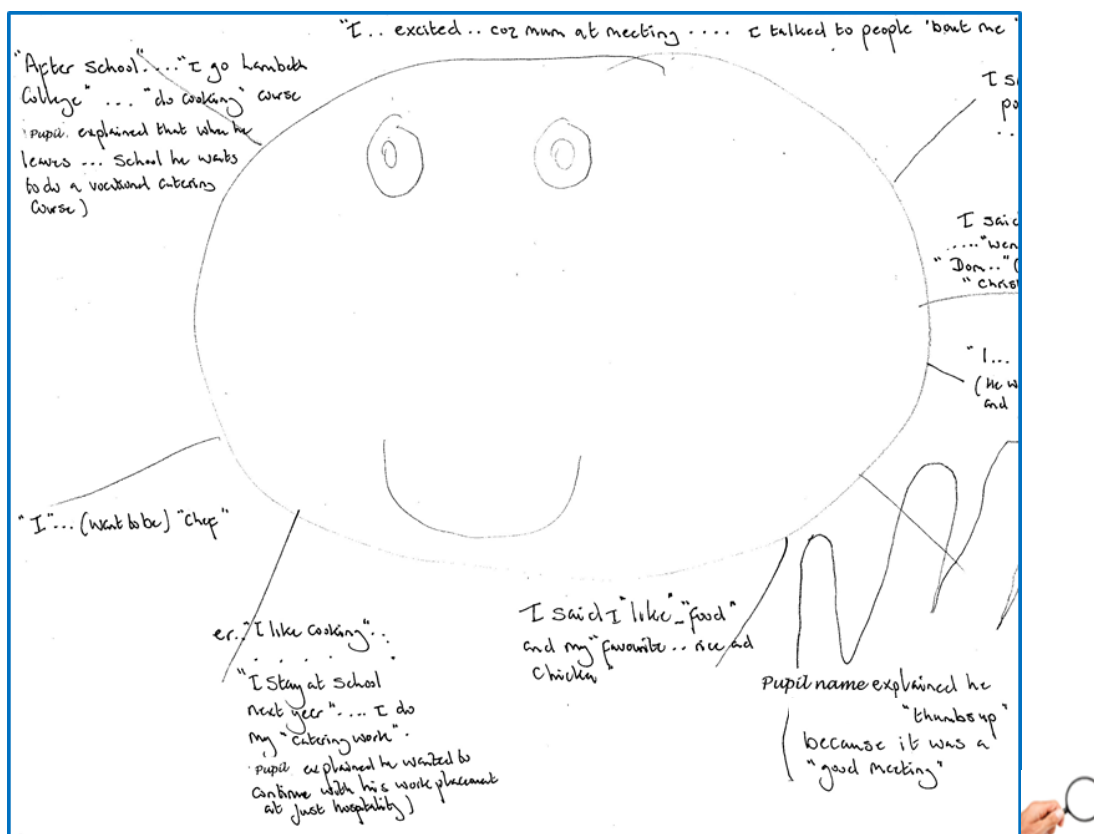


Figure 69 Jamari's DWT Data

Jamari can articulate some of the steps to make his future goals a reality. The EHCp documents information about his ability in this area. His Food Technology teacher observes that he has developed proficient technical skills and he has undertaken a work placement in the school canteen and an external catering placement. Therefore, it could be argued that he has an awareness of the requirements to achieve his future goal of employment in the catering industry and the school has provided personalised provision regarding practical work-experience. However, prior to the EHCp meeting he was involved in a safeguarding incident in which he came to school with a large knife and this led to police involvement and put his catering placement in jeopardy. This illustrates

that while Jamari can voice his choices and aspirations he has little awareness of how his conduct might jeopardise future training or employment opportunities.

Like Alex and Jamari, Imran also specifies that he would like to be a chef:

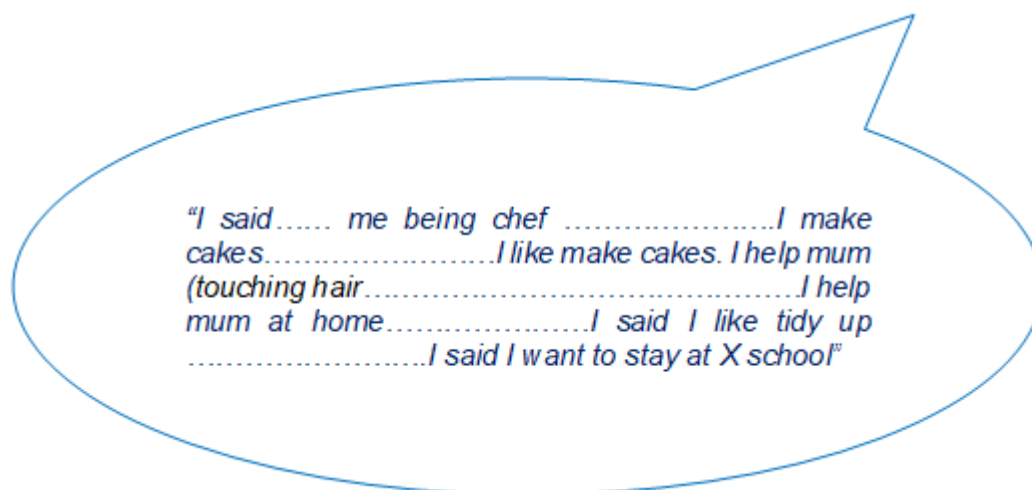


Figure 70 Imran's Comment

Imran indicated that specifically he would like to be a baker (although he didn't use this word). He talked about the fact that at home he can make a "cake" and during the EHCp meeting his mum mentioned that with some supervision he can make a cake. His interest in baking was also corroborated in his power point presentation. It really feels like his own voice when he talks about baking.

The DWT data suggests that the EHCp meeting enabled Bakari to begin to articulate what he wishes to do when he leaves school. There is also a sense that the EHCp meeting is an "important" part of the transition process.

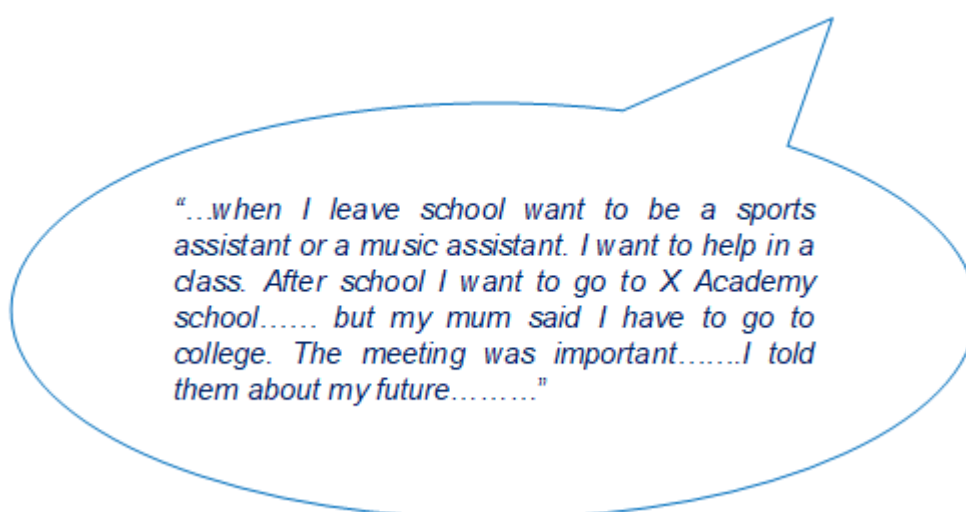


Figure 71 Bakari's Comment

Bakari's responses demonstrate his interest in sport and music and his wish to continue these activities in the future and would like to become a "*sports assistant or a music assistant*". He speaks about wanting to attend "*X Academy school*". This is a mainstream secondary school and it is evident the participant does not fully understand that when he leaves his present provision he will be almost twenty and therefore attending a mainstream secondary school is not a realistic option. He states, "*the meeting was important.....I told them about my future.*" Bakari appears aware of the significance of the meeting and the use of the word "*important*" perhaps indicates that he is beginning to consider transition.

Amare spoke in a low volume throughout his EHCp meeting and had difficulty forming responses. I thought it unlikely that he would comment further on his experiences of participation. The DWT data indicates that the participant acknowledges that the EHCp meeting was "*difficult*" and that he found it challenging to express himself:

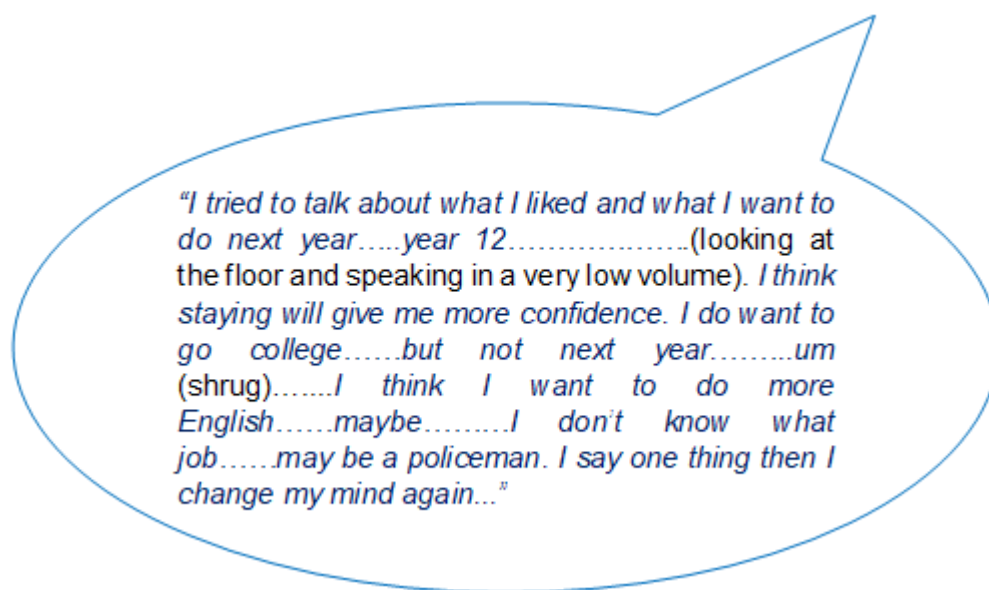


Figure 72 Amare's Comment

Amare's comments in figure 72 indicate that he thinks that staying in the 6th form may build up his "*confidence*". He speaks about his future aspirations to attend college. He indicates that he might like to be a "*policeman*" but, like many 16-year olds, he is not sure what job he would like to do in the future. Amare reflects honestly on the difficulties he encounters interacting socially and expresses a genuine desire to be more confident and "*less...shy*". The DWT



data suggests that the participant found it easier to open up in a one to one situation and the presence of his mum or the EHCp co-ordinator may have made it more difficult for him to express himself in a formal setting.

Prior to the EHCp meeting, Javier expressed the view that when he leaves school he wants to be *“A millionaire...and buy a nice girl on the internet”*. However, in figure 73 he talked about his future in a far more considered way:

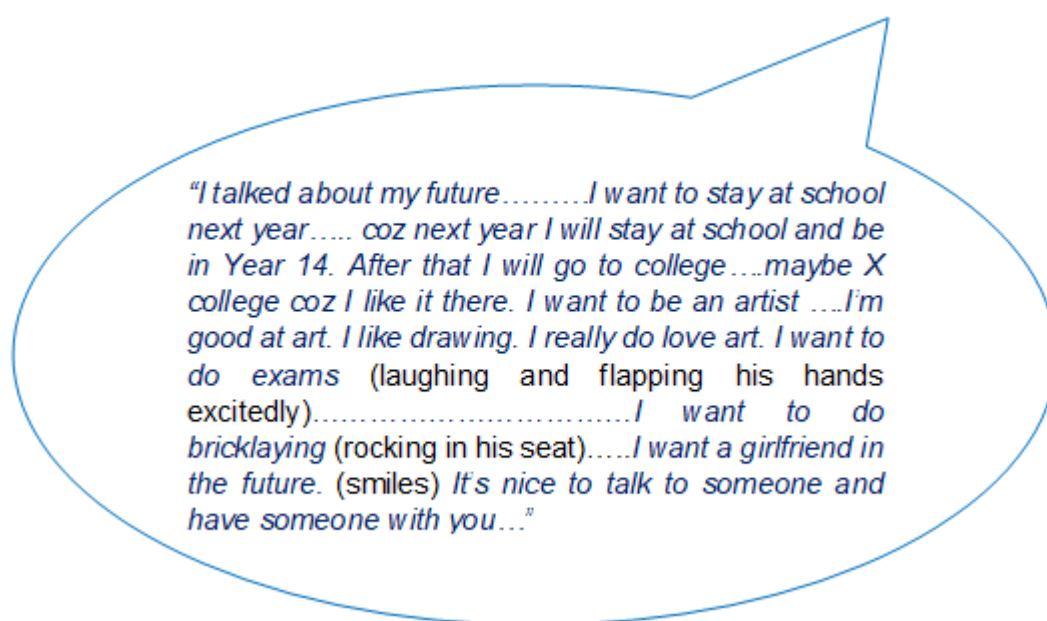


Figure 73 Javier’s Comment

It is evident that the participant can articulate his aspirations and future for transition. He explains that he wishes to stay at school and complete Y14. After this he intends to go to college to study Art and reflects that he would like to be *“an artist”*. He adds that he might *“do bricklaying”*. The participant goes to college one day per week and is undertaking a Construction course and this is probably why he expresses an interest in *“bricklaying”*. He speaks about having a *“girlfriend in the future”*. His responses indicate that he is interested in the opposite sex and suggest that he would like to be in a relationship. He reflects that *“It’s nice to talk to someone and have someone with you...and let them know what you think and what you think of them”*. This contrasts with the comment he made to his teacher about buying *“a nice girl on the internet”*.

Joshua joked that he wanted to be “*the new Prime Minister*” and expresses both dream and realistic aspirations. In figure 74 he elaborated further on his many future goals:

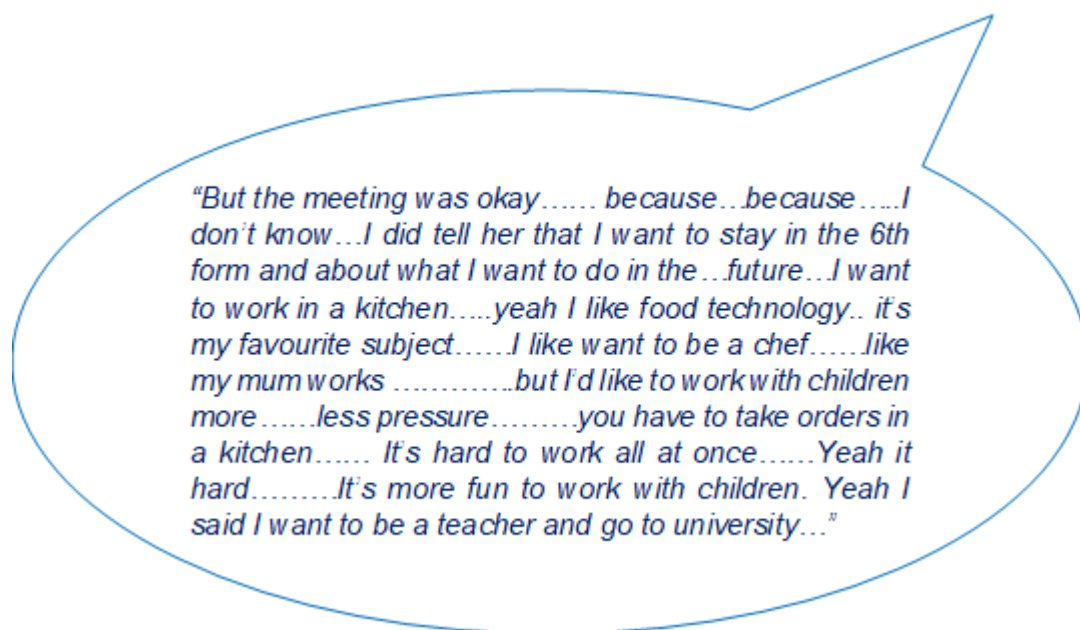


Figure 74 Joshua's Comment

Joshua's responses demonstrate that a job is important to him. Joshua voices an eclectic mix of both possible and impossible aspirations and like many adolescents appears undecided about transition. His comments indicate that he understands that catering requires the skill to work under pressure. Having completed a year in the 6th form Joshua left school having secured paid part-time employment with a catering company.

In figure 75 Sheriff makes his future preferences know:

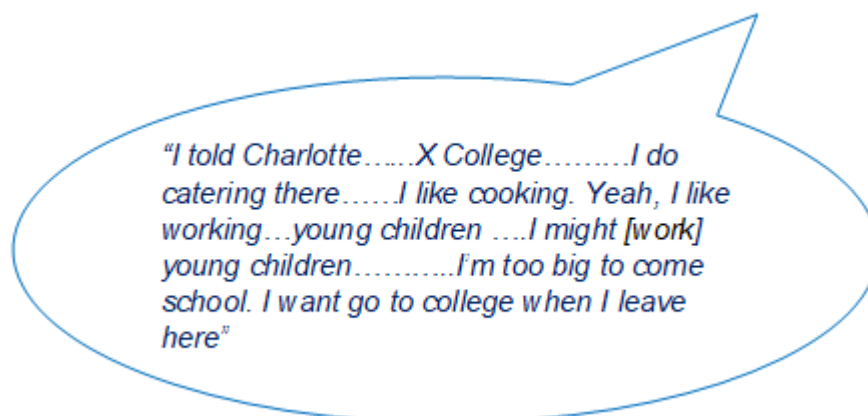


Figure 75 Sheriff's Comment

Sheriff indicates that in the future he would like to attend college and undertake a catering course because he enjoys cooking. Sheriff has undertaken work-experience supporting KS3 pupils in Art lessons so this may explain why he expresses a preference for working with younger children. Sheriff shows awareness that he is a young adult and “*too big to come to school*” and will be transitioning to college soon.

Tahir expressed a strong desire to gain employment:

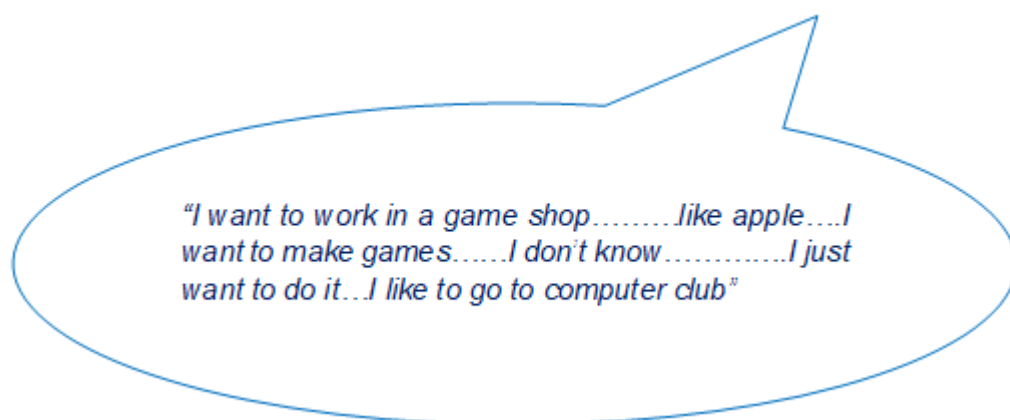


Figure 76 Tahir's Comment

Tahir comments that his dream job would be to work in a “*game shop*” because he enjoys playing on the computer. He also aspires to design games. He appears to understand that a step towards his ambition would be to attend “*computer club*” and gain a better understanding of coding. He seems very unsure as to whether he wants to stay in the 6th form or transition to college. As figure 77 illustrates he experiences challenges in expressing ideas fully, organising his thinking and putting words in the correct order.

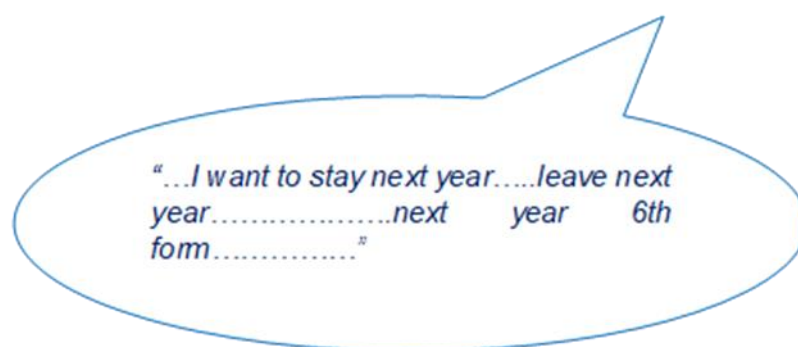
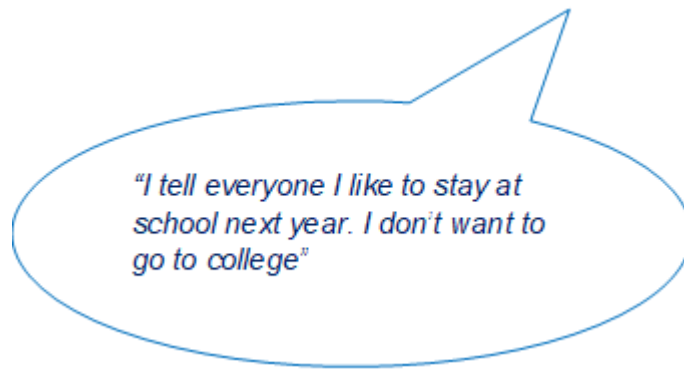


Figure 77 Tahir's Comment

In figure 78 Jayden makes his future preferences clear:



*Figure 78 Jayden's Comment*

In line with his diagnosis of autism, Jayden dislikes change and experiences high levels of anxiety when routines are not adhered to. Therefore, it is possible that he is expressing his dislike of change when he states that he does not want to go to “college”. The participant did not discuss any further long-term aspirations for the future either at the EHCp meeting or in the one to one session. His limited participation perhaps serves to reinforce that for pupils with autism contemplating change and expressing opinions about the future can be an uncomfortable experience.

Although the pupils' drawings do not necessarily depict their future selves, significantly 18 out of the 19 pupils commented on their future. In the majority of cases the participants were able to use the DWT format to help them release or recover their lost, marginalised or silenced voices.

There was one notable exception. While Bradley could tell me using Makaton and gesture who attended the EHCp, he was unable to communicate any understanding of the concept of himself in the future.



*Figure 79 Bradley's Drawing*

In figure 79 Bradley's representations of human figures suggest that he is at the early stages of mark-making and for him the circles were interchangeable. His drawing serves to highlight that for pupils identified with SLD coupled with communication challenges the DWT approach may not be appropriate. The school has a responsibility to all pupils and, in this case, Bradley worked with the SaLT team using Talking Mats to aid communication at his EHCp.

### **5.7.3 Discussion**

DWT findings illustrate, that when adults take the time to listen to the voices of pupils who experience enormous challenges with communication and cognition, pupils have a great deal to impart that can contribute to a better understanding of lived experience. The DWT data demonstrates that pupils can express a variety of opinions both realistic and fantastic about their futures, although there is often a 'reality gap' between a pupil's imagined vision for the future and possibility. In fact, so much rich information was imparted that it was beyond the scope of this study.

