

**An Exploration into the Use of Person-Centred
Planning to Support the Transition of Children with
Special Educational Needs into School**

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Let's see person-centred planning as an art. Let's give it the colour, power, passion, emotion, magic, skill and talent it deserves. Let's start with a blank sheet of paper as our metaphor, a sheet radiant with the patient capacity to record any dream. Let's assist people in creating and designing their own beautiful futures

(Pearpoint & Forest, 1998, p. 103)

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Abstract

Background: Transition into school is an important time for children and parents and can have long-lasting effects. It is a worrying time for parents, particularly when their child has special educational needs (SEN). Parental concern can have a negative effect on the transition process. Person-centred planning (PCP) has been identified as an effective way of involving and reassuring older children and their families during transition, although it has not yet been explored as a way of involving families with preschool children.

Aims: This study aimed to explore the use of a PCP meeting, through an adapted PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope) to support the transition of preschoolers into school, with a focus on parental concerns and whether this meeting helped to address them.

Sample: Parents, preschool staff and school staff from 6 different adapted PATH meetings were selected as an opportunistic sample. The views of other professionals who had attended and had facilitated were also sought.

Method: Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data and a thematic analysis was carried out.

Results: PCP is an effective way of addressing many parental concerns and is also helpful for school staff. It helps to form a clear picture of the child and to form positive relationships between parents and schools. Insight is provided as to factors which influenced this.

Conclusions: PCP has a positive impact on parents and schools and shows promise as a method for use during the transition of children from preschool into school.

1. Introduction to the Thesis

Transition from preschool into school is considered a crucial time in a child's life (Earley, Pianta, Taylor & Cox., 2001; Eckert, McIntyre, DiGennaro, Arbolino, Begeny & Perry., 2008). 'Successful' transition into school is associated with future academic achievement (Entwisle & Alexander, 1998; Gutman, Sameroff & Cole 2003), stable peer relationships and increased school attendance (Ladd & Price, 1987). One of the most salient factors described as important for positive outcomes in transition is family involvement (Dockett, Perry & Kearney, 2011; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). Positive parent beliefs, attitudes and feelings about school have been found to impact positively on a successful transition (Dockett & Perry, 1999). Parental anxiety about managing the transition period however, has been associated with poorer academic and social adjustment outcomes for children, and greater resistance to going to school (Giallo, Kienhuis, Treyvaud & Matthews, 2008). As might be expected, a child's transition to school is naturally a worrying time for parents, particularly if the child has special educational needs (SEN) (Wildeneger & McIntyre, 2011). Therefore, it is crucial that careful thought is given to how families of children with SEN are involved with the transition process and to how their concerns are addressed.

Increasingly part of the government's agenda for promoting family involvement in their child's education is the use of Person Centred Planning (PCP). PCP is specifically mentioned within the Code of Practice for SEN (DfE & DoH, 2014) as being something which schools should be adopting as a useful way to genuinely involve pupils and their families more closely in planning for their futures. PCP uses different techniques, which have three common characteristics: they aim to consider aspirations and capacities rather than deficiencies and needs, with the emphasis on giving the focus person/ family a voice and thus attending to what matters most to them; they attempt to mobilise a 'circle of support', including friends and family who are most invested in supporting the individual; and they attempt to emphasise providing the support a person will require to reach their goals, rather than limiting it to what the service can manage (Mansell & Beadle-Brown, 2003).

The inspiration for this thesis came from the researcher's work within the Early Years, having experienced many parents who were very anxious about their child's transition and having experienced the process personally as a parent. Having used PCP techniques with older children and anecdotally received positive feedback about the process, this is something that appeared interesting to explore further as a potential for use for supporting families transitioning their child into school.

This thesis aims to explore and critically evaluate the use of PCP (in the form of an adapted PATH meeting) in the transition of pre-schoolers with SEN into school, as a

potential method for supporting careful planning for transition and addressing parental concerns. It aims to explore what concerns parents have and whether the meeting helps to address these. It aims to understand how parents and school staff perceive that the meeting impacts upon them, what factors influence this and what participants views are around including children in this type of meeting. It then hopes to consider the implications for using and improving the adapted PATH process for families with preschool children with SEN, in future.