Shar *et al.* (2006) concluded that attending a special school can restrict employment opportunities because of “very limited opportunities to do work-experience (if at all)” and because pupils face greater obstacles and difficulties understanding “real-world work settings” (p. 4). *They Still Need to Listen More* (OCC, 2014) highlighted:

...a requirement for young disabled people to receive appropriate and relevant careers advice/guidance and assistance in brokering work experience placements. There should also be a duty for professionals to put in place the necessary support for young disabled people to access suitable work experience. (p. 31)

However, all the participants in the sample have had work-experience. Many have undertaken several placements but are frequently unable to generate possible selves linked to these experiences. Nevertheless, the very act of contributing to the EHCp process may in time “strengthen personal sense of responsibility, and transition toward adulthood and as independent life as possible” (Hermanoff *et al.*, 2016, p. 2). As contributing to the preparation for adulthood agenda becomes the norm, it may be that pupils’ capacity to impact on decision-making is developed and pupils are better prepared for transition. Further research and increased knowledge could support schools to put in place interventions that better enable pupils to achieve their future goals.

#### **5.7.4 Tokenism or Participation?**

Disabled CYP have in the past often lacked opportunities to participate in decisions concerning their own life. VIPER research (2013) established that CYP were being excluded from decision-making. *Hear us out* recommended that “all young disabled people are fully involved in assessments and the planning and reviewing of their Education, Health and Care plan” (ALLFIE, 2013a, p. 9). My research indicates that all pupils were given opportunities to participate and 18 out of the 19 contributed or indicated their future goals or aspirations (even if at times these are unrealistic or fragile). Nevertheless, what is not clear is the extent to which pupils can influence or shape future outcomes. Participation is more than the act of taking part it is the ability to influence decisions about one’s own life and effect change. Having a say in an EHCp plan is not the same as being given a genuine opportunity to make changes or impact on the outcomes of the EHCp process.

The DfE survey (Adams *et al.*, 2017) questioned 13,643 respondents (although less than 700 were young people) about their views on the likely long-term impact of the EHCp. The findings indicated that 51% “agreed that the help and support outlined in the EHC plan will help the child/young person achieve what they want to in life” (ibid p. 132). Just over half agreed that the EHCp identified aspirations for the future (53%) and 47% felt that the EHCp would improve the CYP’s chances of getting paid or unpaid work (p. 132). This appears to be very optimistic given the climate of austerity. The latest government statistics demonstrate that there is still a significant disability employment gap. While the “economic inactivity rate for those with disabilities is 45.9%”, for people without disabilities the figure is 16.2%” (Brown and Powell, 2018, p. 3)

Prolonged austerity measures have led to the near collapse of services to support transition and significant cuts in funding to help disabled young people to find paid work (Barnham and Martin, 2017). There appears to be a real danger that pupils’ voices will be further tokenised because of the disconnect between policy rhetoric and actionable change. There is limited evidence to suggest that pupils have any real power to impact on the preparation for adulthood outcomes and realise their full potential.

#### **5.7.5 Future Selves and Authentic Voice**

My study is interested in authentic voice and the research revealed that sometimes what the participants say or express does not fit neatly into society’s preconceptions about voice or assumptions about participation. The data corroborates the problematic nature of locating “true” voices” (Spyrou, 2016, p. 6) and the findings suggest that the voices of pupils identified with CMN are difficult to unravel, idiosyncratic and challenging to record accurately. My study notes that documenting authentic pupil voice requires a ‘warts and all’ approach and this can be an untidy process in which language quirks, imperfections and idiosyncratic comments are recorded, as opposed to being edited out.

Figure 80 illustrates Bakari’s ongoing preoccupation with the weather. He repeatedly interjects comments about weather into the conversation:

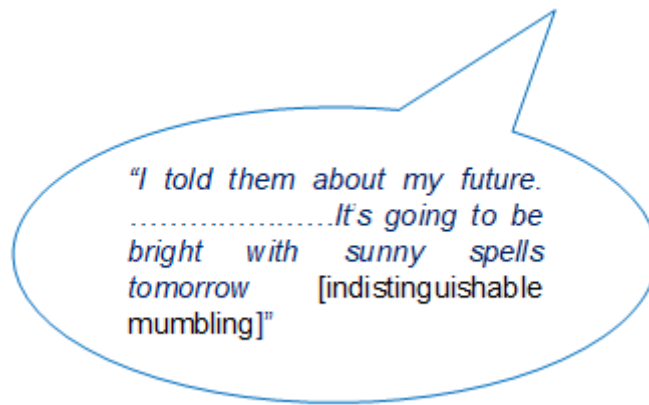


Figure 80 Bakari's Comment

While his interpolating can be very disconcerting for the listener it acts as a self-calming ritual for Bakari. In this example, it would be very easy for a researcher to interpret his meaning to be a subconscious voicing that his future will be *"bright with sunny spells"*

The data notes that three pupils gave unconventional responses that were seemingly irrelevant. In figure 81 Jayden suddenly informed me:



Figure 81 Jayden's Comment

In this example Jayden appears to struggle to keep his communication relevant, but in fact he became distracted by the environment and a small picture of a tiger hanging on the wall.

Sheriff launches into an off-subject response to an open question:

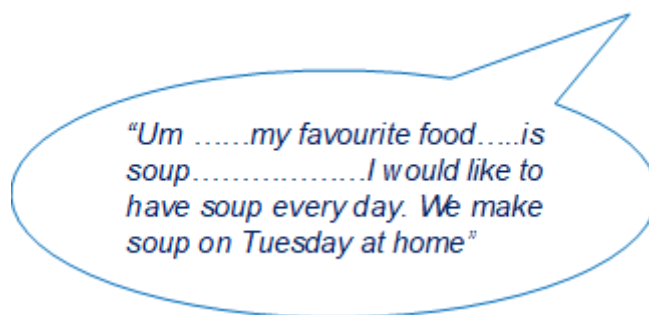
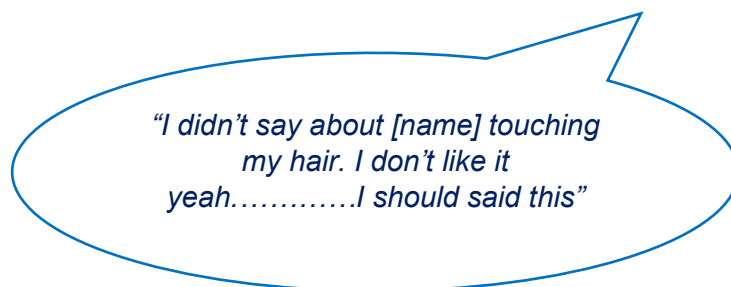


Figure 82 Sheriff's Comment



Figure 82 is probably an example of a pupil struggling to understand and respond appropriately to the question asked.

In figure 83, Imran appears to be off-subject.



*Figure 83 Imran's Comment*

Imran frequently incorporates repeated phrases about his hair when communicating, especially when he is apprehensive, which acts as a functional calming behaviour.

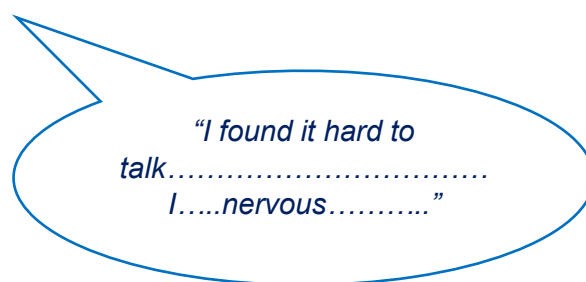
As a researcher, it would be very easy to omit these responses, but I include them because I feel that stripped of idiosyncratic and quirky comments pupils' individual voices are much less authentic and cannot be considered "the real thing" (Coca Cola's marketing slogan introduced in 1969). It might be argued that these incongruous contributions tell us more about individual pupil interests or future selves than data that is more easily interpreted.

Prior to the EHCp meeting, it is evident that school staff attempt to tidy up pupils' responses in *Section A*. There are several noted examples where staff give the impression that the participants communicate using full sentences, whereas, in contrast, the data indicates that pupils are inconsistent in their ability to apply language skills, struggle to structure language into grammatically correct phrases and experience difficulties with linking sentences. Importantly my research highlights that staff make assumptions, for example, in Temi's case his EHCp states that he wants to be a "*football manager*", when in fact his aspirations are far from clear. My findings concur with those of Ashby (2011) who noted a temptation to fill in the blanks to "...seek consistency and cohesion" (para 34). There is evidence in *Section A* that staff 'tidy up' and 'sanitise' pupils' comments perhaps so that what was said will make sense to those reading the EHCp. This distortion of voice, combined with adults interpreting what pupils say to mean what the adults

understand by transposing their adult interpretive perspectives (Spyrou, 2011), leads to inauthentic voice and further dilutes “the real thing”.

The findings take account of silence and especially the time it takes for pupils with cognitive or linguistic challenges to respond. Listening to non-normative voices presents challenges. Lewis (2010, p. 19) has advised listening more carefully and listening better. This requires staff to be more reflexive when interpreting and decoding encounters and necessitates taking account of silences and the time it takes for pupils identified with CMN to respond. Failure to record silence results in the impression that pupils with CMN have normative voices. Speech becomes sanitised when stripped of the pauses and hesitations. Professionals need to pay attention to silence and note and record gaps more accurately instead of attempting to edit them out to ease understanding for the benefit of the EHCp process.

Silence is not neutral or empty and what is not said may be as revealing as what is said. This is certainly the case with Chloe whose body language and countenance revealed a great deal of “silent data” (Mazzei, 2007, p. 632). The challenge is to hear the silence of the body language and facial expressions because silence can speak volumes. In Chloe’s case she was intentionally silent and DWT data reveals anxiety about her EHCp meeting was at the route of her choice not to communicate:



*Figure 84 Chloe's Comment*

It is important to respect Chloe’s right to silence but to be critically reflexive and recognise that her silence is speaking volumes. Spyrou (2016) contends that when researchers fail to take account of silence in their analysis of children’s voices this may act to simplify the “worlds of those we seek to understand” (p. 19) and the opportunity to take account of the complexities of voice. Conversely, Spyrou recognises that encouraging pupils to talk about facets of

their worlds which they find difficult or painful can mean that researchers are faced with ethical dilemmas.

In several instances there are examples of how challenges with language can impinge on understanding. Sheriff, who has language and communication difficulties, probably took the prompt question literally and this would explain why he drew a plan of the meeting room and focused his drawing on the physical environment.

Generally, school staff in this study wanted *Section A* of the EHCp to accurately reflect the pupils' interests, hopes and aspirations. Nevertheless, the findings show that staff frequently 'tidied up' pupils' comments. For example, both Temi and Jamari appear to be able to communicate using grammatically phrased sentences. Overall the discrepancies uncovered reflect the problematic nature of hearing and accurately recording pupils' authentic voices. My research suggests that while *Section A* provides the potentiality for consultation, staff and professionals do not always have the skills or expertise to fully support the voices of pupils for whom speech is unconventional.

## **5.8 Summary and Recommendations**

In line with my research questions, the findings uncovered a wealth of insights into what constitutes voice and participation for pupils in a special school. The DWT approach supported a better symbiosis of voice and participation by encouraging a more complete picture to emerge and the participant's drawings were central to this process. It was apparent that when DWT approaches were combined, and voices listened to, the participants revealed illuminating and multi-layered narratives about their experiences of participation, their future selves and their lived experiences.

The study acknowledges that DWT would not be inclusive for pupils with the most complex communication requirements. This does not absolve schools of their responsibilities towards these learners and staff must be robust in exploring alternative means of communication.

The findings also revealed barriers to participation. This suggests that the principles of voice and participation may not have been implemented as intended by the SEND CoP (2015).

Based on my findings I put forward the following recommendations:

- Staff require training to listen carefully and accurately record or scribe what pupils say, sign or gesture. Staff should not attempt to 'tidy up' *Section A* of the EHCp.
- Staff should respect silence and value idiosyncratic, unrealistic or impractical comments. Ignoring these may delimit authentic voice and act as a form of silencing.
- PCA should be offered and choices as to how pupils communicate at their EHCp meeting.
- Schools should carefully consider the formal procedures and forewarn pupils about EHCp meetings to reduce levels of anxiety and stress.
- Schools should consider having older pupils act as mentors to encourage attendance and participation.

## **CHAPTER 6. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS DATA COLLECTION 2**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I present the key findings and analyse the data from the second AR cycle with the aim of investigating the third research question:

How can practice be improved so that pupils actively participate and contribute to the EHCp process in ways that are inclusive, democratic and move beyond tokenism?

I engage with five pupils' individual voices to examine if the DWT approach can be used effectively in schools by pupils identified with CMN to encourage more inclusive participation. The data and accompanying analysis detail experiences of participation but also unexpected and unique insights into pupils' lived experiences of the transition process.

The presentation of the data in this chapter differs from the previous one as in effect it utilises a case study approach.

### **6.2 Implementing and Revising an Action**

DWT created a platform through which pupils could use visual methods to support communication and active participation. Critically, I implemented a second cycle of AR to investigate whether the DWT approach could be utilised not just as a research tool, but during the EHCp meetings.

#### **6.2.1 Participants**

The criteria for selecting participants was guided by the initial sample and contained pupils who had previously taken part in the first data cycle. This group was selected for pragmatic reasons, namely that I was directed to conduct their EHCp review when the Y14 class teacher was unable to. Initially the cohort consisted of 8 pupils, 7 boys and one girl. However, 2 pupils were ruled out, the first because he had not been in the initial research group and the second, the only female, because she was on work-experience and her family insisted the EHCp review continue without her present, which exemplifies how power is exerted and parental voice still takes precedence over that of pupils. Six families were re-contacted and agreed that the participants could continue to take part in the research if they wished to. However, at a later stage the sixth pupil's EHCp paperwork was subject to a tribunal hearing and I exercised

ethical prudence and withdrew him from the study.

### **6.2.2 Approaches to Drawing in the Second Cycle of AR**

During the first data collection cycle participants were asked to “draw their meeting” after the event. In data collection 2, pupils were invited to draw during their EHCp review meeting. Pupils were given the opportunity to undertake a drawing of their own choice and were free to create from a wide range of drawing materials with access to a spectrum of colours. In addition, pre-drawn speech bubbles of various sizes and shapes were added because pupils frequently drew these in the first DWT cycle. The unstructured approach meant that pupils were given a choice as no instructions about what or who to draw were issued. I acknowledge that this open-ended approach ran the risk of participants not engaging or creating drawings quite different to anything I might have foreseen. In the event, what pupils chose to draw was fascinating and provided a rich pool of data. When the formalised EHCp review was completed, pupils were invited to talk about their drawings. Critically, the “tell” component enabled pupils to communicate about their drawing or discuss points that had arisen in their review meetings. Importantly, this allowed me to clarify misunderstandings and check for meaning-making. Significantly, this resulted in a variety of insights into pupils’ drawings and meaning-making during the EHCp review.

### **6.2.3 Approach to Data in the Second Cycle of AR**

The DWT session undertaken in the second AR cycle were recorded, thus ensuring accurate transcriptions were made. During the first recording, I was aware that the session felt different and that I was asking lots of questions. When I commenced the rough transcription, I was not surprised that the DWT sessions followed the format of an unstructured interview, although not particularly conversational in style. Interestingly, the initial method, as detailed in my research proposal, was semi-structured interviews. The five recorded transcriptions and the accompanying interpretive dialogue provided a more detailed account of what was said, signed or gestured but also the way in which this was communicated. This supported a more comprehensive exploration of meaning-making and shed light on pupils’ experiences of voice and participation during the EHCp process.

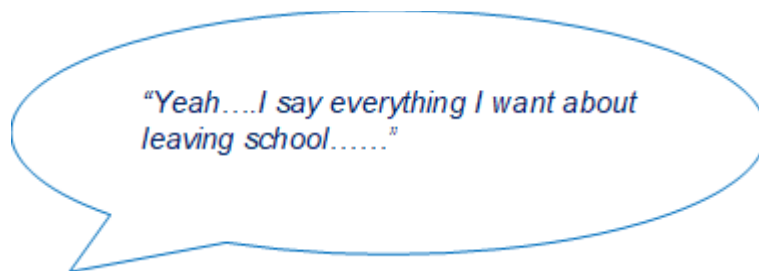
#### **6.2.4 Key Themes**

In line with my research question the primary aim of data collection 2 was to establish to what extent pupils could utilise drawing to enable voice and active participation during the EHCp review. The findings reveal that the Y14 pupils could highlight some of the inclusive benefits of drawing.

The DWT findings warrant a more in-depth analysis of pupils' understanding of aspects of transition. The Y14 group were in their final year of school and this is a significant period when pupils face major changes to their lives. Transition for disabled young people requires decisions to be made about accessing university or further education or entering training, or employment. Preparation for adulthood investigates leisure and social life opportunities, selfcare and independent living skills and supports pupils to establish themselves as autonomous individuals. It is not surprising that transition emerged as a significant theme.

#### **6.3 Finding 1: Pupils' Experiences of Participation During the EHCp Review**

All 5 participants contributed to their EHCp review and the findings correlate with those in data capture 1. Figures 85-88 illustrate that 4 out of the 5 participants made comments demonstrating that they had engaged and participated during their EHCp meeting.



*Figure 85 Sheriff's Comment*

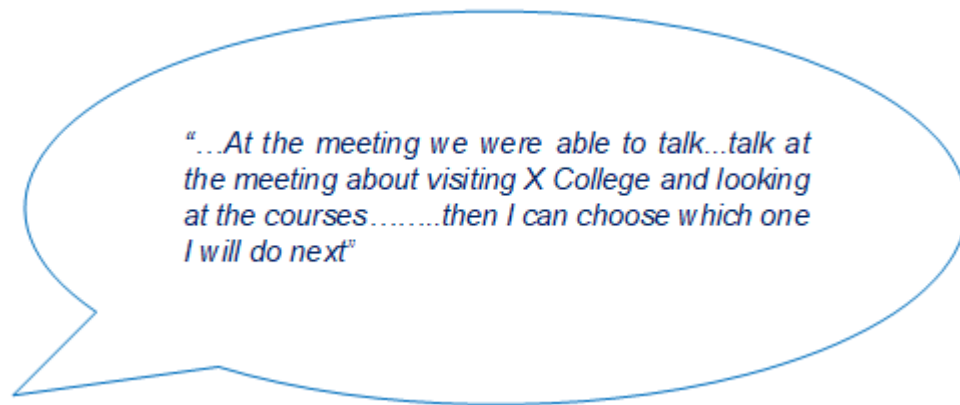


Figure 86 Abdel's Comment

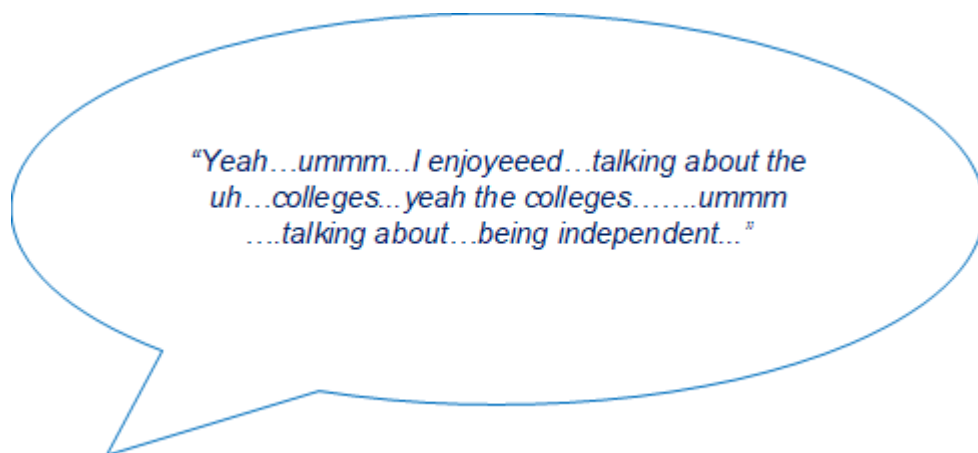


Figure 87 Javier's Comment

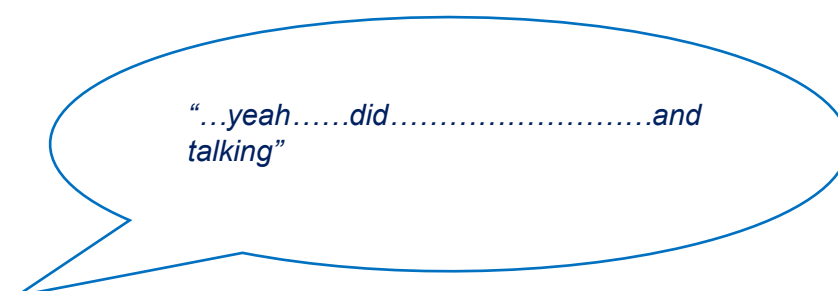


Figure 88 Jamari's Comment

Figures 85-88 demonstrate that pupils participated in the EHCp review process and three of the participants could express views about the upcoming changes in their lives.



As in data collection 1, the findings note that DWT activities supported participation. All the participants drew or wrote during their annual review and some directly commented on the benefits.

Abdel's comments in figure 89 make it apparent that for him this was a pleasurable activity:

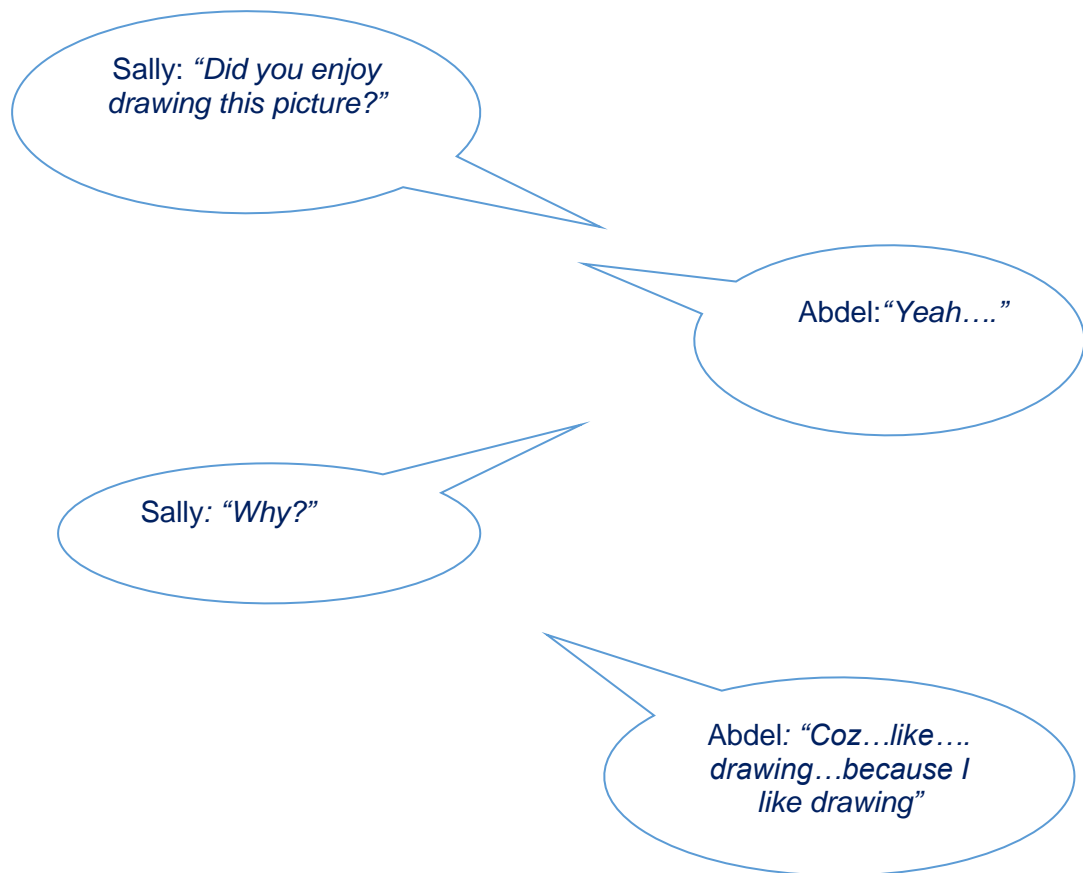


Figure 89 Extract from Interpretive Dialogue

Sheriff describes the DWT activities as "*fun*" in figure 90:



Figure 90 Sheriff's Comment

For Jamari, drawing made it “*easier*” for him to talk and share his experiences:

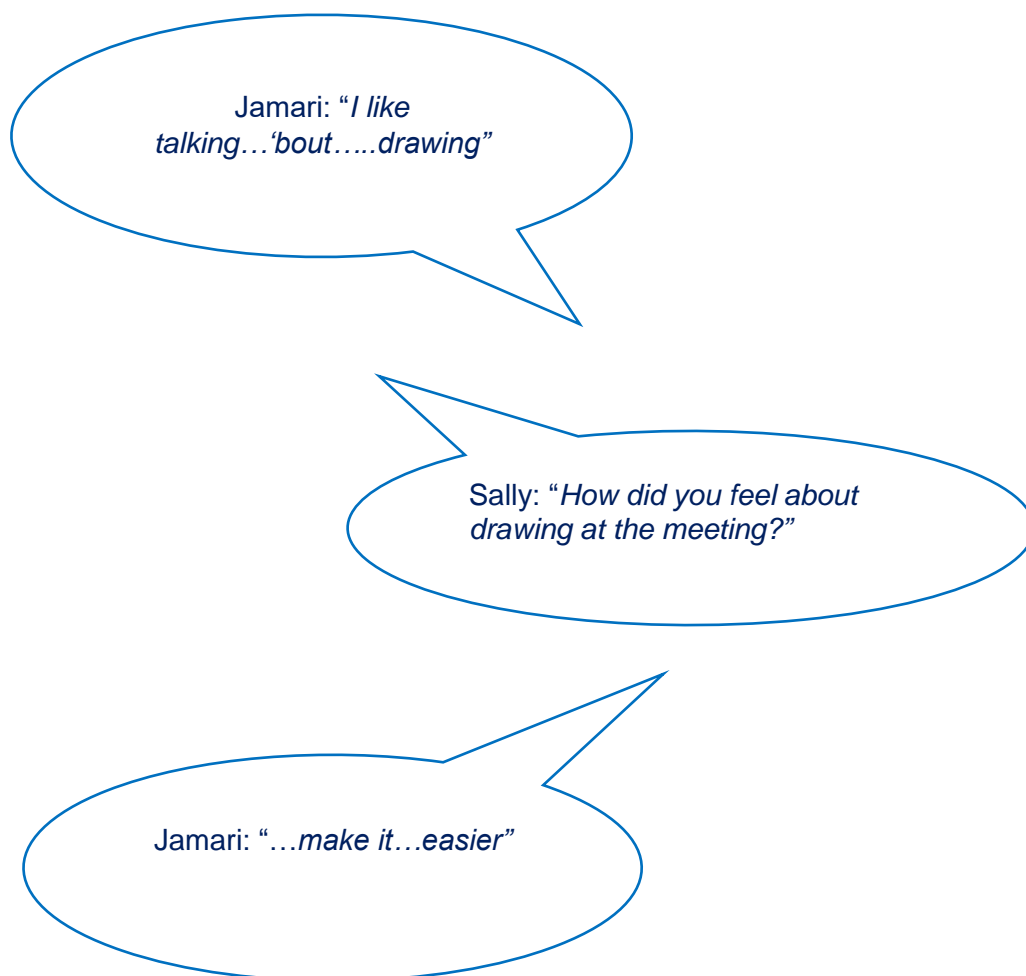
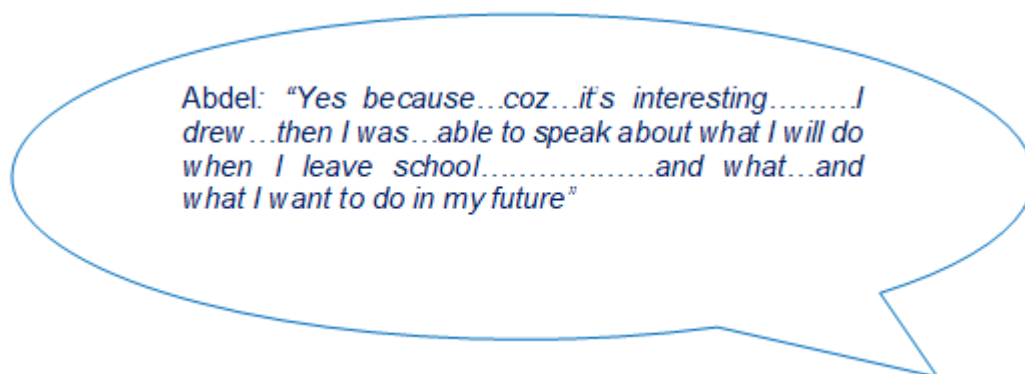


Figure 91 Extract from Interpretive Dialogue

Some pupils were able to give a more nuanced account of how the act of drawing supported voice and facilitated participation. In figure 92 Abdel indicates that the act of drawing made him “*focus*” on what he wanted to say about transition:



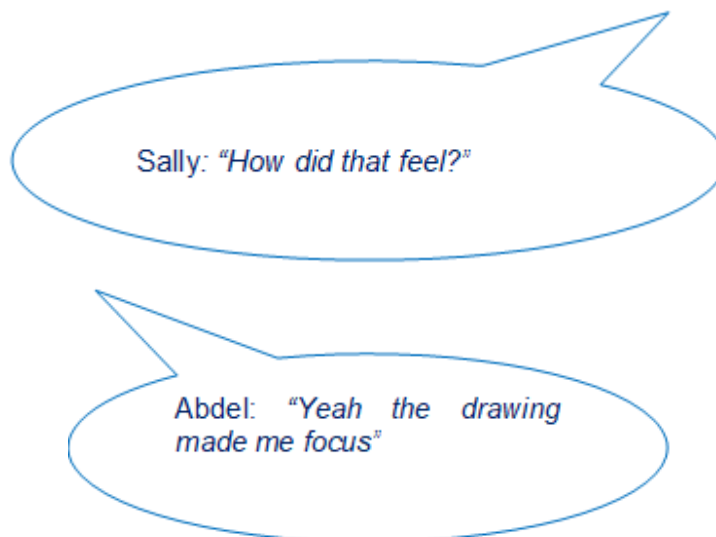


Figure 92 Extract from Interpretive Dialogue

In figure 93 Javier reflects that the process of drawing can help pupils to “*talk about fings*” and express views especially if they struggle with literacy:

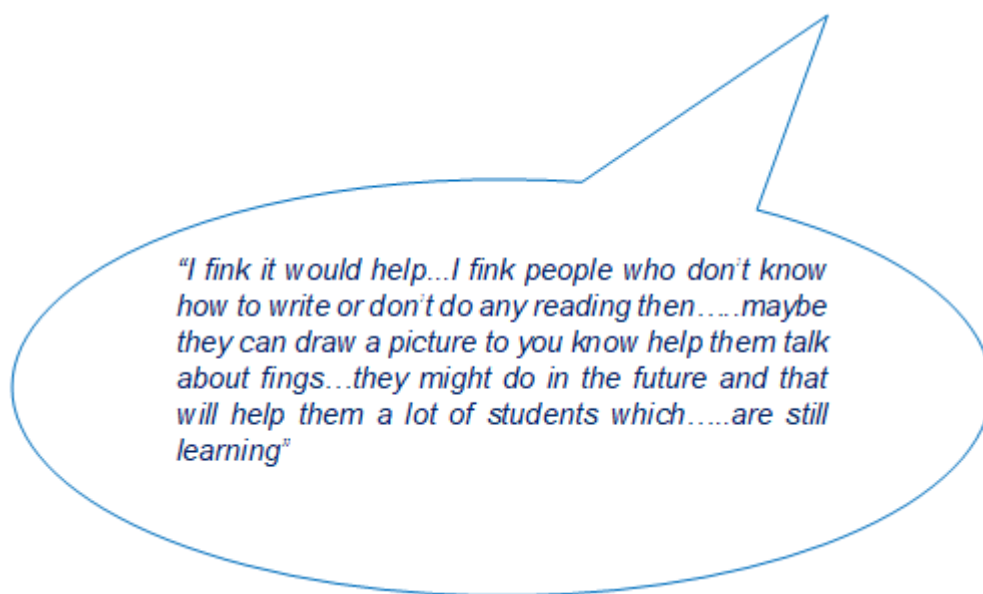


Figure 93 Javier's Comment

The comments highlight that drawing, writing and visualisation can aid communication and more meaningful engagement. Javier explains that the act of drawing helped him to focus on what he wanted to say and, for pupils with limited literacy skills (like himself), drawing can facilitate and guide discussion and help the process of the abstract to become concrete. Javier's comments in figure 94 also hint at the difficulties that he and other pupils experience with ordering thoughts and expressing their views:

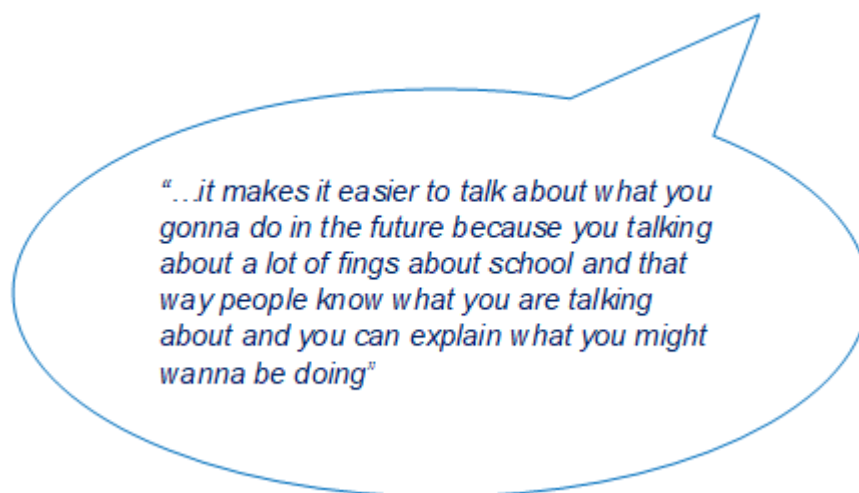


Figure 94 Javier's Comment

Arguably, for pupils identified with CMN, participating in their EHCp review was an emancipatory experience because the emphasis was on their opinions. DWT activities conducted in the second cycle had the benefit of providing an opportunity for participants to choose the subject matter of their pictures and this allowed pupils to select a focus relevant to their lives and interests. Furthermore, this generated unique data regarding transition that allowed pupils' authentic voices to be placed at the forefront of the study.

### **6.3.2 Pupils' Experiences of Being Listened to**

Participation Works (Davey, *et al.*, 2010) laid out four core principles for participation, the first of which was "listening to children and young people of all ages" (p. 11). Javier comments directly on the experience of being listened to and what he has to say is illuminating:

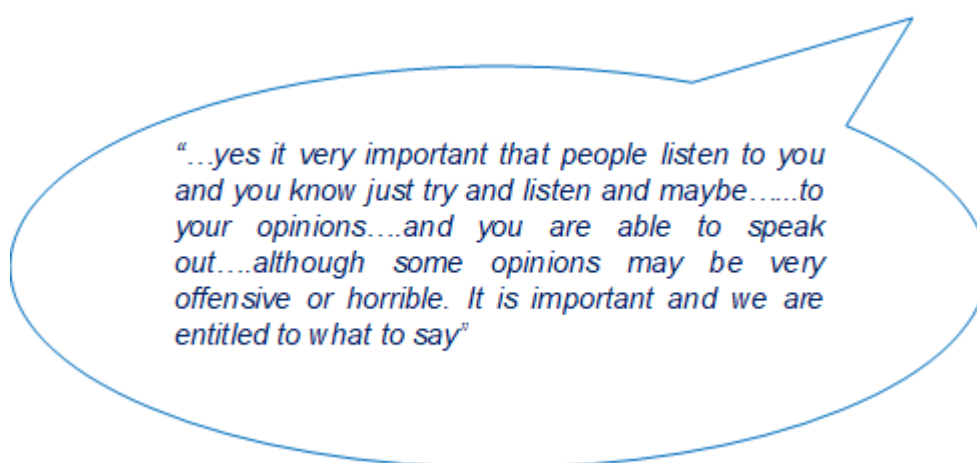


Figure 95 Javier's Comment

Javier only started to use speech in Y 9; prior to this his communication was non-verbal. Although, he is particularly articulate his voice is often hard to hear because he speaks quietly in a monotone and has significant word-finding difficulties which can reduce his intelligibility. When he says it's "*very important that people listen to you*" this statement conveys his first-hand experience of having his opinions dismissed because he was literally unable to make his voice heard.

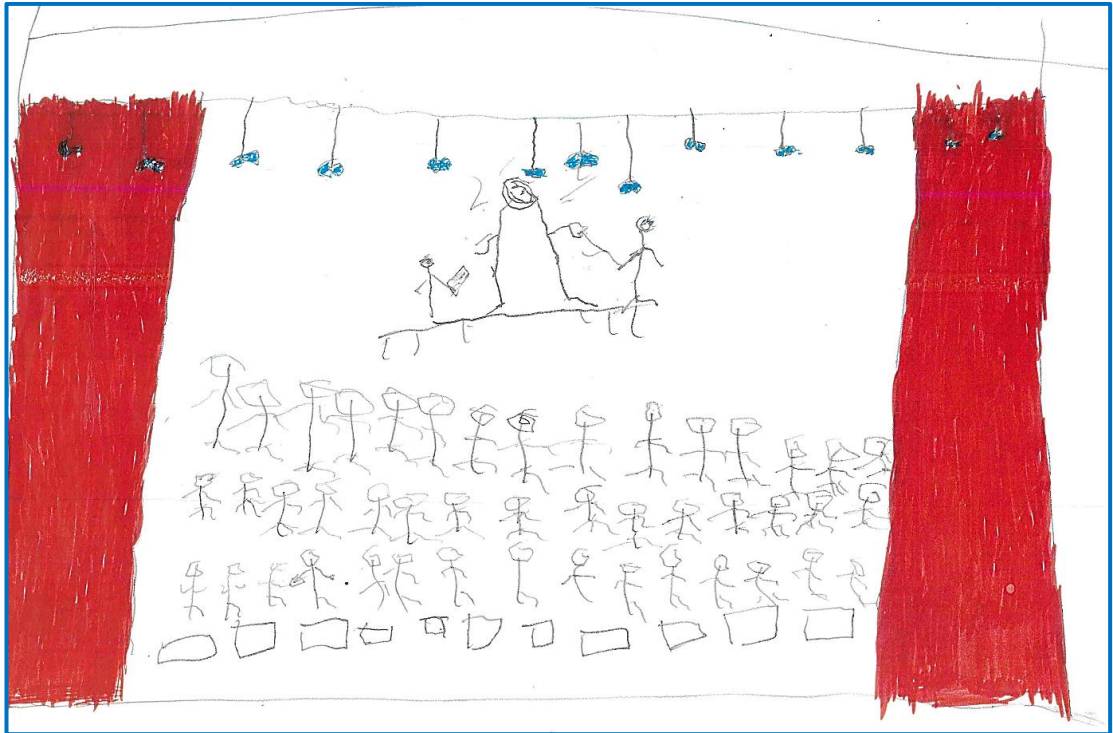
#### **6.4 Finding 2: Pupils' Individual Experiences of Participation and Voice**

My research suggest that a creative and visual methodology can empower the voices of pupils identified with CMN and enable rich and complex insights into the participants' lived experience to emerge. Eldén (2012) uses visual methods to explore the voices of young children and contends that these techniques do not uncover the "authentic, unconscious voice of the child". Nevertheless, she argues that the narratives constructed during these encounters provide a platform that allows the "multidimensionality" (p. 77) of children's voices to surface and "challenge what is known" (p. 78). My findings concur that the DWT approach revealed insights into participation but additionally uncovered unexpected narratives about self, identity and transition.

It is striking that all 5 of the pupils' drawings feature people prominently. In 4 out of the 5 pictures the person drawn was the self. Hawkins (2002) asserts that drawing offers typically developing children a powerful medium for seeking self and identity. Matthews (1999) contends that human representations are "concerned with the children's search for their own identities as well as the identities and structures of events and objects" (p. 30). It could be argued that the following 5 drawings and the accompanying dialogues illustrate pupils' struggles to make sense of their figured worlds (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain, 1998) and their growing awareness of selfhood.

#### **6. 4.1 Javier's Experience of Participation**

Javier's picture gave me the impression that he is full of enthusiasm and optimism about his future. During his review meeting, he discusses his progress towards his EHCp outcomes, preparation for adulthood and transition. The DWT data indicates that he is aware of some of the challenges he faces transitioning to adulthood. He talks eloquently about leaving school and his drawing depicts an event in his near future.



*Figure 96 Javier's Drawing: "Yeah...so this is my idea of the future and what it's gonna look like when I leave"*

Javier drew the picture in figure 96 during his EHCp meeting. He began with the line across the bottom of the page and then drew two rectangular shapes at either side of the page and then a pointed arch. It later transpired that this represented a stage complete with lighting and curtains. The use of the colour red for the curtains injects a sense of creativity and drama to the picture. The drawing has large numbers of stick figures who represent the audience. Three human figures are depicted centre stage. The largest figure in the centre represents Javier. This figure has a face with two eyes and an upturned smiling mouth. The stick figure has two lines for a body and arms. Furth (2002) contends that the proportions of an object or person in a drawing may represent

a child's sense of self. Javier has depicted himself centre stage receiving a certificate at the Leavers' Assembly. The smaller figure on the right represents the Deputy Headteacher who is shaking hands with Javier, while the Headteacher is on Javier's left and is handing him a "well done" certificate.

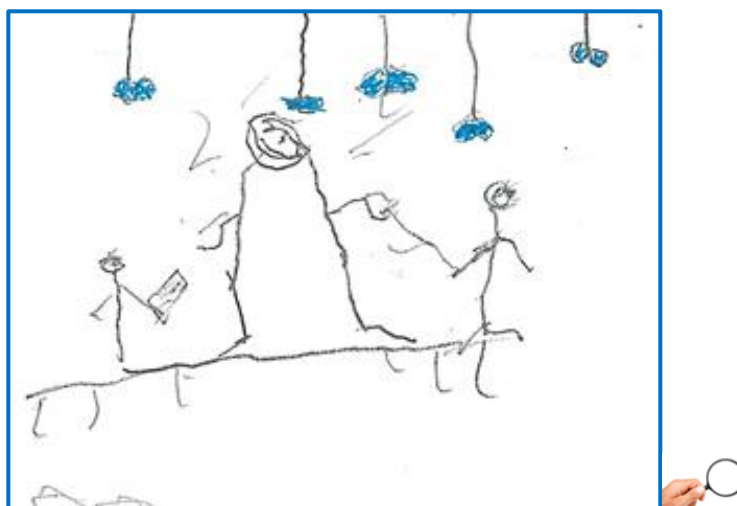


Figure 97 Javier's Drawing

Javier's depiction demonstrates a clear understanding that he will be leaving school at the end of Y14 and he will be the most important person on the stage. In fact, he will be the central focus, and this accounts for the size differentiation. Additionally, the picture suggests that the Leavers' Assembly is a significant event that he is looking forward to and his smiling facial expression indicates that he is happy at the prospect of leaving school.

During the DWT session, Javier used his drawing to convey his views and experiences about a range of topics. Cameron and Clark (2004) suggest that researchers may learn a lot from listening to young children's talking while they are drawing. My study suggests that fascinating information can be gleaned from listening while pupils draw.

In figure 98 Javier talks about possibly becoming an “*artist*” in the future.

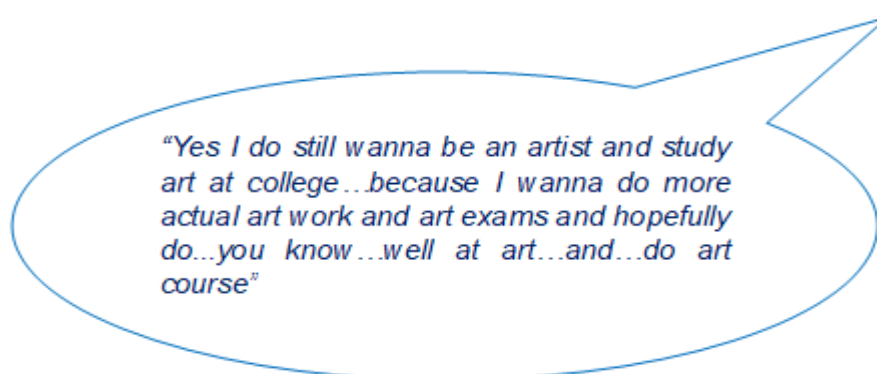


Figure 98 Javier's Comment

Interestingly, he is a commissioned artist, as he has been asked, via the school, to design the inside cover for a book about trees.

In figure 99 Javier deliberated on his part-time employment for the LA as a Disability Champion. He attends disability provision, such as specialist youth clubs or short courses funded by the LA specifically for disabled young adults, and provides feedback about his experiences:

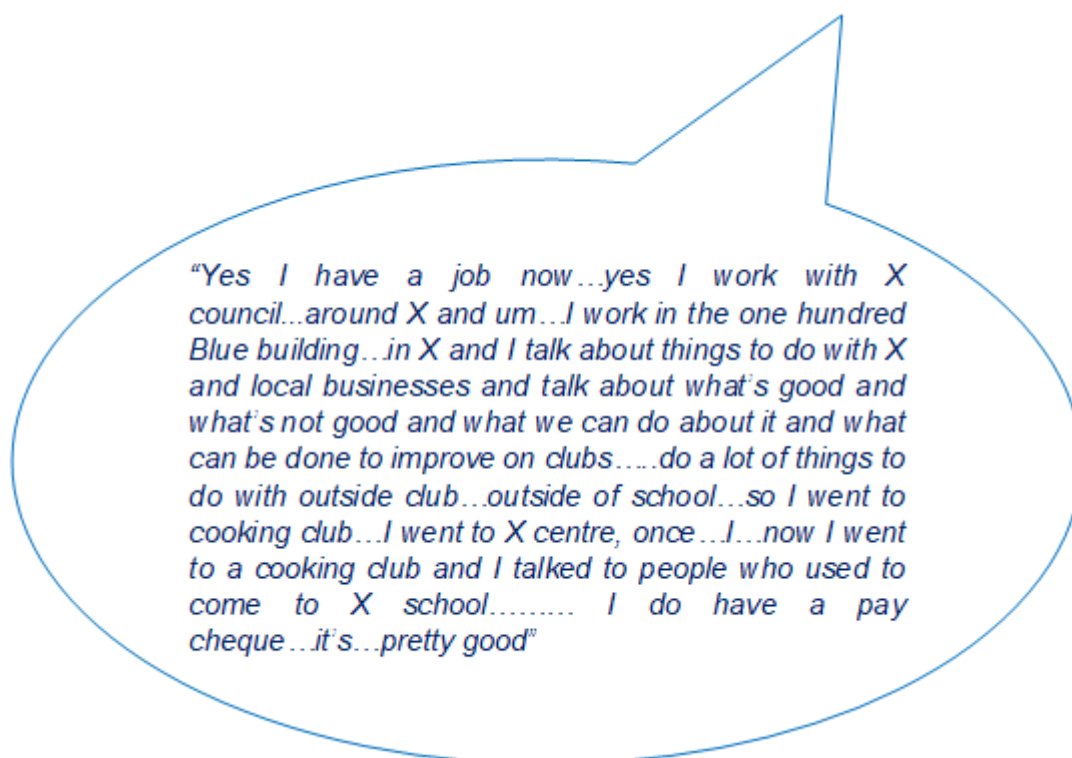


Figure 99 Javier's Comment



Javier discussed his feelings about bereavement, becoming an independent adult and the importance of developing self-care skills:

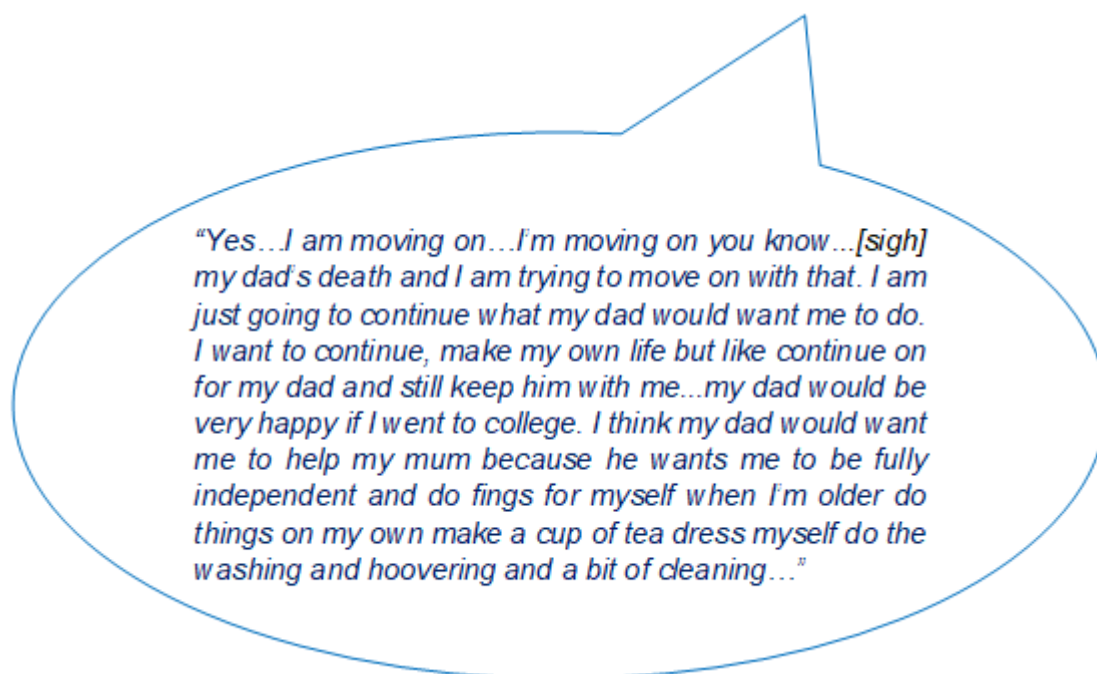


Figure 100 Javier's Comment

During this encounter Javier talks about aspects of his future and the progress made towards his outcomes, such as the ability to travel to and from school independently, his wish to study art, his paid part-time employment and the need to take responsibility for his self-care. His narratives demonstrate that he can speak as the expert on his own life. Javier imparted a wealth of information that could be critical to understanding disability issues and his insights make him an excellent Disability Champion. However, it would be contradictory to give prominence in this study to his voice over other participants.

Nevertheless, despite his eloquence and understanding that he would transition to college the EHCp review revealed that he was unable to name a college or give clear preferences as to which course he would like to follow.

### 6.4.2 Abdel's Experience of Participation

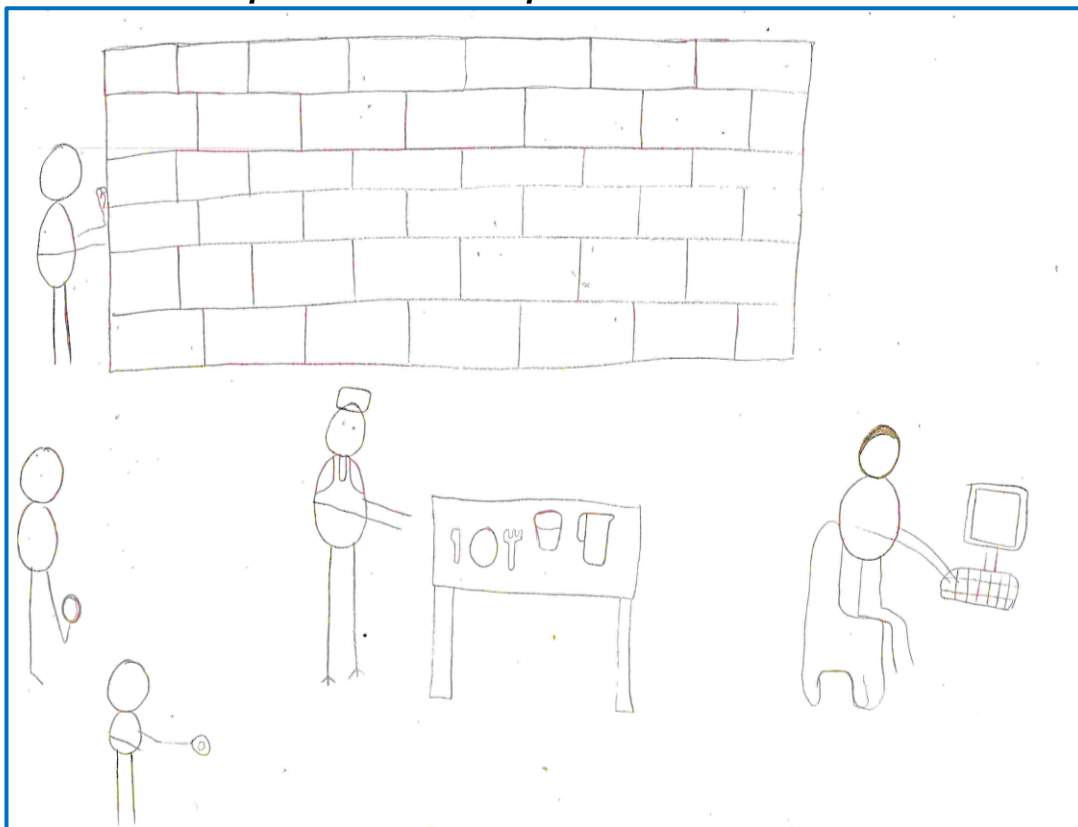


Figure 101 Abdel's Drawing: "I drew then I was...able to speak about what I will do when I leave school"

Abdel selected a brown pencil and drew throughout the EHCp review. In figure 101 he depicted himself engaged in a variety of activities including building a perfect stretcher bond wall. During the DWT session Abdel referred to his drawing and explained that he was interested in undertaking a construction course because he enjoyed *"mixing mortar"* and especially liked the *"wobble"* sound the cement mixer made. To the right of the page, he drew himself sitting at a computer and he explained he was *"looking at pictures of buses"*. It would be wrong to assume that Abdel is indicating an interest in pursuing either construction or computing as a career because the reasons he gave for enjoying these activities are very specific and not necessarily conducive to working in either of these fields. On the left of the page he has drawn two figures engaged in sports activities. One is him playing football; the other is him playing tennis. Abdel clarified that he was interested in *"sports"* and especially *"football"*. In the middle of his drawing Abdel depicted a table complete with plate, knife and fork and a cup and jug and portrayed himself on his work-

experience placement standing beside the table laying the cutlery wearing a chef's hat and apron.

The human figures in the drawing follow a similar schema and consist of a circle to represent the head with an oval shape to represent the body, two straight lines to represent arms and another two to signify legs. The HFD resemble stick people and apart from the chef's hat and apron are devoid of clothes. Interestingly the HFD lack detail and this contributes to the impression that it is the activities portrayed that are important.

During the DWT Abdel uses his drawing to explain that he wants to go to college next year. Abdel may be interested in construction, ICT, catering or sports courses, or he may be simply listing activities that he has already experienced at college.

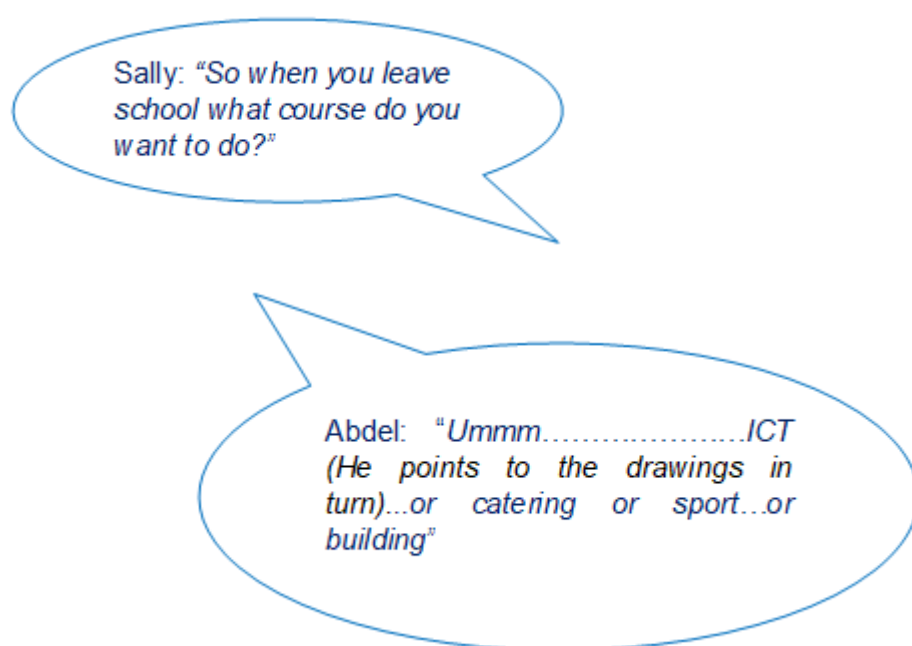


Figure 102 Extract from Interpretive Dialogue

Prior to his EHCp meeting, Abdel was mixing the ingredients for a sponge in the school kitchen, where he was on a long-term 1 day a week work placement. During the review meeting Abdel's successful catering experience placements in two local cafés were discussed with him and his mother. In figure 103 Abdel has depicted himself setting a table.

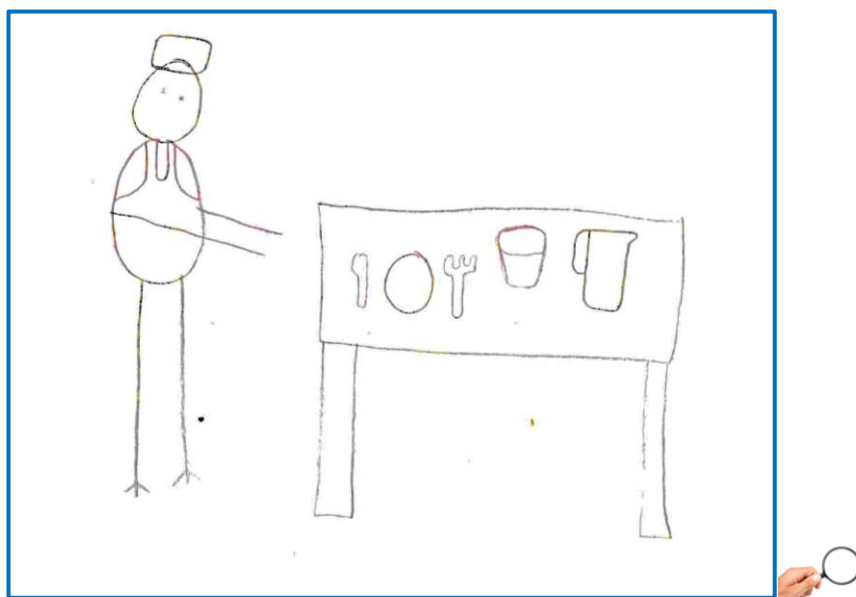


Figure 103 Abdel's Drawing

Significantly Abdel did not reveal any further information about his intention to undertake a catering course or pursue a career in catering. Even though I tried to glean more information as the exchange in figure 104 illustrates:

Sally: "Um...what food have you been you making?"  
(pointing to the human figure in the picture)

Abdel: "ummm.....stacking knives and.. fork andddd...p...plates ..... cleaning table away....."

Sally: "Oh I see you are clearing the tables and taking away the cutlery and plates.....this is a picture of you (pointing to the figure by the table) and you are wearing a..."

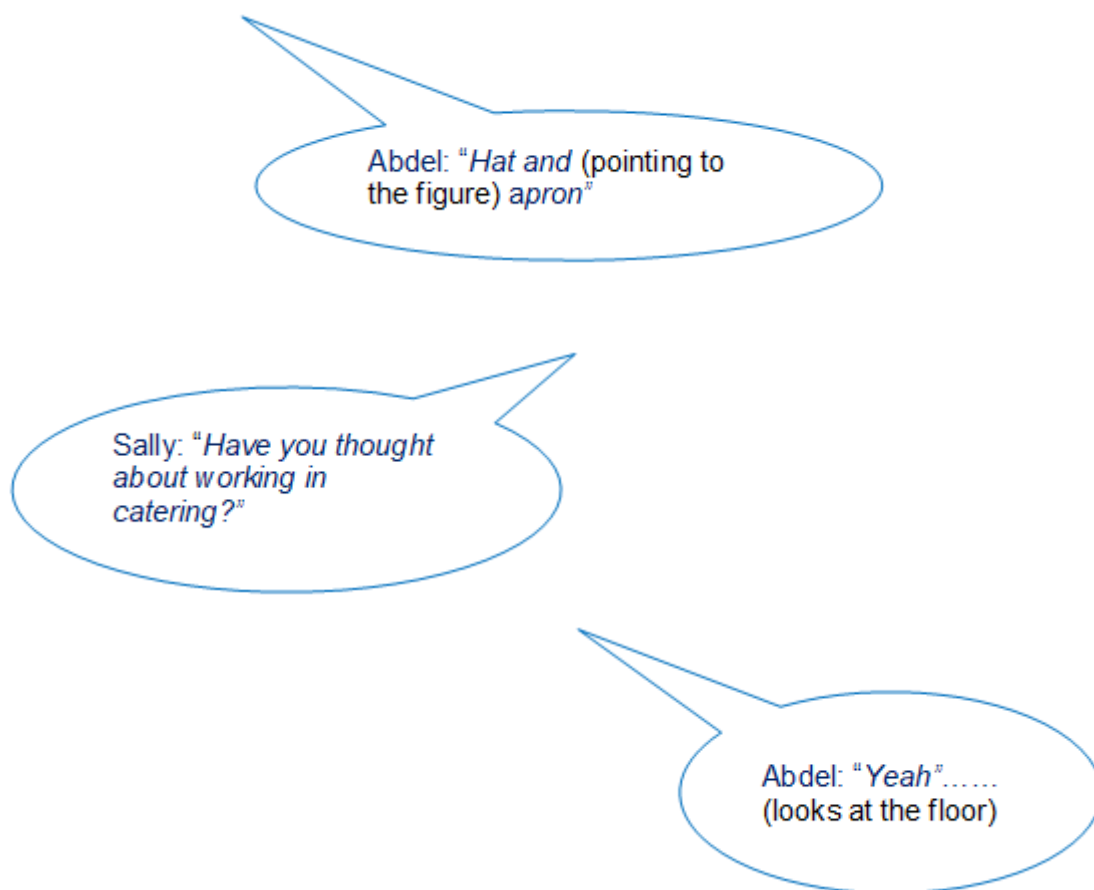


Figure 104 Extract from Interpretive Dialogue

My poor phrasing of questions was an ill-judged attempt to guide Abdel to give more detail about his cooking experiences and I could legitimately be accused of putting words into the participant's mouth. Abdel's answer is literal, he tells me precisely what the figure in the picture is doing. He is unable to provide any information about his cooking experiences. This gives the impression that Abdel's catering experiences are limited to laying out and clearing away cutlery. In fact, Abdel has had a great deal of experience of food preparation, but he does not volunteer this information. Instead, he tells me about the clothes he wears in the school canteen. I prompt him, but I get the strong impression from his body language that Abdel is either unable or does not want to discuss this. There appears to be a disconnect between work-experience and a career in catering and Abdel seems unable to imagine himself employed. Perhaps Abdel enjoys working in a kitchen but does not see this as a future occupation. This may be a good example of the importance of listening and noting not just what is voiced but "the silent, the unclear and incoherent" (Spyrou, 2016, p. 23) during DWT encounters. As I demonstrated, simply repeating questions that

strive for more conventional responses to omissions will not unlock Abdel's figured world.

Although Abdel is unsure about his longer-term career options he is clearer about more immediate aspects of his future. Abdel has an in-depth interest in buses and consequently is very knowledgeable about bus routes. He has depicted himself at the back of the bus travelling independently to college. For Abdel the concept of his future self, striving for independence, is encapsulated in the speech bubble below.

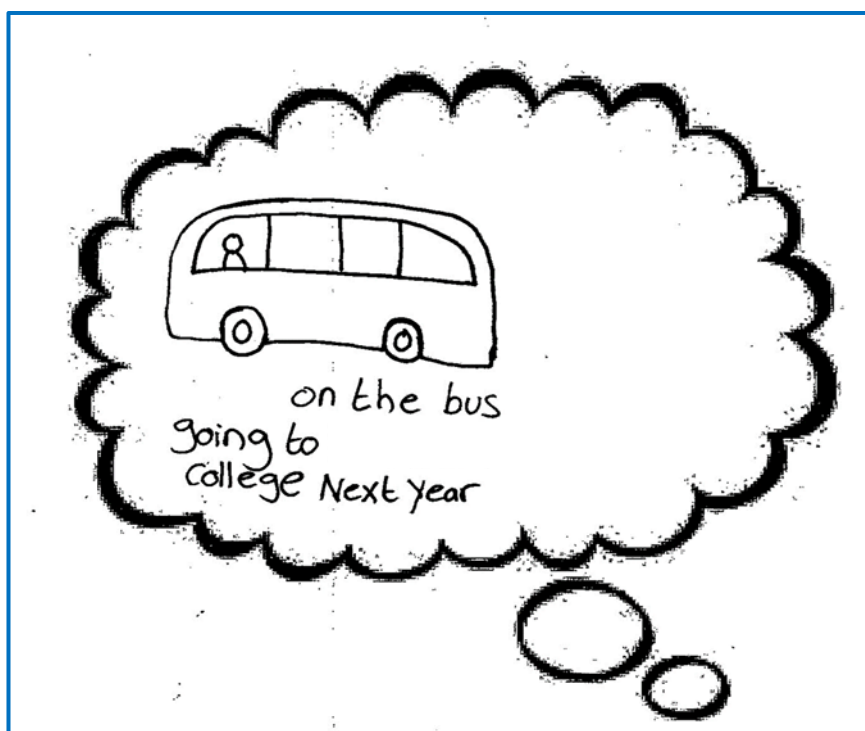


Figure 105 Abdel's Speech Bubble

Figure 105 illustrates that Abdel understands that he will be leaving school and transitioning to college. His comments about his drawings indicate that from his perspective the EHCp meeting gave him the opportunity to discuss his future options and *"talk at the meeting about visiting college and looking at the courses...then I can choose which one I will do next"*. His drawings also suggest that DWT provided a means for Abdel to voice his opinions and structure his thoughts independently.

### 6.4.3 Anthony's Experience of Participation

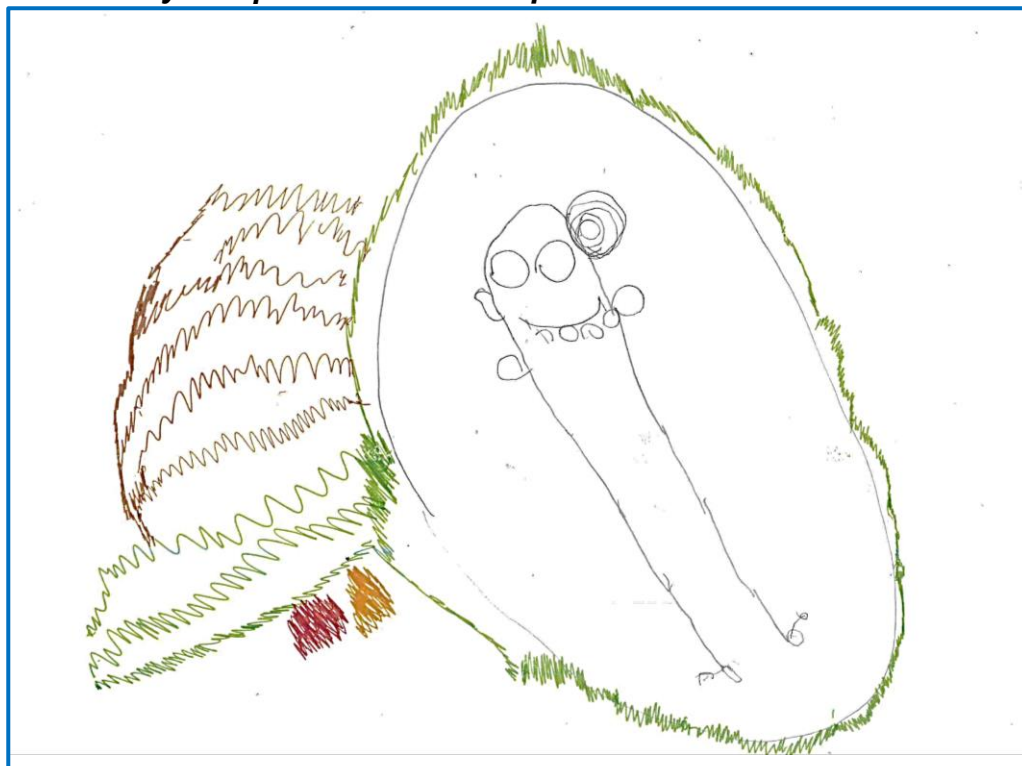
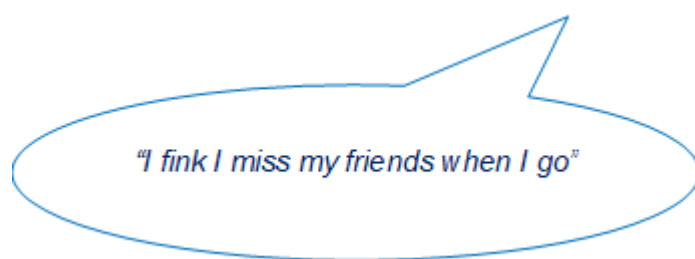


Figure 106 Anthony's Drawing: "yeah...um this is me doing work-experience"

Anthony selected a pencil and drew a phallic floating figure in the centre of the page. The person has large eyes, huge ears and a smiling upturned mouth complete with teeth. This figure may have hands and possibly feet. The drawing is like the tadpole depictions he drew in a previous DWT session, in which the incomplete human forms are shown as floating without any awareness of vital body parts such as a trunk, arms or legs. He enclosed the figure in an oval shape and used a green pen to outline it. He used a green and then a brown felt tip and added a series of wiggly lines which represent "*planting*". During the DWT session, he added red and orange flourishes and by checking I understood that this represented "*carrots*" and "*tomatoes*". These anamorphic forms and shapes help Anthony communicate and give us some insight into his figured world. Anthony was very clear about the subject of his drawing: "*this is me at root and shoots*" and I understood that he has drawn himself in his work-experience placement. This is an environmental educational charity based in London with half an acre of garden, where young people can learn horticulture and basic gardening skills to prepare themselves for the world of work. His drawing, and what he told me about it, created the impression that Anthony enjoys gardening and may pursue this as a career. The year before he

explained that he was interested in carpentry, probably because he was undertaking a construction course at the time. A year on, his drawing and the ensuing exchange, centred on his work-experience placement. It would therefore be a mistake to presume that Anthony wishes to take up gardening as a career. His cognition, limited memory and recall skills mean that he prefers the concrete. In fact, when Anthony left school he went on to a full-time access placement at college.

In figure 107, Anthony's comment makes it clear that he is aware that he was leaving school. He expresses his emotions using the Makaton sign "sad". Like many of the pupils, he reflects that he will miss his peers:



*Figure 107 Anthony's Comment*

Anthony communicates his feelings using a mix of Makaton, single word utterances and occasionally a simple sentence. Much of what he communicates about his future needs to be read in the context of the interpretive dialogue and is related specifically to his drawing and his work-experience placement. In data collection 1 Anthony drew lots of smaller drawings and told me about each of these in turn. Interestingly, Anthony could impart less information when he had only one drawing to reference. This disparity suggests that drawing for Anthony acted as a springboard for remembering and supported recall. It is as if the visuals act like a train track, creating a pathway, and without this he is unable to voice any further opinions or information.

Anthony's drawings and communication could be considered discordant and certainly challenge normative conventions; nevertheless they convey dimensions of his figured worlds. It is important not to insist that pupils' responses conform to the expectations of the EHCp process, but allow pupils the freedom to participate authentically.



#### 6.4.4 Jamari's Experience of Participation



Figure 108 Jamar's Drawing: "yeah... I love my family...I want...draw them"

Jamari selected a pencil and drew a series of human figures representing his family, which he independently labelled. During the EHCp meeting, he added two smaller figures between his mum and dad. He drew "Trey" his younger brother and "Trelly" who he described as his brother but is his cousin. Jamari confuses many basic facts including names and relationships. Jamari selects a red and green pen to draw his sister's "suit" and a blue pencil to depict his mother's dress (she was in fact wearing a blue dress). The males in the pictures have different shape bodies and are wearing "trousers". The humans are smiling, and this conveys an impression of a happy family scene. The importance of his family is evident, and Jamari says that he wants to live with his family "always" and states:

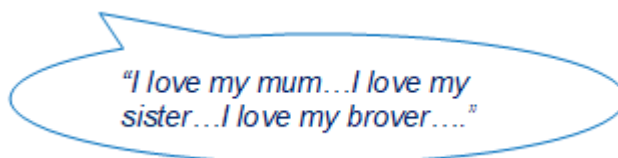


Figure 109 Jamari's Comment

Interestingly, Jamari has not depicted himself in his drawing. When asked about this, he tells me he is “out”, meaning literally that he is “out” of the picture. This conveys the impression that Jamari has not yet developed a strong concept of self and any hypothetical plans in respect of his future revolve round his family. When Jamari talks about getting a job in the future, it is in the context of impressing his younger brother:

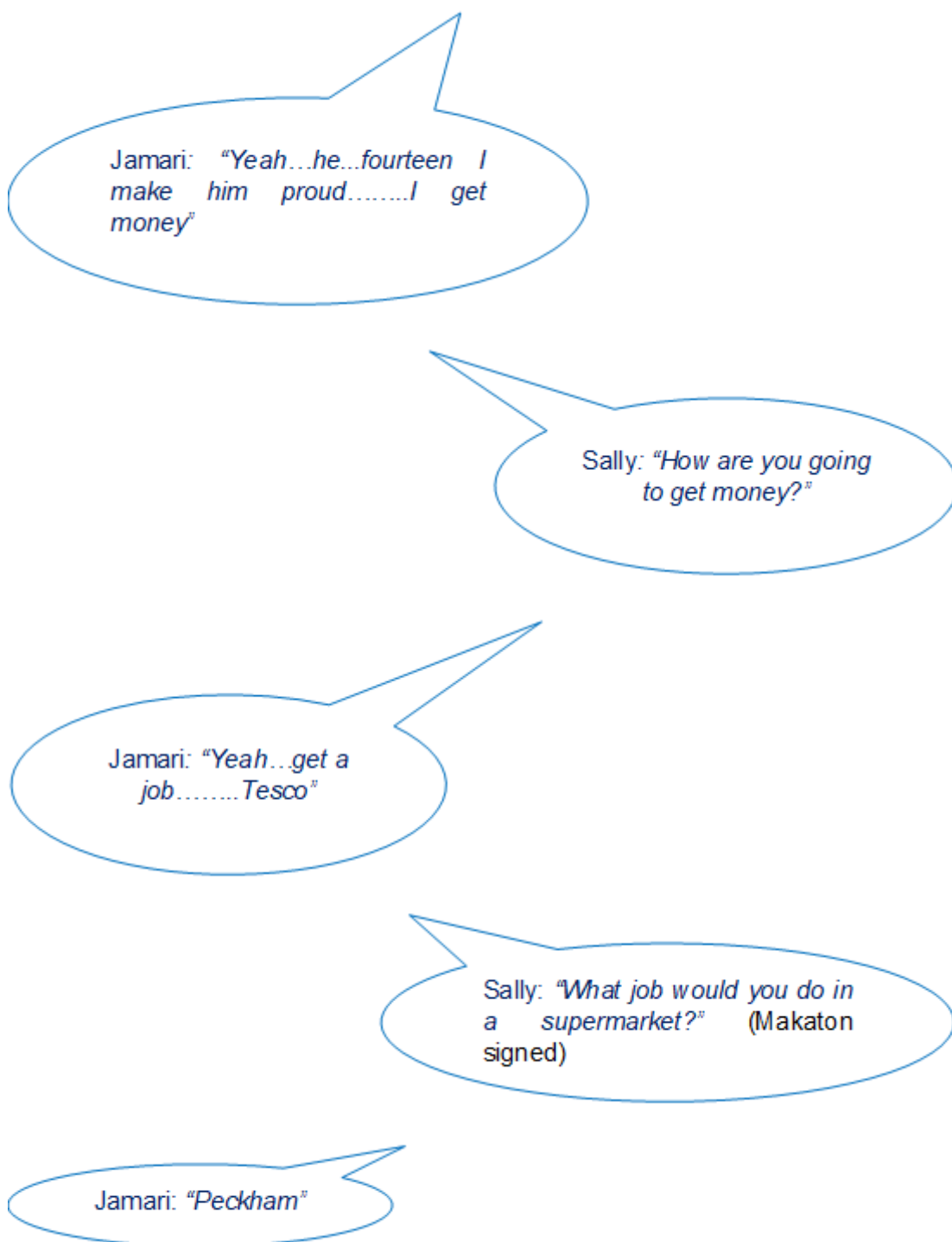
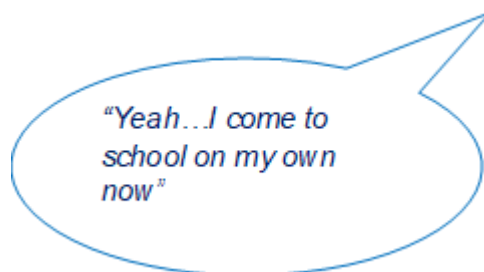


Figure 110 Extract from Interpretive Dialogue

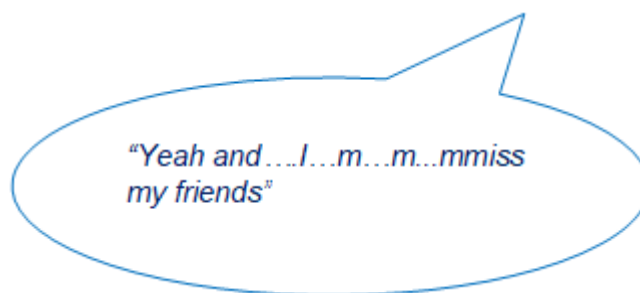
Initially I cannot understand Jamari's response, but I later realise, that he has confused what and where. He is referring to a supermarket in "*Peckham*" where he would have seen disabled young people employed. Jamari appears to be aware that adults need to get a job to earn money. However, his mother felt that he was not ready for work and was adamant that she did not want him to collect trolleys in a supermarket. His mother wanted Jamari to go to college and do an access course. Jamari has completed a 2-year 1-day-a-week catering placement in a commercial kitchen. He could realistically undertake a catering course, but he makes no mention of this and seems completely unaware that this is an option when he leaves school.

Independent travel is an issue, as Jamari cannot use public transport without adult support, and is particularly vulnerable in the community. This makes transition to either college or a work placement difficult, as he would need to be escorted. He lives near school and appeared very proud that he has recently begun to walk independently:



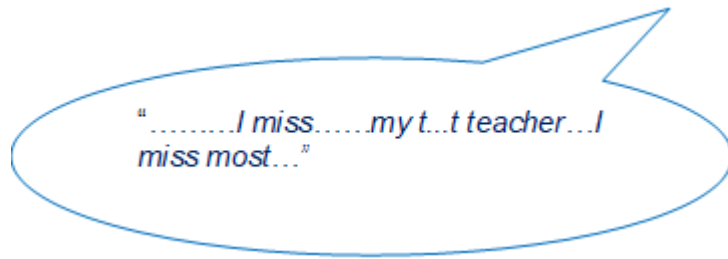
*Figure 111 Jamari's Comment*

In figure 112 it is evident that friendships are important, and Jamari will miss his "*best friends*" when he leaves school:



*Figure 112 Jamari's Comment*

Jamari indicates several times that he will miss school and the staff:



*Figure 113 Jamari's Comment*

For Jamari, it appears that school provides an environment in which he feels safe and can engage in appropriate social interactions with peers and staff. Jamari's drawing and comments illustrate that home and school are of primary importance and play a significant role in his life. Transition will mean that Jamari will leave behind the familiar environment of school and enter a very challenging phase. The overall impression given is that Jamari will be very much reliant on his family in terms of future support.

### 6.4.5 Sheriff's Experience of Participation

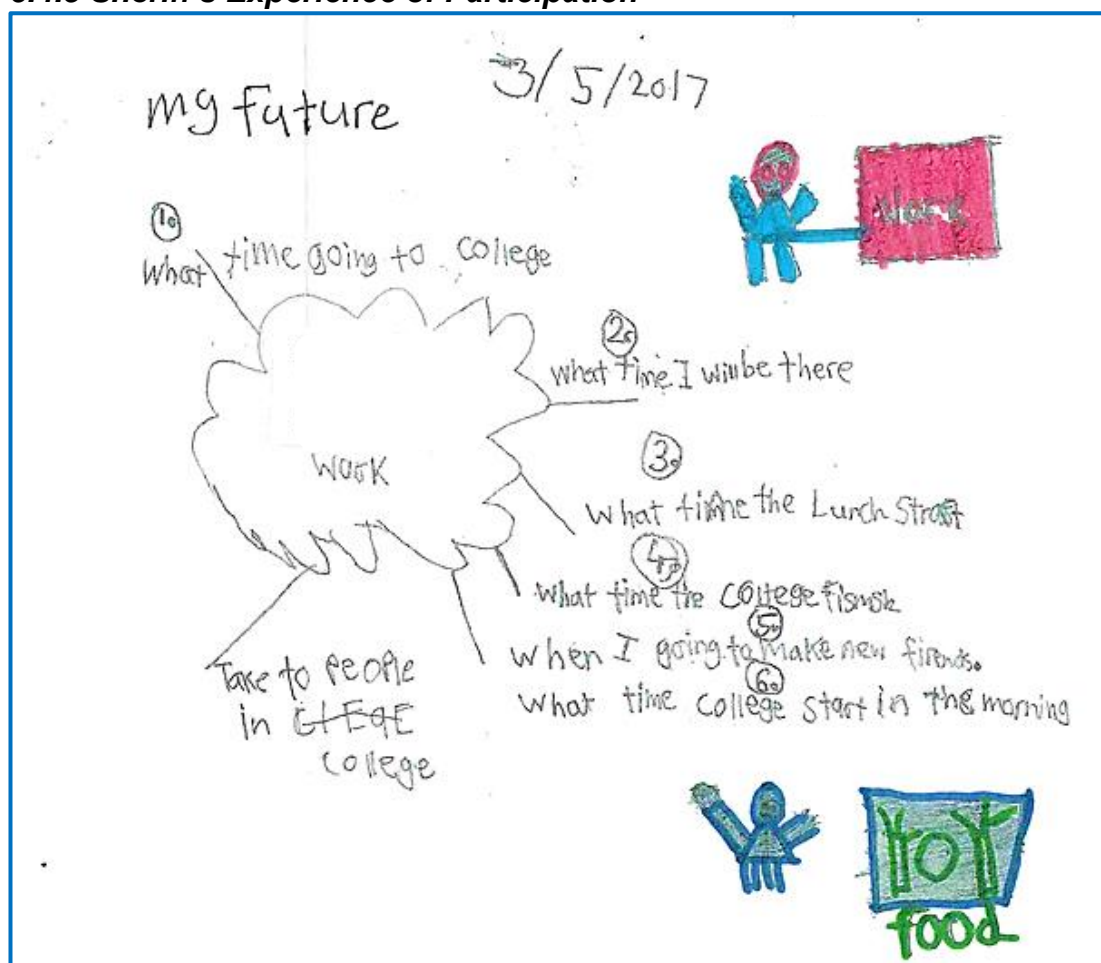


Figure 114 Sheriff's Drawing "My future"

Sheriff entitled his work "My Future". During the EHCp review Sheriff selected a pencil and drew a bubble in which he wrote "[name] work". The speech bubble is surrounded by a series of questions that were written independently. During the session it transpired that the questions related to the routines of his new college. Sheriff is very aware of timetables and the repetitive nature of the written questions about routines give the impression that he is apprehensive about his forthcoming transition to college. A small oblong shape at the top of the page was coloured in red and later Sheriff wrote the word "Work" in pencil in the centre. Next to the oblong, Sheriff has drawn a self-portrait with a face and 2 eyes outlined in red. Next to another oblong the HFD depicted is grey and outlined in blue and it represents Sheriff eating his lunch at college.

Sheriff worked diligently on the drawing and writing activity. In figures 115 and 116 Sheriff's drawing depicts him at "work" and he voiced his thoughts about getting paid employment:



Figure 115 Sheriff's Drawing

Sheriff: *"This me working.....job"*

Sally: *"In the future?"*

Sheriff: *"Yeah.....when I go to work"*

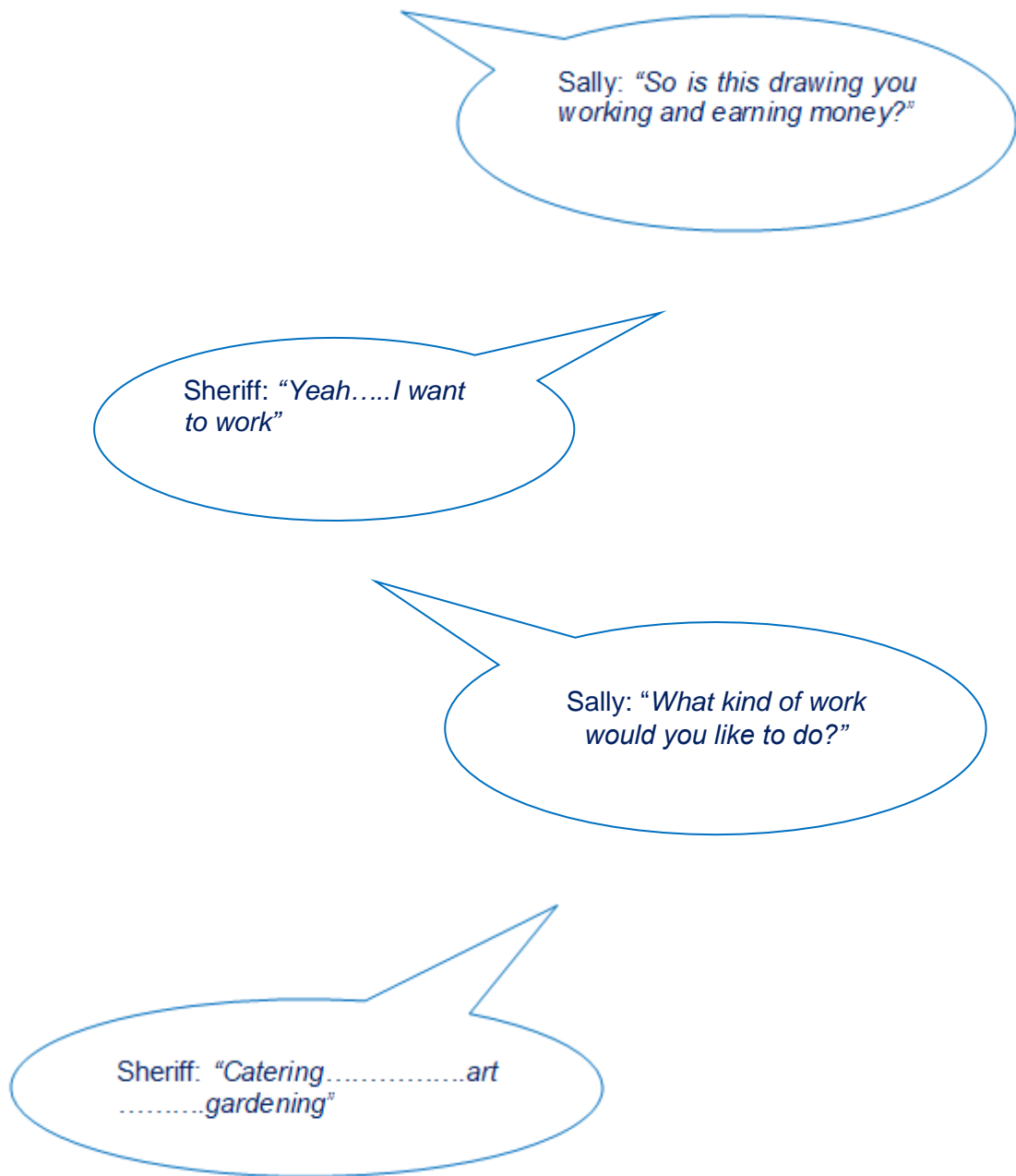


Figure 116 Extract from Interpretive Dialogue

It is evident from Sheriff's comments that in the future he sees himself gainfully employed even if he is unsure about the type of job he would like. Sheriff has completed 3 work placements, one of which was at the Ministry of Justice. However, figure 117 illustrates that he struggles to impart basic information about this placement due to the challenges he experiences with receptive and expressive language.

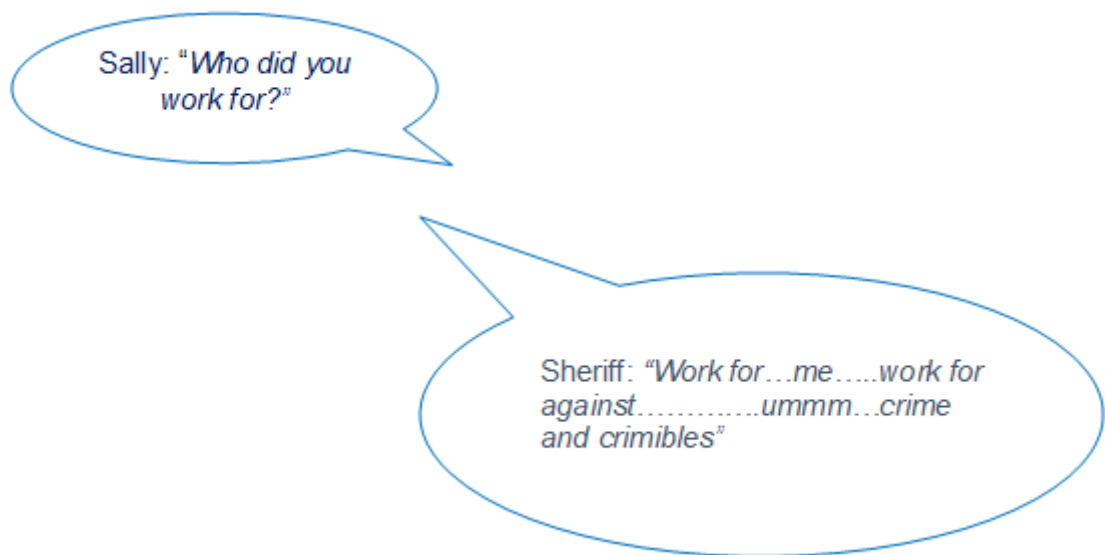


Figure 117 Extract from Interpretive Dialogue

It is difficult to ascertain how his work placement has influenced his transition decisions, but work-experience has helped Sheriff to become a more independent traveller and this is a source of great pride:



Figure 118 Extract from Interpretive Dialogue



Sheriff, like other pupils, states that he will miss his friends and the staff:

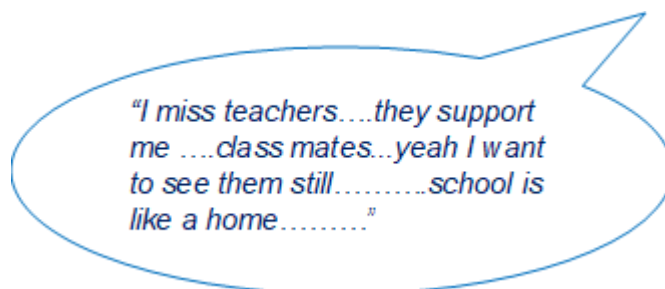


Figure 119 Sheriff's Comment

Sheriff comments that *"school is like a home"* and this gives the impression that school provides a safe and secure learning environment. Interestingly both Sheriff and Jamari express similar sentiments about school. Nonetheless, their drawings and what they tell me indicate a very different outlook regarding their future selves. Jamari and Sheriff both have Down's Syndrome and a similar learning profile with significant speech, language and communication challenges. While Jamari expresses a wish to live at home with his family, Sheriff presents as wanting to become a more independent adult. However, how much of this is Sheriff's authentic voice and to what extent is he echoing his family's desires for him to gain employment and live independently?

When Sheriff had completed his drawing and writing activities he appeared to be listening intently. However, when asked a series of direct questions about his college course he answered with non-verbal gestures such as a nod of his head to indicate "yes" in agreement. Sheriff was given extended time to respond and process questions, but he remained silent. His grandfather became perceptibly frustrated and demanded that Sheriff answer questions appropriately and indicated that he expected him to reply using spoken language.

From Sheriff's perspective he did participate during the meeting:

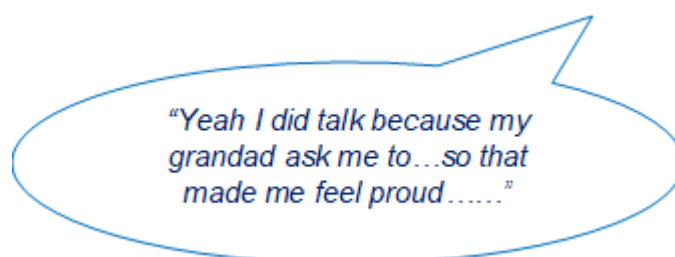


Figure 120 Sheriff's Comment

After the meeting Sheriff was able to explain that, when his grandad gave a clear directive, he understood that the expectation was that he would speak and he delivered this speech:

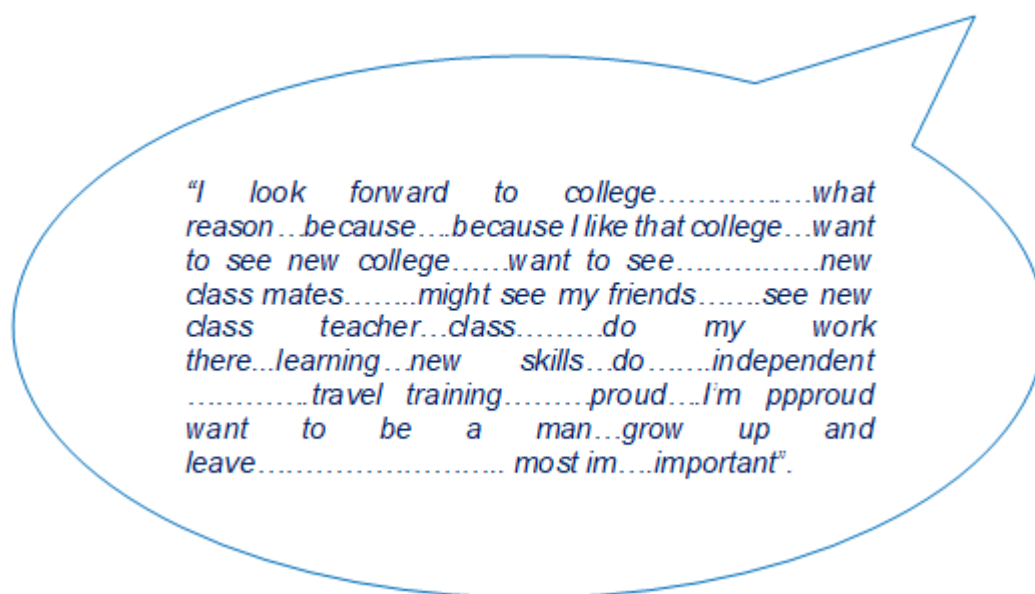
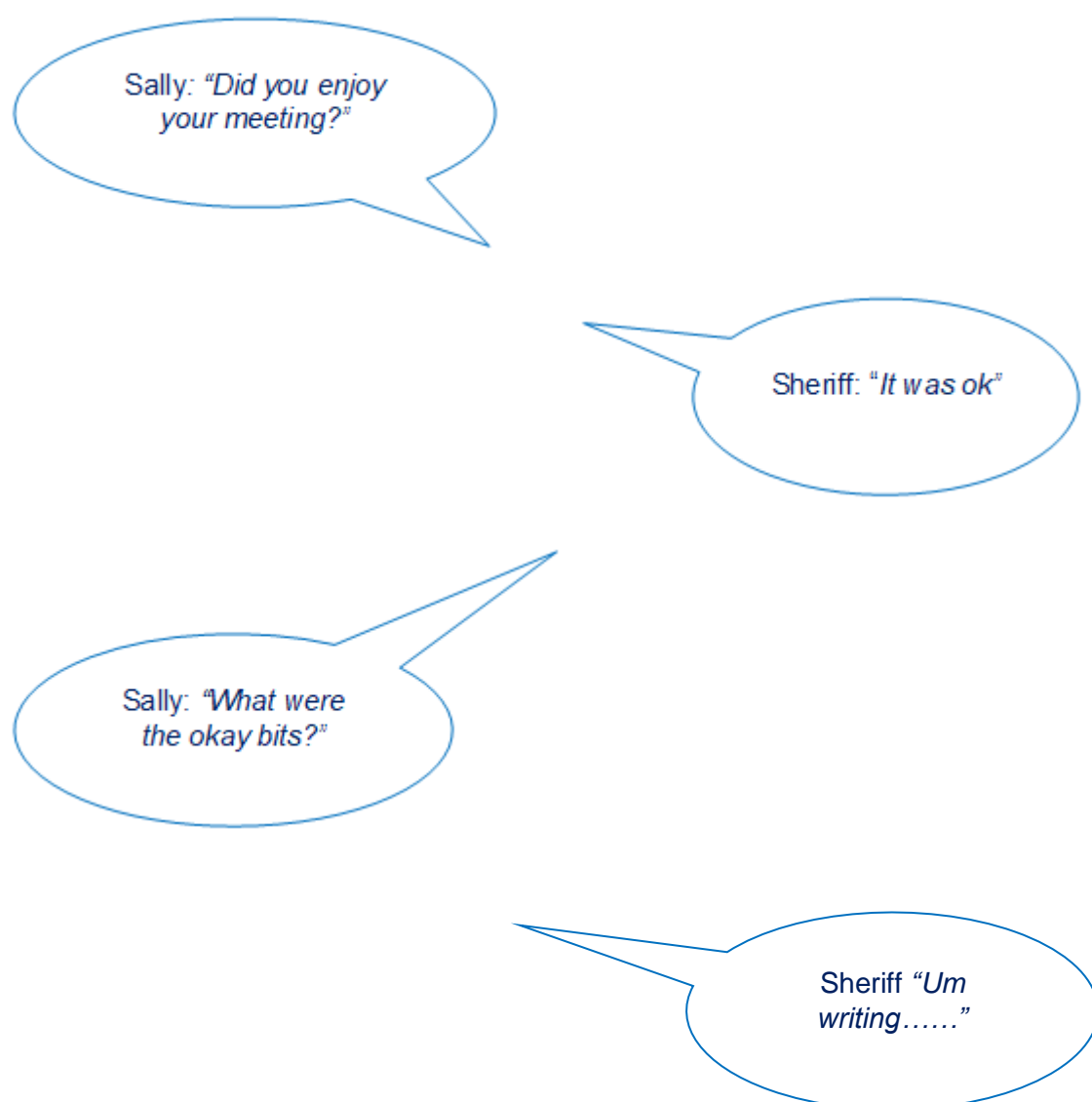


Figure 121 Sheriff's Comment at the EHCp Meeting

Sheriff was instructed to “*speak up*” by his grandfather and this resulted in the speech recorded verbatim for the purposes of the EHCp. On balance, I believe this was a rehearsed script and I felt that there was an element of coaching, not for the EHCp but perhaps as part of his college interview. The literature has shown that a drawback of talking to children can be the tendency for them to say, what they think is “acceptable” in situations where adults hold the power “rather than authentically reflecting on the discourses that affect them” (Mayaba and Wood, 2015, p. 3). Sheriff’s family have high expectations and have managed to secure him on a college course that requires Functional Skills Entry Level 3 English and Maths. Interestingly, subject specialists have refused to enter him for Level 3 exams as this requires the participant to be able to work on tasks independently. His family maintain that he can do this and agreed to undertake the tasks with him at home. There is also continued pressure on the school by his family who want Sheriff to have a “*much higher profile in school*”. Sheriff frequently presents with very low-arousal and tends to speak slowly and use a very low tone and volume of voice, which can significantly reduce his intelligibility and clarity, especially when he is anxious or apprehensive. Sheriff does have a good functional use of vocabulary and he is able to use contextual

and visual cues to help him express his needs, wants, thoughts and feelings. He can provide coherent answers to simple questions. Nevertheless, formal and unfamiliar situations can be difficult for him because he cannot use his repertoire of stock responses. If pressurised to “speak up” in formal situations this can have the opposite of the intended effect and be counterproductive. While it is admirable to strive for their son to achieve the very best outcomes, this ‘rehearsed talk’ has led to an inaccurate and possibly unauthentic voice. Bakhtin would probably cite this as an example of how encounters are “overpopulated with other voices” (p. 58) and new meanings are imbued and reshaped by past and present events.

Unexpectedly the data reveals that Sheriff can explain why he found it difficult to follow the group conversation and respond. The exchange in figure 122 is fascinating because it makes clear that “*listening*” was the cause of his silence:



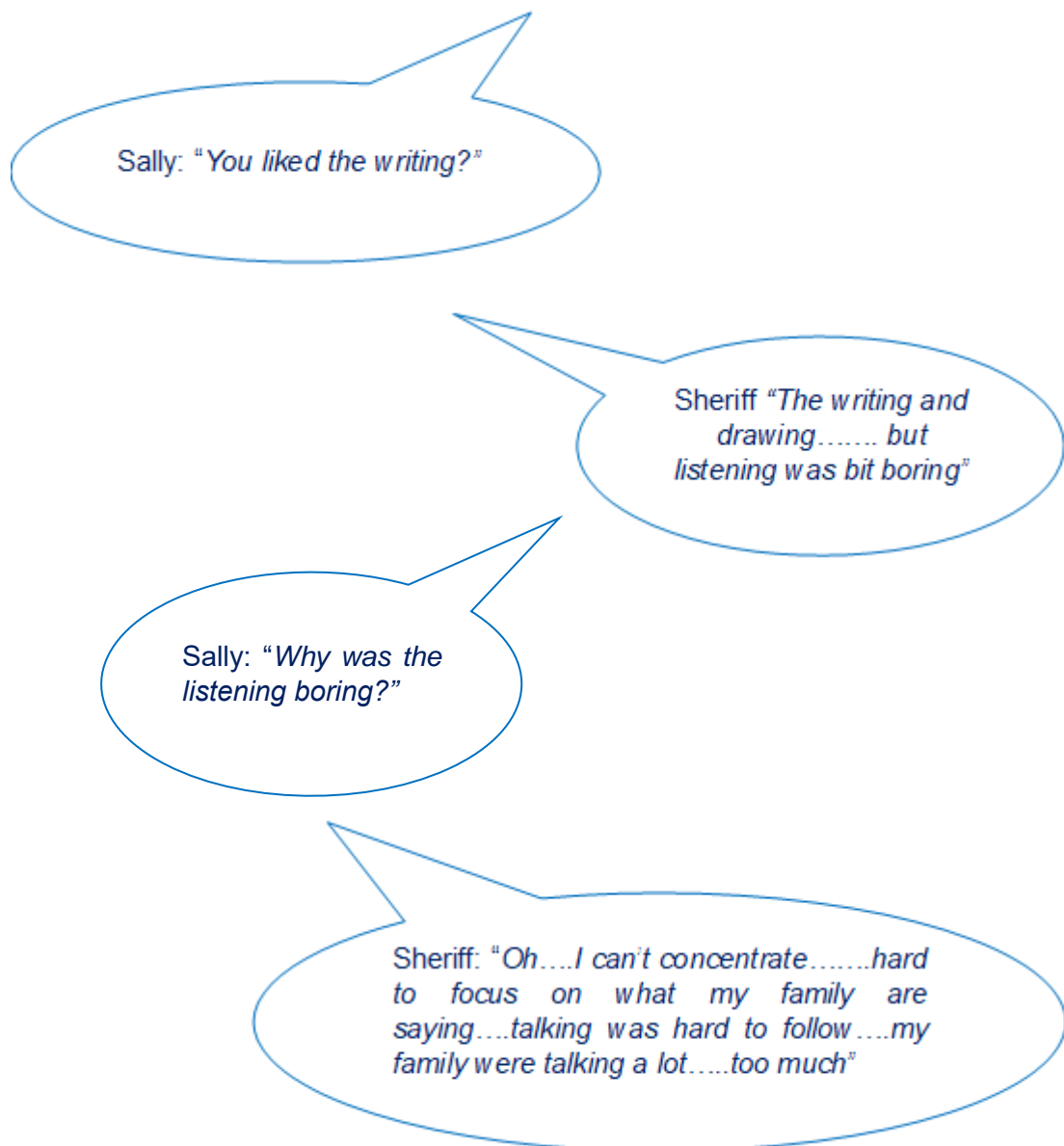


Figure 122 Extract from Interpretive Dialogue

It is fascinating that he says the listening was *"boring"* because in my experience this is what children tend to say when they find activities difficult. Sheriff's comments highlight that he finds attending and listening in a group situation difficult. He can demonstrate integrated attention but needs to maintain focus and be given time to process spoken instructions or information. This explains why, when asked a series of direct questions at his EHCp meeting, he gestured agreement but failed to respond. Sheriff explains that *"talking was hard to follow...."* signalling that listening, processing information and responding is problematic during a meeting. Inviting pupils to attend and actively participate is admirable but pointless if the adult structure or the EHCp

meetings act as a barrier to participation because it involves too much adult talk. By contrast, the extract from the DWT encounter demonstrates that Sheriff can reflect on his experiences of participation in a way that feels both honest and authentic when given time to respond and visual stimulus. Prout (2003) called for institutional and organisational changes that encourage and facilitate children's voices. It appears that if pupils identified with CMN are to be included in ways that are inclusive and democratic, attention needs to be given to the issue of power and real opportunities to participate in discourses.

### **6.5 Future Selves and Transition**

The DWT data suggests that this approach can enable voice and participation. The study has uncovered unique and unforeseen insights into pupils' lived experiences of transition.

Several key findings were identified from the DWT data:

- Work-experience and college placements are frequently referred to by the pupils. The vocational nature of the KS5 curriculum in which pupils can practise real-life learning is evident. However, all 5 participants seem unclear, confused or anxious about the next step in their lives. Of real concern is that pupils seem to have a disconnect and cannot relate their experiences to transition or lack real understanding or engagement. This warrants further research and investigation.
- Public transportation and independent travel are clearly important. In the past, the pupils have all travelled to and from school using transportation provided by the LA. During KS5 pupils have become more independent and some can use public transport. Travelling by public transport is important because it increases individual sense of independence and presents a chance to act like an adult. Sheriff gives a detailed account of his progress towards becoming an independent traveller and how this has strengthened his sense of autonomy. By contrast, Jamari's dependence on his family are seen to restrict his transition choices. Independent travel is a bone of contention because cuts to services have seriously limited access to travel support.

- Friendships and peer relationships are important and mentioned by all 5 participants. School has provided a happy environment in which friendships have been forged. Javier and Sheriff recognise that when they transition they will have opportunities to form new social networks.
- Supportive adults and a safe school environment are also seen as important. Participants frequently mention they will “*miss*” school staff, who are viewed as positive enablers.
- Families play an important role in the pupils’ lives and a significant role in transition and some are more able to support pupils on the path toward adulthood than others. There is a stark contrast between Sheriff’s and Jamari’s outlooks. Jamari has drawn a picture of his family and states that he will “*always live at home*”, while Sheriff’s comments highlight that he is being encouraged to expand his horizons and live independently.

By privileging the pupils’ voices, the research has unexpectedly developed a better understanding of pupils’ conceptualisation of future selves and experiences of transition. Hermanoff *et al.*’s (2016) study focused on 14 young people with intellectual disability and asked their opinions about transitioning from special education to a vocational college. Significantly, several findings corollate with my study and “...location of the study place, company of same-aged peers, supportive teachers and tutors” (p. 1) were all seen as important.

My findings note that when pupils engaged in the DWT process they could communicate some of the steps taken to becoming more independent, such as transitioning to college courses, work-experience placements and training. Overall the data reveals that pupils were determined to be heard and had a lot to say about their future. The DWT approach could have a significant role by providing visual prompts that act like train tracks to support recall and help pupils to focus on expressing their views and opinions.

## **6.6 Future Selves-Tokenism or Genuine Participation?**

Having a voice in the EHCp process does not necessarily promote empowerment or mean pupils have access to support to help them take control of their lives or goals.

Typologies have been developed to illustrate participation. Shier (2001) offers a 5 point “pathway” based on Hart’s (1992) work, in which he dispenses with the non-participation stages in favour of determining current levels of participation:

- 1) children are listened to
- 2) children are supported in expressing their views
- 3) children’s views are taken into account
- 4) children are involved in decision-making processes
- 5) children share power and responsibility for decision-making. (p. 110)

While the participants in this research met the first 3 stages of participation, there is very little evidence that pupils identified with CMN have any real power or control in the decision-making process regarding transition. Sloper *et al.*’s (2010) study of transition services identified “high levels of unmet need” amongst disabled young people going through transition and reported information needs on a huge range of subjects including “career and employment opportunities, and planning future goals and aspirations” (p. viiii). The EHCp process advocates an ongoing, co-ordinated and multi-agency approach but the data evidences a distinct lack of coordination between services. Transition workers failed to attend EHCp review meetings even when a pupil had been allocated one. This resulted in the school family worker having to support pupils to make decisions about their future.

In some cases, the data points to a lack of awareness or readiness to transition and 4 out of the 5 participants appeared unsure about the next steps regarding this. Neither the pupils nor families had taken any practical steps to visit a college, attend open days or make an application, despite being given information by the school. The data appears to indicate a disconnect between the views expressed by the pupils and their ability to action change. Nevertheless, the 5 participants successfully transitioned to college. During the EHCp review process it was difficult to pursue positive outcomes for pupils across the preparation for adulthood agenda, in the absence of coordinated multi-agency support or a qualified transition worker with access to funding

streams to support provision for independent travel, self-care, access to leisure and social activities and the next steps of adult life.

In conclusion, despite emphasis being placed on disabled pupils' participation via the EHCp, there is little evidence to suggest pupils are equal partners in democratic participatory processes. Lack of funding is posing a barrier to participation with successive cuts to services affecting established transition practices and leaving pupils identified with CMN dependent on schools and their families for practical support to transition. My personal view, based on my experience of conducting EHCp conversions, is that nothing has changed with many pupils left unsupported and therefore unable to share responsibility.

### **6.7 The Complexities of Authentic Voice and Participation**

The findings in this chapter further illustrate the complexities of authentic voice and participation. During the last decade, the principle of empowering voices to gain a deeper understanding of pupils' lived experiences has gained momentum in educational research. Throughout the literature the complexities of enabling authentic voices is acknowledged.

My findings in Chapter 5 note caveats regarding the complex and unique challenges associated with enabling authentic voice. Scrutiny of the data collected in the second cycle also highlights that the EHCp format can lead to inauthentic voice. The formal structure of meetings needs to be considered carefully if all pupils are to be included in the process. Garth and Aroni (2003) concluded that parental and professional voices have in the past taken precedence over that of pupils and suggested a "reliance on parents/carers for insight into their child's experiences" (p. 561). The EHCp sanctions and provides opportunities for pupils and their families to have an equal voice. Nonetheless, the second data cycle reveals subtle ways in which pupils' voices are mediated by more powerful adults. For example, my research exposed how Sheriff, quite literally, had words put into his mouth.

### **6.8 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I present the key findings from the second AR cycle and critically reflected on my third research question: How can practice be improved so that



pupils actively participate and contribute to the EHCp process in ways that are inclusive, democratic and move beyond tokenism?

In this respect I believe my findings have been impactful. The findings acknowledge that DWT can be beneficial during the actual EHCp meeting and demonstrate that DWT can assist by prompting remembering and helping pupils to focus on matters that are important to them. Findings suggest that when appropriate support is in place pupils' voices can be heard and reveal a much more nuanced view of their world, especially regarding future steps and transition. Therefore, DWT could be of practical use in a special school settings to promote more inclusive approaches.

The interpretive dialogue allowed themes to emerge: friendships, family, independent living, independent travel and interests. The scope of this study limited the themes that could be followed through. However, the interpretive dialogue provides a rich data resource for future exploration.

Finally, my study highlights that pupils identified with CMN can be meaningfully involved in informing the preparation for adulthood agenda when visual prompts and enabling environments are put in place. However, genuine, active participation appears to be tokenistic and radical changes to policy, practice and provision need to be put into place for this to become a reality.

## **CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter draws conclusions from my research findings in Chapters 5 and 6. I demonstrate the originality of research findings, discuss possible benefits, limitations and some emergent ethical concerns relating to the DWT approach that only came to light after data collection was completed. Finally, I provide suggestions for further investigation.

### **7.2 Original Contribution**

The literature supports the view that in the past disabled pupils' rights to participate and have a voice have mostly been defined by models of disability based on adult assumptions about ability. Shifting views about agency as well as rights discourses have led to policy change and pupils' participation is now seen as integral to the EHCp process. Critical disability researchers are searching for innovative ways to include pupils in ways that are emancipatory and inclusive. Paradoxically the recent DfE report (Adams *et al.*, 2017) investigating the effectiveness of the EHCp process obtained pupil opinions by parent/carer proxy, evidencing that participation and the voices of disabled pupils are still mediated by adults. My research is significant because it places the voices of pupils identified with CMN at the forefront of research and highlights how DWT could be adapted to support participation in a special school setting.

AR cycles led to actions that supported my aims and the research questions to be answered.

- What constitutes authentic voice and how is participation experienced by pupils identified with CMN in a special school during the EHCp process?
- How are the principles of voice and participation being experienced as intended by the SEND CoP? (2015)
- How can practice be improved so that pupils actively participate and contribute to the EHCp process in ways that are inclusive, democratic and move beyond tokenism?

In addition, new and unexpected information was produced, therefore the study's original contribution should be considered twofold:

- The DWT approach can support pupils to communicate and conceptualise experiences of participation and generate information about a range of topics including future selves, transition, work-experience, independent travel, friendship and family.
- DWT can be utilised as an effective and inclusive approach because it is an intuitive, CMN-friendly medium for appropriating near-authentic pupil voice in the EHCp process with the minimum of 'interference' from adults and/or professionals.

My research contributes to the literature and impacts on practice. It establishes that a visual, child-friendly methodology can be utilised as both a data generation approach and a practical tool to support pupils identified with CMN to have a voice at the table. The study is not only of benefit to those involved but relevant to school practice and the field of disability research. At the end of Chapter 5 I made a series of recommendations about the challenges of voice and participation and these should be used to inform and refine future policy change, theory and practice.

### **7.3 Pupil Voice and Participation**

The main contribution of my thesis is to the subject area of voice and participation and the dynamics of the inter-relationship between the two, that is, how DWT as a human creative activity mediates between the often-unspoken voice and participatory practices in the production of self. Placing pupil voices at the centre of the study demonstrated that pupils have much to say about their lived experiences, are experts in their own lives, and this challenges existing perceptions about ability/disability. The findings suggest that creative methodologies, such as the DWT approach, enable pupils to reveal unexpected details about a range of lived experiences. In some instances, insights were revealed that may otherwise not have surfaced. Hence, my first original contribution to the field of disability research is that DWT can lead to a better and more informed understanding of pupils' conceptualisation of participation and a range of lived experiences and how they can communicate these to listening others.

#### **7.4 Benefits and Limitations of DWT as a Research Approach**

I consider DWT offers many benefits including the potential to unlock inner voices. DWT has the advantage that it is multi-modal and easily adapted to suit the diverse communication preferences of individual pupils identified with CMN. It is familiar and non-threatening because it is a part of the everyday educational repertoire. DWT also requires few instructions and many pupils started to draw without the prompt question. It is effective because it uses resources readily available in a school setting. DWT allows pupils to respond in their own time and on their own terms. DWT provides an affective gateway for allowing 'feelings' and self-awareness to take form. It enables meanings to be communicated and has the potential to unlock voices.

Significantly, DWT provides a structuring device that is not imposed by more powerful adults and enabled pupils to take control and voice their views and ideas. The study offered an opportunity to investigate whether the DWT approach could be utilised specifically as a research tool for gathering information to examine pupils' experiences and perspectives of authentic voice and participation in a special school in ways that purely verbal means might not. Additionally, and unexpectedly, the research findings suggest that DWT is an approach that can be adopted in a special school setting to place pupils' views at the fore of the EHCp process, but it should be seen as having wider applications. Hence, my second original contribution to the field of disability research is that DWT, when embedded in the EHCp process and chosen by the pupils themselves, can provide a flexible, child-friendly approach. Additionally, it enables pupils to graphically represent their participation by offering opportunities to reflect multi-dimensionally and participate independently on their own terms.

My findings support the literature and demonstrate that the implementation of DWT offers benefits, but it also has limitations. DWT has the potentiality to facilitate participation but, as with any approach, there are caveats which need to be addressed. Firstly, drawing activities are not always appropriate for pupils with physical and gross or fine motor difficulties, or pupils with specific visual impairment. Secondly, the literature suggests that typically developing children who have a cognitive ability above the age of 8 or 9 years may perceive drawing

to be “babyish” (Cox, 2005). Therefore, DWT may not be a suitable approach for pupils who have achieved visual realism or may become anxious if they perceive that their drawing may not be ‘correct’. Thirdly, this approach may not be appropriate for pupils with intellectual impairment for whom mark-making may have no meaning. However, it is the responsibility of the school to address concerns and put in place inclusive practices.

A further caveat is that this relatively small-scale research was undertaken within an individual school with an established ethos and commitment to communication. While pupils in this study were seemingly happy to adopt DWT, it is conceivable that it might not be easily transferable to other school settings without sensitivity, empathy or familiarity with the individual abilities and impairments. AR is not concerned with “generalisable rules for other practitioners” (Arnold and Norton, 2018, p. 24) or the extent to which this study applies to other contexts. Nevertheless, my findings are likely to resonate with practitioners, and future research needs to be piloted in comparable schools to ascertain if DWT can be successfully actioned in other contexts. Dissemination is important and I have produced a short film about my research which has been shared with undergraduates and post graduates in the fields of Disability Studies, Education and Health and Social Care.

A disadvantage of the DWT approach is the scarcity of literature pertaining to how researchers have developed a principled approach to analysing and interpreting the multi-modal data that emerges. My research has sought to break with, or to extend, conventional, tried and tested methods of data analysis and to employ novel and emergent conceptions of qualitative interpretation. In this study, I used aspects of the “i-paradigmatic” approach—insight, intuition, imagination—and improvisation to look at symbolic text (Ingram, 2014). This approach is highly reflexive and relies on the intersubjective knowing and understandings of the practitioner-researcher who is engaged in an intimate and interiorised dialogue with participants who are able to emote the experience but find it difficult to communicate it verbally.

## **7.5 Ethical Issues Arising From the DWT Research**

During the research several concerns arose relating specifically to ethical issues. Researching with pupils identified with CMN raises the bar when it

comes to research ethics and professional ethics. This research has been driven by the moral codes and ethical principles which informs the Professional Doctorate in Education and fulfils the ethical dimension of action research as defined by Kemmis and McTaggart (1998):

A form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out. (As cited in Reason and Bradbury, 2008, pp. 121-122)

A principle of AR is that it recognises that research should be of benefit to those involved but it is an ethical imperative that the process should cause minimal distress. During data collection I occasionally felt apprehensive about following through with the DWT activities, especially if a pupil had an EHCp meeting in which communication and participation had been challenging. I anticipated that this might place added pressure on individual pupils and possibly cause further anxiety during the DWT encounters. Therefore, as can be evidenced in the interpretive dialogue, I always made it clear to pupils that they could opt out and should only participate if they wanted to. It was often the case that pupils appeared to feel better about their contributions after completing the DWT activities. In one case it is apparent that the DWT session was a cathartic experience and this enabled Javier to return to school after a long period of absence.

Generally, the DWT encounters provided a less pressured and more informal situation which permitted pupils to guide and control the structure of the activities with absolutely no pressure to either produce an image, write or talk about their EHCp experiences. Pupils controlled the length of time and level of interaction with the drawing/writing materials as well as deciding how and when the picture was completed and what it communicated. The flexible nature of the activities allowed tasks to be pupil-led and to add flourishes such as labelling or writing on their drawings either independently or with support. Jamari and Javier for example coloured part of their pictures and then decided to stop seemingly half way through the activity. My findings demonstrate that by offering pupils participation choices, removing the pressure to respond immediately to direct questions and leaving activities open-ended pupils expressed both dissent and assent freely.

Drawing offers a tangible end product and with this came further unexpected ethical considerations centred on issues of anonymity, confidentiality and ownership of the pictures produced as part of DWT, which were far from clear cut. Pupils frequently wrote their names and those of others attending the EHCp meeting on their drawings. Text seemed to be an integral part of the meaning-making as well as a symbol of authenticity and identity. Authorship was marked on the pupils' drawings in a similar way an artist might sign off a painting. It could be argued that a pupil's name is a symbolic representation and the inclusion or exclusion of ownership may have important signification. The issue of ownership was further complicated by my perception that many of the pupils wished their work to be recognised and would have been happy to have their names remain on their drawings. However, if names were not removed there was a risk that anonymity may be compromised. To maintain anonymity, I covered pupils' names and use pseudonyms to comply with research ethics. Nevertheless, this posed ethical dilemmas and it was quite possibly an inversion of pupils' wishes and ethical imperatives, as pupils wanted their drawings' authorship to be acknowledged. I obtained further consent for the pupils' drawings to be used for research purposes and made pupils aware that this meant that if the work was published that other people would see the drawings outside of the school domain (Appendix 6).

A final and significant concern relates to the pupil who demonstrated that he wished to be included in the research but had limited cognition and his intentional communication was inconsistent. While it would have been unethical to exclude him from the study, and I did not, it does raise questions about the serious challenges of co-constructing meaning-making with pupils with intellectual impairment. This exemplifies the ethical dilemmas faced by researchers who wish to embrace inclusive practice. Furthermore, it highlights the issue that DWT is not a universal panacea.

## **7.6 Authentic Voice Moving Forward**

The research findings suggest that pupils labelled as having SEND are being involved in the co-production of *Section A* of the EHCp. Nonetheless, it is posing challenges. The EHCp provides a mechanism for participation but my research suggests that if pupils' voices are to be included they must be allowed

to do so in ways that enable the participants to use preferred modes of communication and this surely does not mean answering a series of pro forma questions. It is imperative that adults guard against the dangers of damaging pupils' sense of self by asking questions that insist on them trying to achieve the realistic representational status of more 'normal' others as in effect this will result in de-authentication. The research uncovered numerous examples of inauthentic voice, such as replications of adult language constructs and utterances, the ironing out of quirks, idiosyncrasies and anomalies and the filtering out of both verbal and non-verbal communications that do not fit into the EHCp format. By contrast the DWT encounters record and detail not just what was voiced but "the silent, the unclear and incoherent, the perplexing and the contradictory" (Spyrou, 2016, p. 23). Spyrou argues that far more rigour needs to be applied when recording children's voices and that research should take account of more than just what is heard but also the blank spaces in between. This involves looking at and listening to the figured worlds of pupils identified with CMN, whose view is often discordant and different from our own. This research suggests that further exploration is required in relation to how voice and participation for pupils with unconventional communication is recorded and facilitated by teachers, professionals and those in advocacy roles to allow for authenticity.

### **7.7 Participation Moving Forward**

Disability and education researchers have a responsibility to challenge and develop creative, innovative methods and approaches that include pupils labelled as having CMN in research. Going forward, it is conceivable that a wider range of visual methods can be developed to support pupils' participation in ways that allow for active engagement across a variety of creative mediums. Ridout (2016) has explored ways in which creative methods such as narrative diaries and collage can support autistic young people's voices to "narrate their real-life experiences" (p. 46). It is feasible that future researchers will devise new opportunities to enable pupils to take control of many aspects of a study. Truly emancipatory research is that which gives control of the design and processes to the pupils in a meaningful way and where the findings inform government policy on the best ways to effect change and support voice and



participation. How pupils identified with CMN, or indeed SLD can be involved in such pioneering research “has yet to be considered” (Iriarte, O’Brien, Chadwick, 2014, p. 155), but this study is a starting point.

### **7.8 Future Research**

Reason (2006) talked about the important role of AR being to “help articulate voices that are not being heard” (p. 198). During this study the AR approach literally created a space for pupils “to articulate their world” (ibid p. 198) and enabled the voices of the marginalised to be heard and paid attention to. Nevertheless, the abundance of data generated posed a significant challenge. The study’s scope meant that there are a range of themes that emerged from the data that are not followed through. The richness of the data could provide a wealth of information and opportunities for future research related to disability issues.

The AR model provides a structure for further action that would allow pupils’ voices to be listened to by society. The drawings and the fragments of speech combined within the interpretive dialogue contain many untold stories that would make a unique and fascinating piece of verbatim theatre that could spotlight a variety of disability issues. Having completed my research, I wish to go beyond the scope of my thesis and voice the unheard stories on the public stage. With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to envisage how I could put in place new actions and use my drama skills to create an original piece of drama that would enable the voices of pupils with CMN to be placed, literally, centre stage. This next step action allows for the exciting possibility of unique voices, in all their forms, to be heard by a wider audience and significantly facilitates “...the process by which individuals with disabilities can tell their own stories”. (Ashby, 2011, para 44). If funding and ethical approval could be secured it may be possible in the future to work collaboratively with a disabled theatre company to produce a film or a piece of live theatre which communicates and celebrates previously unheard voices. Crucially this fits well with the AR approach, by which repeated cycles of action or activity provide practitioners with the structure not only to better understand practice but devise changes that may lead to social improvement.

## **7.9 Policy and Practice**

Franklin and Osbourne (2009) made a raft of recommendations that needed to be implemented in practice if children identified with complex communication needs were to actively participate in review processes. Martin and Franklin (2009) questioned whether participation was reality or rhetoric and suggested that "...disabled children and young people are frequently denied their right to participate in decision making arenas, despite a plethora of government policy" (p. 97). Despite strides in legislation and the introduction of the CFA and changes to the SEND CoP (2015) this question remains pertinent a decade later. Indeed, my research has identified barriers to voice, and the latest DfE research (Adams *et al.*, 2017) suggests that inclusive practices are not embedded. The EHCp process must meaningfully engage with what pupils have to say and a concerted effort be made to stamp out tokenistic or tick box compliance. Further research and theorisation of voice is required to investigate practices that will enable all disabled children to be empowered to have an authentic voice and fully participate.

## **7.10 Final Thoughts**

This research has provided an opportunity to challenge assumptions that underpin policy and critically reflect on how to improve and re-shape school practices to support pupils' voice and participation. I have long advocated via my drama teaching the rights of pupils to express themselves creatively and pride myself on working with pupils to gain their perspectives. However, I concur with Mayaba and Wood that the process of gathering and unravelling pupil voice using DWT was not "child's play". (2015, p. 8). Interpreting the meanings pupils are making is far from easy in practice and frequently "messy" (Eldén, 2012, p. 66). This research confirms the premise that pupils' voices need to be acknowledged to be frequently muddled, ambiguous, contradictory and bound by context and complex interactions. Nevertheless, the findings generated rich data that unequivocally demonstrates that unconventional voices have a great deal to say and should not be excluded from participation or assumed to be inconsequential.

Including unconventional voices in research is a demanding task. Fulfilling and applying emancipatory research principles in which disabled people have

ownership and control of the research design in line with the slogan “Nothing About Us Without Us”, has indeed proved “complex and extremely challenging” (Barton, 2005, p. 326). Nevertheless, it is nothing short of a travesty that some disabled pupils have not been given the opportunity to say how they wished to participate and voice their views, opinions and perspectives as part of the EHCp process. Society needs to respect the inarticulate voices of pupils who struggle to communicate and recognise pupils as “authors and active agents of their own development” (Deakin Crick *et al.*, 2015, p.150).

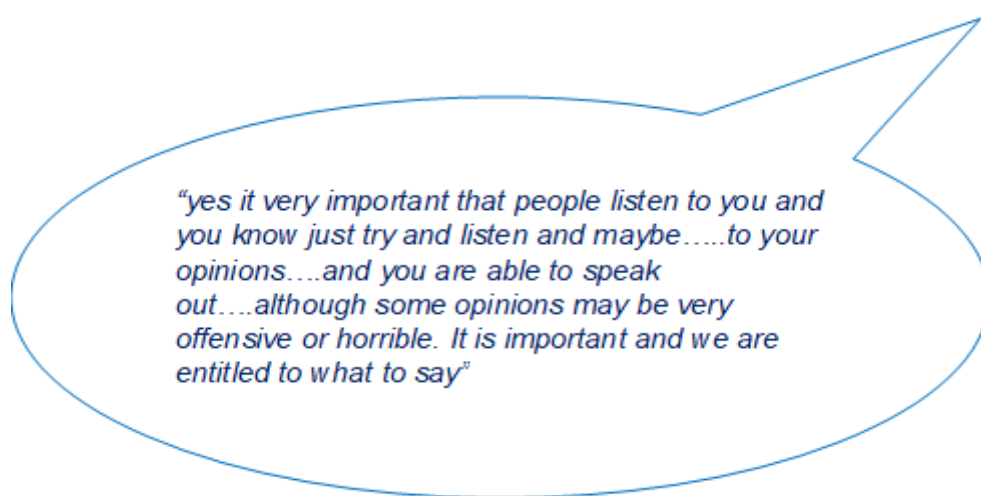


Figure 123 Javier's Comment

Javier's comment highlights the importance of valuing what pupils have to say however it is expressed. We must stop paying lip service and listen respectfully and more carefully to what pupils labelled with CMN communicate about their lived experiences. Inequalities, exclusion and discriminatory practices need to be challenged and this requires paradigmatic shifts in attitudes. Radical policy change needs to be actioned at a school level and permeate through the fabric of society so that voices that have been previously ignored, silenced or marginalised are 'heard' and included.

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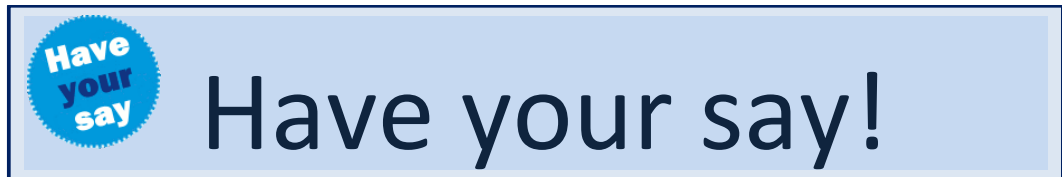
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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 Recruitment Poster



An invitation to join a research study: Pupils' experiences of authentic voice and participatory practices in a special school



Have you had an EHCp meeting?



Did you have a voice at the meeting?

Are you interested in joining a research study? I'm interested in **pupils'** experiences of their Education, Health and Care plan meeting.

The study aims to improve how we listen and hear what **pupils** have to say.

Sally would like to hear **your views** on the EHCp.

Get involved  
Have your say!

If you would like more information, contact the **school office**.



## Appendix 2 Pupil Consent to Participate Form

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE FORM

Title of research: **Pupils' Experiences of Authentic Voice and Participatory Practices in a Special Cchool**

Name of researcher: **Sally Brett (Assistant Headteacher)**

Dear Participant

The following information is to help you to decide if you wish to take part in the research. The purpose of this study is to investigate pupils' experiences of having a voice at the Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) meetings.

Please sign below to show that you understand that:

- You may remove yourself from the study at any time.
- The information given by you will remain confidential and anonymous and only the researcher will know your identity.

Please sign the consent form:

I give my permission for the information to be used for research purposes only.

Name:\_\_\_\_\_ Sign:\_\_\_\_\_

Date:\_\_\_\_\_

Thank-you for agreeing to take part in the research. A copy of this form will be given to you to keep.

---






Dear Parent/carer




If the participant is under the age of 19, permission must also be given by a parent or career to take part in the above research. Please sign below:



I give my permission for \_\_\_\_\_ to take part in the research project.








Signed:\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_






## Appendix 3 Easy-Read Pupil Consent to Participate Form













  
 An Invitation To Take Part in Research





  
 Have Your Say



  
 What this means.








  
 Sally will have a meeting with you about






  
 your Education Health and Care Plan.








  
 Sally might ask you if you would like to


  
 draw.



You can



change your mind



at



any



time



and



do not have



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take



part.



Anything



you



say



to



Sally



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Sign



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the research.







Name











Date







Page 2:

## Appendix 4 Easy-Read Summary of the Research Findings











  
**Recommendations to improve EHCp Meetings**

**1**        





1. Staff will **prepare** pupils and ensure they have








visual aids to take to their EHCp.

**2**      





2. Teachers will **forwarn** pupils about the time of







their EHCp review meeting.

**3**       





3. Staff will **listen carefully** and **record accurately**

everything pupils say, sign or gesture.

**4**      

4. Pupils can have someone to **help** them

**communicate** at the EHCp meeting.

## **Appendix 5 Examples of Evolving Transcription Style**

Version A. Notes written up immediately after the DWT session using a narrative style. (January 2016)

### **Pupil 4 (Dwayne) Date 20th Jan 2016 (55 mins)**

The fourth session was undertaken with an 18 year old pupil who is currently completing Year 14. He has a diagnosis of autism with associated communication, learning and behaviour difficulties. He was first issued with a statement of Special Educational Needs in 2001, when he was aged 4.

His attention and listening skills can be variable. He has functional vocabulary which he uses to express himself in everyday situations. His use of spoken language is, overall, much stronger than his understanding of spoken language. Additionally, his attention and listening skills can be variable. He demonstrates frequent echolalia, repeating words and phrases that he hears. Generally he finds longer, more complex spoken language difficult to understand and struggles to make sense of social situations. He mimics behaviours of others and this can makes relationships with others difficult.

His behaviour can fluctuate and he takes medication to try to regulate his angry outbursts. He has unpredictable and severe physical outbursts, and he has been restrained in school, and has been excluded on a number of occasions. His aggressive outbursts are usually triggered when he is not engaged in an activity or he cannot express his emotional state. He can become very anxious when his routine is not followed. The police have attended the family on numerous occasions due to the severity of his behaviour. Conversely, he can be calm and polite and especially enjoys being helpful. He responds especially well to praise.

This session was undertaken on the same day as the EHCp. The meeting took place in the morning and the DWT session was in the afternoon.

When the pupil was taken to the meeting room in which the EHCp had taken place he began to talk about his meeting as he entered the room. Therefore, there was no need to ask him any questions. Without prompting he said "I loved having a chat at my meeting." and "I had lots of words". Luckily I was able to record these comments.

As we sat down and pupil, who is fond of drawing, picked up a pencil and began to draw himself at the meeting. He depicted himself sitting on a large chair in a central position. Above his picture he wrote "This is me sitting on a chair Right at the table." He didn't draw any of the other people at the meeting, although he did name two other attendees. He wrote "I love having a chat at my meeting with my mum, the

social worker, (and) Sally Brett". It is evident from the pupil's comments and art work that he perceived that the meeting was focused on him and his world. He was able to scribe for himself. In his second drawing he drew a large smiley face surrounded by speech bubbles. Across the top of the drawing he wrote "I told everyone All About Me". This further illustrates that the pupil felt that he played a significant role and felt that what he said was being listened to by the adults in the meeting.

In his second picture he drew a big smiley face and he wrote "I felt really confident to talk well...." and had "brilliant ideas about my further and job" on checking with the participant I believe he meant to write the word "future". He wrote in one of the speech bubbles "I told people I want to go to [name of college] in September 2016". This is a designated provision that caters for pupils with SLD. In fact this pupil has been offered a place for September (pending Local Authority funding). He was also able to articulate his future employment and training needs. He drew a speech bubble and wrote "When I grow up I will go to university." At the EHCp meeting he expressed his wish to "study maths" and be "a teacher". Although the participant spoke clearly about his future, he did not articulate an understanding of the steps required in order to attend university.

Another of his speech bubble says "I'm going to (live) in my own house." At the EHCp meeting he described in some detail how he wanted to travel on his own to college and his desire to eventually live independently. This is something that may take some years to accomplish, as he is a particularly vulnerable and his behaviour is volatile. However, it was agreed that a "care package" would be put in place by the transition team to facilitate independent travel and access activities in the community in accordance with his wish.

He also comments in the DWT session about his mature behaviour. He wrote "all around the school" but I got the impression that he felt he had behaved in a mature fashion at the EHCp interview and was able to check that this was in fact so. He concluded by writing that "It was a great meeting" (Later that week he was visibly proud to receive a "pupil of the week certificate" in assembly for having a "great EHCp meeting".)

It took this pupil 55 mins to complete the DWT session. He did not want me to scribe, although he did ask me to spell "confident". When we were talking about one of the speech bubbles I noticed he had left the word "live" out. I asked if I could pencil the missing word in. The participant gave me permission but I got the impression that he would not have wanted me to write on his drawings. This session was not like any of the previous three. The participant was in control from the outset and completed all the drawing and writing independently.

In fact if I had a role in this session, it was to keep the participant focused on the prompt question by gently reminding him to “tell me about the meeting”. In the one to one session the participant presented as co-operative and happy. By the end of the session the participant had concentrated for a very long period and was just beginning to show signs of anxiety and was rocking. However, he was clearly very pleased with his artwork, and as we set off to the photocopier he stopped staff to show them his drawings.

The following week he was awarded an achievement certificate for his “excellent EHCp” at assembly and appeared delighted.

#### Version B Interpretive commentary (March 2016)

##### **Pupil 4 (Dwayne) Date 20th Jan 2016 (55 mins)**

The fourth session was undertaken with an 18 year old pupil who is currently completing Year 14. He has a diagnosis of autism with associated communication, learning and behaviour difficulties. He was first issued with a statement of Special Educational Needs in 2001, when he was aged 4.

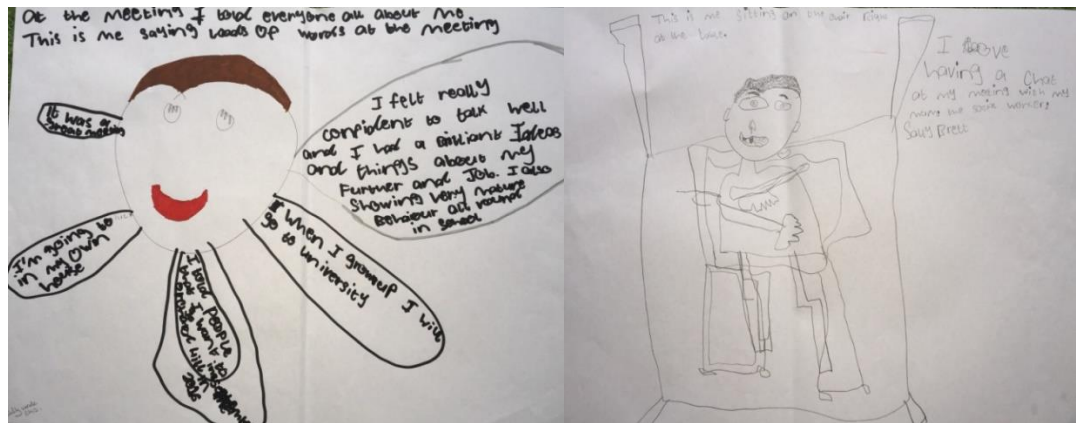
His attention and listening skills are variable. He has functional vocabulary which he uses to express himself well in everyday situations. His use of spoken language is, overall, much stronger than his understanding of spoken language. He demonstrates frequent echolalia, repeating words and phrases that he hears. Generally he finds longer, more complex spoken language difficult to understand, and can struggle to make sense of social situations. He mimics the behaviours of others and this can makes relationships with peers difficult.

His behaviour can fluctuate and he takes medication to try to regulate his angry outbursts. He has unpredictable and severe physical outbursts, he has been restrained in school and has been excluded on a number of occasions. His aggressive flare-ups are usually triggered when he is not engaged in an activity or he cannot express his emotional state. He can become very anxious when his routine is not followed. The police have attended the family on numerous occasions due to the severity of his behaviour. Conversely, he can be calm and polite and especially enjoys being helpful. He responds well to praise and has a behaviour report card.

This session was undertaken on the same day as the EHCp. The meeting took place in the morning and the DWT in the afternoon. Consent had already been given and D understood that his participation was voluntary.

When the pupil was escorted to the meeting room in which the EHCp had taken place, he began to talk about his meeting as he entered the room. Therefore there was no

need to ask him the prompt question because he began to talk about his EHCP meeting spontaneously.



Line		Draw, write and tell session	Commentary
Line 1	D	I loved having a chat at my meeting. I had lots of words. (excited tone of voice) My meeting was great.	From the outset the participant could be described as enthused and happy to participate, and this is reflected in his opening statement. When the pupil was escorted to the meeting room in which the EHCP had taken place earlier that morning. He began to speak spontaneously about his meeting as he entered the room. Therefore there was no need to ask the prompt question. Luckily I was able to record these comments.
Line 2	S	Would you like to draw your meeting? (I indicate the drawing materials that are already setup )	
Line	D	Yeah, I would like to draw my meeting. (smiles) I like drawing. I'm good at drawing.	D is fond of drawing and finds it a calming activity. He has a 1:1 session every morning in which he writes a diary and draws. This is part of a routine which helps to lower his levels of anxiety. He happily selects a pencil and begins to draw himself at the meeting.
		<p>He depicted himself sitting on a large chair in a central position. The self-portrait has a large head with a number of facial features including; eyes, pupils, eyebrow, nose, ears, hair a mouth and possibly teeth. The Human figure also has a defined neck, arms, hands with fingers, as well as a trunk and legs. The depiction may or may not be wearing clothes.</p> <p>In contrast to the realism of the human figure, it is hard to make out the table and the chair. The drawing has an X-ray quality that allows objects such as the</p>	<p>The subject of this drawing is the pupil himself. The head is drawn larger because of its importance, and the mouth is also large because that's where the talking emanates.</p> <p>He did not draw any of the other people at the meeting. It is evident from the pupil's comments and art work, that he perceived that the meeting was focused on him and his world.</p>



		<p>chair, to appear transparent and parts of the chair can be seen that you would not see if a person was sitting on it.</p> <p>The participant appears to be sitting on the table when he is trying to convey sitting at a table. Thus this picture could be described as <i>failed realism</i>. The table and chair are not drawn in relationship to one another, in position or size, nor are they organized on the page in a way in which they are related spatially in the world. I would describe his art work as unique, imaginative and creative.</p> <p>Above his picture, D independently wrote "This is me sitting on a chair Right at the table". To the side of his drawing he wrote "I love having a chat at my meeting with my mum, the social worker, Sally Brett". Thus making it very clear exactly what he was trying to convey in his drawing. Not only is D able to scribe for himself but he demonstrates functional use of punctuation-such as the comma!</p>	<p>He has a mini art enterprise project making bespoke vases, plates and furniture for sale at Borough market, and works with the art Department supporting a younger group one day per week.</p>
Line	S	This is a great picture. Can you tell me more about your meeting?	
Line	D	Yeah. This is a great picture. Can I draw another picture?	This is an example of echolalia.
Line	S	Yes (I point to a blank sheet of paper)	
Line Line	D	At the meeting I told everyone All About Me. I like drumming, singing and music. I like football.	This further illustrates that the pupil felt that he was able to tell the adults about himself and the types of activity he enjoys.
Line	S	Do you want to write that?	
	D	Yeah, I'm going to write that	He writes this comment in black felt tip across the top of a blank sheet of paper.
		<p>He selects a pencil, felt tips and begins a second picture. He draws a smiley face. He carefully colours in a big red mouth and brown hair. From the face emanates a speech bubble.</p> <p>Inside the speech bubble he wrote "I felt really confident to talk well and had a brilliant ideas and things about my further and job. I also showing very mature Behaviour all around in school"</p>	<p>He wrote "Further" but meant to write future. At the EHCp meeting the participant expressed his wish to "study maths" and be "a teacher". Although the participant talks about the future in a way that implies he understands the concept. It is clear that he does not understand the concept of work and training. It is very important for D to behave well, and he needs constant reassurance that he is "showing very</p>

			mature Behaviour all around in school". He wrote "all around the school" but I got the impression that he felt he had behaved in a mature fashion at the EHCp interview .He demonstrates frequent echolalia and "mature behaviour" is an example of a phrase he would have heard in school and one he enjoys repeating.
Line	D	Will you sign my report card?	
	S	Yes ( I write a 5 on his report sheet which equates to excellent behaviour)	It appears to be very important that he behaves in a mature way. By which I presume that he understands this to mean he is calm, and does not have angry or physical outbursts
Line	D	<p>I've been very good. (big smile) ...At my meeting I said that when I leave school I want to go to university. I want to be a teacher. I like maths. I'm good a maths. I want to be a maths teacher</p> <p>He then drew another speech bubble and wrote "When I grow up I will go to university" (He asked me to spell "university")</p>	<p>What is clearly evident is that the pupil has some awareness that he is leaving school at the end of the academic year and will hopefully be transitioning to college .The participant can express his aspirations but when he speaks about his future. The EHCp documents a wide range of work-experience undertaken both in and out of school. These include working in the school kitchen, supervising a younger autistic pupil in the school canteen four days per week, working in the Art department once per week supporting a younger class. He works with the premises officer, and sets out and puts away chairs for assemblies and at the end of school. Additionally, he has external placements at The Soup Kitchen, preparing and selling the products and has undertaken and year-long placement at the Mosaic project. He attends College one day per week. Thus, it could be argued that the participant has had opportunities to enable him to make a choice about his future training and employment. Although limited, he has successful experiences of supporting younger pupils and decided that this is what he wants to do in the future. He commented at the EHCp meeting that "I've learnt to be a role model to help younger students".</p> <p>He is unable to articulate any understanding of the requirement to undertake exams, in order to attend university and train to be a teacher. This is an example of the participant being able to use the word "university", but not actually</p>

			<p>understanding the meaning. His mother has stated “god willing he will go to university” Indicating that she does not fully understand the nature of her son’s needs either. It is also possible that D is repeating language he hears at home.</p> <p>The participant has functional literacy skills and emerging numeracy skills. He enjoys repetitive worksheet activities that involve additions to 10, and these number activities help to keep him calm. When D talks about liking maths and “being good at maths” what he actually means is that he finds doing simple single digit additions calming. In fact he will work steadily through them. Clearly his career choice is not realistic.</p> <p>D has aspirations in line with school aims of communication, independence and self-help but he has an unrealistic understanding of future self. While the participant has the vocabulary and language skills to express his choices, he lacks the cognition skills required in order to undertake a university course. D talks about “When I grow up” as if he still views himself as a child. The reality is that he is an 18 year old young man, who is 6ft 5 tall and considered an adult by society.</p>
Line	S	That’s interesting.	
Line	S	<p>I’m going to college in September</p> <p>He then drew another speech bubble and wrote bubbles “I told people I want to go to (name of college) in September 2016”.</p>	<p>In fact this pupil has been offered a place at the named college (pending Local Authority funding). This is a designated provision that caters for pupils with SLD and a significant level of need. However this college may not be best placed to meet the pupils behaviour needs which require 1:1 and 2:1 support when he is angry.</p>
Line Line  Line Line	D	<p>At my meeting I said to everyone that I wanted to travel on my own and I want to live on my own.</p> <p>He drew another speech bubble and wrote “I’m going to (live) in my own house.”</p> <p>I also been showing very mature behaviour all around school. Have I been good?</p>	<p>At the EHCp meeting he described in some detail the desire to become an independent traveller. He is currently transported by cab to school. He also expressed the wish for greater independence and to eventually live independently. This is something that may take some years to accomplish, as he is a particularly vulnerable young man. He is not aware of his own personal safety. He requires prompts to complete vital personal care tasks without which he would be at risk of unintended self-neglect. However, it was agreed that a “care package”</p>

			would be put in place by the Adult Disability team to facilitate independent travel in accordance with his wish. I noticed he had left the word “live” out. I asked if I could pencil the missing word in. The participant gave the impression that he did not want me to write on his drawing.
Line	S	Yes, you have been <b>very good</b> .	I am trying to reassure him.
Line	D	It was a great meeting. He drew another speech bubble and wrote this	
Line	S	You said a loads of interesting things at you meeting	
Line Line	D	Yeah I said loads of interesting things. He writes across the top of his drawing “This is me saying loads of interesting words at the meeting”	This is an example of echolalia. He is repeating my own words back to me and mimicking. This begs the question whose voice is this? How can the researcher and participants voice be separated? (Tangen 2009 p 164)
Line Line	S	Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your meeting?	
Line Line	D	I showed my film. It was All About Me. I think my mum liked seeing the film it showed me doing good stuff in school.	D class teacher made a film that documents D achievements, and this was shown at the EHCp meeting. D gives the impression that he is pleased that his mum saw him in the film “doing good stuff”.
Line	S	Your film was fantastic.	
Line Line Line	D	My behaviour has been very good today (D is rocking and his facial muscles are twitching). Sometimes my head hurts when I get angry.	The rocking and need for reassurance is a sign that he is showing signs of anxiety. The participant had concentrated for a very long period. He acknowledges that “his head hurts” and he is having difficulty controlling his behaviour. I quickly change the focus and the activity. This example also shows the requirement for researchers to possess the skills to read and understand when a pupil may be showing signs of distress or discomfort.
Line	S	You have been very <b>good today</b> . I have really enjoyed taking with you	I know that reminding D that he has been good will calm him.
Line	D	Yes (smiles) I had a <b>very good meeting</b>	He emphasises these words too.
Line	S	Shall we go and set the chairs up in the hall?	I quickly change the focus and the activity. D helps to put out the chairs at the end of the school day. It is part of his routine and he enjoys this. He is composed as he exits the meeting room because he is returning to his familiar routine.

Line	D	Yeah	
Line Line	S	Your drawings are great. Would you like to make a copy of them?	He was clearly very pleased with his artwork, and as we set off to the hall we stop at the photocopier on route and he proudly shows staff his drawings. He is composed.

In the one to one session the participant presented as co-operative, calm and very happy to talk about his unique experiences of participation. For the most part he appeared to direct the flow of the conversation, and completed the drawing and writing activities independently and was fully engaged.

His imaginative drawings, his independent writing and the talk that accompanied these activities are evidence that he has much of interest to say. However, the session reveals that some of what appears to be his authentic voice, is in fact mimicking what he has heard adults say at home or in school. He certainly repeats my words back to me. Therefore it is difficult to know if D is expressing his own thought and opinions or if it is the echolalia.

On the surface of this session it could be argued that D is composed but there are signs of his anxiety. He repeatedly talks about the need for “mature behaviour” and seeks reassurance that his behaviour is good or that he had a “good meeting”. By the end of the session the participant had concentrated for a very long period, and is beginning to show signs of anxiety. He is rocking and his face is twitching.

The following week he was awarded an achievement certificate for his “excellent EHCp” at assembly and appeared delighted.

Two weeks after the EHCp meeting his behaviour became very erratic, and the aggressive episodes escalated in school and he was unable to attend college or his work placement. By the third week his mother presented herself at A&E and the participant was hospitalised. He has to date not returned to school. He was assessed for a placement at a college that specialise in autism (19-25) but refused on the grounds that his level of need in regard to his behaviour could not be met.

Version C. The interpretive dialogue style (June 2016). This approach was used to transcribe all the participants DWT sessions.

#### **Pupil 4 (Dwayne) Date 20th Jan 2016 (55 mins)**

The fourth DWT session was undertaken with an 18 year old pupil who is currently completing Year 14. He has a diagnosis of autism with associated communication, learning and behaviour difficulties. He was first issued with a statement of Special Educational Needs in 2001, when he was aged 4.

His attention and listening skills are variable. He has functional vocabulary which he uses to express himself well in everyday situations. His use of spoken language is, overall, much stronger than his understanding of spoken language. He demonstrates frequent echolalia, repeating words and phrases that he hears. Generally he finds longer, more complex spoken language difficult to understand and can struggle to make sense of social situations. He mimics the behaviours of others, and this can makes relationships with peers difficult.

His behaviour can fluctuate and he takes medication to try to regulate his angry outbursts. He has unpredictable and severe physical outbursts, and he has been restrained in school, and has been excluded on a number of occasions. His aggressive flare-ups are usually triggered when he is not engaged in an activity, or he cannot express his emotional state. He can become very anxious when his routine is not followed. The police have attended the family on numerous occasions due to the severity of his behaviour. Conversely, he can be calm and polite and especially enjoys being helpful. He responds well to praise and has a behaviour report card.

He is currently working at the following National Curriculum levels: Reading 2A, Speaking and Listening, 2C, Writing 2A and Maths, 3C.

This session was undertaken on the same day as the EHCp. The meeting took place in the morning and the DWT session in the afternoon. Consent had already been given and D understood that his participation was voluntary. When the pupil was escorted to the meeting room in which the EHCp had taken place he began to talk about his meeting as he entered the room. Therefore there was no need to ask him the prompt question because he began to talk about his EHCp meeting spontaneously.







		<p>eyebrow, nose, ears, hair a mouth and possibly teeth. The human figure also has a defined neck, arms, hands with fingers as well as a trunk and legs. The depiction may or may not be wearing clothes.</p> <p>In contrast to the realism of the human figure it is hard to make out the table and the chair. The drawing has an X-ray quality that allows objects such as the chair to appear transparent, and parts of the chair can be seen that you would not see if a person was sitting on it.</p> <p>The participant appears to be sitting on the table when he is trying to convey sitting at a table. Thus this picture could be described as <i>failed realism</i>. The table and chair are not drawn in relationship to one another in position or size, nor are they organized on the page in a way in which they are related spatially in the world.</p> <p>I would describe his art work as unique, imaginative and creative</p> <p>Above his picture D independently wrote "This is me sitting on a chair Right at the table". To the side of his drawing he wrote "I love having a chat at my meeting with my mum, the social worker, Sally Brett". Thus making it very clear exactly what he was trying to convey in his drawing. Not only is D able to scribe for himself but he demonstrates functional use of punctuation- such as the comma!</p>	<p>He did not draw any of the other people at the meeting. It is evident from the pupil's comments and art work that he perceived that the meeting was focused on him and his world. He appears to have positioned himself very much centre stage.</p> <p>He has a mini art enterprise project making bespoke vases, plates and furniture for sale at Borough market, and works with the Art Department supporting a younger group one day per week.</p> <p>His picture demonstrates that he is at an egocentric stage, commonly associated with very young children. It is positive that he feels that the meeting was all about him and does not put emphasis on the presence of other adults, as other pupils in this study have done.</p>
L9 L10	S	This is a great picture. Can you tell me more about your meeting?	








L11 L12	D	Yeah. This is a great picture. Can I draw another picture?	This is an example of echolalia.
L13	S	Yes (I point to a blank sheet of paper)	
L14 L15 L16 L17	D	At the meeting I told everyone All About Me. I like drumming, singing and music. I like football.	This illustrates that the pupil felt that he was able to tell the adults about himself, and the types of activity he enjoys.
L18	S	Do you want to write that?	
L19	D	Yeah, I'm going to write that	He writes this comment in black felt tip across the top of a blank sheet of paper.
		He selects a pencil, felt tips and begins a second picture. He draws a smiley face. He carefully colours in a big red mouth and brown hair. From the face emanates a speech bubble. Inside the speech bubble he wrote "I felt really confident to talk well and had a brilliant ideas and things about my further and job. I also showing very mature Behaviour all around in school"	He wrote "Further" but meant to write future. At the EHCp meeting the participant expressed his wish to "study maths" and be "a teacher". Although the participant talks about the future in a way that implies he understands the concept, it is clear that he does not understand the concept of work and training. It is very important for D to behave well, and he needs constant reassurance that he is "showing very mature Behaviour all around in school". He wrote "all around the school" but I got the impression that he felt he had behaved in a mature fashion at the EHCp interview .He demonstrates frequent echolalia and "mature behaviour" is an example of a phrase he would have heard in school and one he enjoys repeating. There is a disparity between his drawings of himself and the language he uses. On the surface his drawing appears to indicate that he has a strong self-concept, but he relies on the words and phrases of others to create an impression of his self.
L20	D	Will you sign my report card?	
L21	s	Yes (I write a 5 on his report sheet which equates to excellent behaviour)	It appears to be very important that he behaves in a mature way. By which I presume that he understands this to mean he is calm and does not have angry or physical outbursts
L22 L23 L24 L25 L26 L27 L28	D	I've been very good. (big smile) ...At my meeting I said that when I leave school I want to go to university. I want to be a teacher. I like maths. I'm good at maths. I want to be a maths teacher He then drew another speech bubble and wrote "When I	What is clearly evident is that the pupil has some awareness that he is leaving school at the end of the academic year and will hopefully be transitioning to college. The participant can express his aspirations when he speaks about his future. The EHCp documents a wide range of work-experience undertaken both in and out of school. These include working in the school kitchen, supervising a younger autistic pupil in the school canteen four days per week, working in the Art department once per week supporting









		<p>grow up I will go to university" (He asked me to spell "university")</p>	<p>a younger class. He works with the premises officer and sets out and puts away chairs for assemblies and at the end of school. Additionally, he has external placements at The Soup Kitchen preparing and selling the products and has undertaken a year-long placement at the Mosaic project. He attends College one day per week. It could be argued that the participant has had opportunities to enable him to make a choice about his future training and employment. Although limited he has successful experiences of supporting younger pupils and decided that this is what he wants to do in the future. He commented at the EHCp meeting that "I've learnt to be a role model to help younger students".</p> <p>He is unable to articulate any understanding of the requirement to undertake exams in order to attend university and train to be a teacher. This is an example of the participant being able to use the word "university" but not actually understanding the meaning. His mother has stated "god willing he will go to university" Indicating that she does not fully understand the nature of her son's needs either. It is also possible that D is repeating language he hears at home.</p> <p>The participant has functional literacy skills and emerging numeracy skills. He enjoys repetitive worksheet activities that involve additions to 10 and these number activities help to keep him calm. When D talks about liking maths and "being good at maths" what he actually means is that he finds doing simple single digit additions calming. In fact he will work steadily through them. Clearly his career choice is not realistic.</p> <p>D has aspirations in line with school aims of communication, independence and self- help but he has an unrealistic understanding of future self. While the participant has the vocabulary and language skills to express his choices he lacks the cognition skills required in order to undertake a university course.</p> <p>D talks about "When I grow up" as if he still views himself as a child. The reality is that he is an 18 year old young man who is 6ft 5 tall and considered an adult by society.</p>
L29	S	That's interesting.	
L30 L31	S	<p>I'm going to college in September</p> <p>He then drew another speech bubble and wrote bubbles "I told people I want to go to (name of college) in September 2016".</p>	<p>In fact this pupil has been offered a place at the named college (pending Local Authority funding). This is a designated provision that caters for pupils with SLD and a significant level of need. However this college may not be best placed to meet the pupil's behaviour needs which require 1:1 and 2:1 support when he is angry.</p>






L32 L33 L34 L35	D	At my meeting I said to everyone that I wanted to travel on my own and I want to live on my own. He drew another speech bubble and wrote "I'm going to (live) in my own house." I also been showing very mature behaviour all around school. Have I been good?	At the EHCp meeting he described in some detail the desire to become an independent traveller. He is currently transported by cab to school. He also expressed the wish for greater independence and to eventually live independently. This is something that may take some years to accomplish, as he is a particularly vulnerable young man. He is not aware of his own personal safety. He requires prompts to complete vital personal care tasks without which he would be at risk of unintended self-neglect. However, it was agreed that a "care package" would be put in place by the Adult Disability team to facilitate independent travel in accordance with his wish. I noticed he had left the word "live" out. I asked if I could pencil in the missing word. The participant gave the impression that he did not want me to write on his drawing.
L36 L37 L38			
L39	S	Yes, you have been <b>very good</b> .	I am trying to reassure him.
L40	D	It was a great meeting. He drew another speech bubble and wrote this	He needs a lot of external validation in order to prop up his self-esteem. He projects his concept of self in the words of others, never his own.
L41 L42	S	You said a loads of interesting things at you meeting	
L43 L44	D	Yeah I said loads of interesting things. He writes across the top of his drawing "This is me saying loads of interesting words at the meeting"	This is an example of echolalia. He is repeating my own words back to me and mimicking. This begs the question whose voice is this? This is a critical methodological difficulty- how can the researcher and participants voice be separated? (Tangen 2009 p 164) It is hard to hear his authentic voice because it does not feel like he thinks about himself in his own terms, nor his future or his self-esteem.
L45 L46 L47	S	Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your meeting?	
L48 L49 L50 L51	D	I showed my film. It was All About Me. I think my mum liked seeing the film it showed me doing good stuff in school.	His class teacher made a film that documents D achievements and this was shown at the EHCp meeting. D gives the impression that he is pleased that his mum saw him in the film "doing good stuff". This is the only instance where he shows a meaningful, independent thought process – he 'thinks' his mum liked seeing the film because of what it showed. He has come to that conclusion more thoughtfully than where we hear him repeating back what adults think of him.
L52	S	Your film was fantastic.	
L53 L54 L55 L56	D	My behaviour has been very good today (D is rocking and his facial muscles are twitching). Sometimes my head hurts when I get angry.	The rocking and need for reassurance is a sign that he is showing signs of anxiety. The participant had concentrated for a very long period. He acknowledges that "his head hurts" and he is having difficulty controlling his










			behaviour. I quickly change the focus and the activity. This example also shows the requirement for researchers to possess the skills to read and understand when a pupil may be showing signs of distress or discomfort
L57 L58 L59	S	You have been very <b>good today</b> . I have really enjoyed taking with you	I know that reminding D that he has been good will calm him.
L60 L61	D	Yes ( smiles) I had a <b>very good meeting</b>	He emphasises these words too.
L62 L63	S	Shall we go and set the chairs up in the hall?	I quickly change the focus and the activity. D helps to put out the chairs at the end of the school day. It is part of his routine and he enjoys this. He is composed as he exits the meeting room because he is returning to his familiar routine.
L64	D	Yeah	
L65 L66 L67	S	Your drawings are great. Would you like to make a copy of them?	He was clearly very pleased with his artwork. We set off to the hall stopping at the photocopier on route, and he proudly shows staff his drawings. He is composed and calm.







## Appendix 6 Easy-Read Pupil Consent to Participate Form for Data 2













**2**


 An Invitation to participate in part two of the research project















 This information is to help you decide if you still want














 to take part in the research project.
















 This may involve you drawing another picture and talking to









 Sally about your experiences of the EHCp review.










 I understand that I can remove myself from the study.







 I understand that the information will remain anonymous.









 I understand my drawings would be used in the study.







 Sign below if you give your permission


 Name \_\_\_\_\_
 
 Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Participant Advisory Group (PAG) Invitation Letter**



Sally would like your help with a research project.

Sally wants to learn more about the new Education and Health Care plans (EHCp) meetings. Sally is asking you because you have already had an EHCp meeting.

How can you help?

- Design a poster to invite pupils to take part in the research
- Explain informed consent to participants
- Support participants at their EHCp meetings

Training will be given to help you became a member of the Pupil Advisory Group (PAG)

Please sign your name if you would like find out more.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