The study uses an exploratory, flexible, qualitative design, using semi-structured interviews as a method in order to explore and gather in-depth perspectives from participants, and using thematic analysis as a method for interpretation of results. Such methods fit with a realist approach to ontology and epistemology. This approach assumes that the world is made up of structures and processes of a social and psychological nature, which have cause and effect relationships with one another, independent of our own beliefs and constructs (Maxwell, 2011). Research then seeks to generate valid and reliable knowledge about a social or psychological ‘reality’ and captures and reflects, as truthfully as possible, something that is happening in the real world. While such realities are not seen as indisputable ‘facts’ and inferences can only be made probabilistically (Robson, 2011), the assumption is that there are processes of a social and psychological nature which can be identified and that they characterise the behaviour and thinking of the participants, even if they are unaware of this. Therefore, this view is compatible with the current study, as it aims to gather multiple perspectives from individuals in order to gain a better understanding of what is ‘really’ occurring in a

particular context (Maxwell, 2011). It aims to explore some ‘imperfect causal relationships’ between people’s unique experience of an intervention (PCP), including their views and feelings, and the complexities of the context and its outcomes (how it impacts on those experiencing it) (Robson, 2011).

The thesis begins with a scoping review of the literature around transition from preschool into school. The aim of this is to provide a broad overview of the literature, in order to better understand the rationale for supporting this process (why is it important?) and to understand factors which are important to consider when doing so: What helps to make it a positive experience? Why and how should families be involved? What about the involvement of the child? It also aims to consider how parents of children with SEN experience the process of their child’s transition into school and what they worry about, in an attempt to understand what specifically needs to be addressed from their point of view.

A broad description of PCP then aims to provide an understanding of what it is, its general principles and why it is part of the agenda for involving families in planning for their children’s futures. A more in depth, systematic review is then undertaken in order to gather a full picture of how others have experienced/ perceived PCP within the context of education. This provides further rationale for the use of PCP in planning for transition from preschool into school, an understanding of some of the methodological

issues in exploring the use of PCP and a deeper understanding of the current findings and the contexts in which they occur.

An account of the empirical work carried out as part of this research follows. The findings are reported and discussed in light of previous research carried out in this area. Implications for practice are considered and possible directions for future research suggested. The thesis ends with a critical appraisal of the study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Overview: Transition from Preschool into School

2.1.1. Transition- what is it, why is it important and what makes it successful?

Transition from preschool into school is an important time in the lives of children, their families, and their school communities (Pianta & Cox, 1999), involving changes in the relationships, roles and identities for all of those involved (Dockett et al., 2011). While every transition differs, the term ‘transition’ is defined by Dockett and Perry (2007) as a ‘process, beginning before children start school when families start to seek information and make decisions, and extending beyond the actual start of school until children and families start to feel comfortable at school’ (p46). In the UK, transition to school usually occurs when the child is four years old, usually moving from a preschool, childcare or

home environment into school. Some may not yet have separated from their parents or have mixed with peers or other adults outside of the home before transition, whereas others may have experienced a preschool environment more similar to the school environment for up to two years before transition. However, regardless of the environment in which the child is transitioning from, the transition into school is likely to signify a big change, with this being the first ‘formal’ schooling and often the first time a child has been separated from their home environment for a longer period of time. The goals, demands and structure of the classroom are different to the preschool environment and as Feiring and Lewis (1989) point out, the composition of children’s social networks starts to change from networks in which children primarily interact with adults to networks in which children primarily interact with other children and on an increasingly autonomous basis.

Transition practices vary between different schools and different teachers. General practices might involve visits to the school to meet teachers and peers and to become familiar with the routines and environments; the provision of information packs and information sharing evenings and parents and staff from the receiving school going into preschools to meet with children and possibly their parents. Other practices may include ‘transition meetings’ in which parents, preschools and schools meet together to discuss a particular child. In the document ‘Preparing Your Child for Starting School’ (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, (PACEY) 2014), advice for all parents in the UK around transition includes: parents being aware of how their own anxieties and memories of starting school can impact upon their child, communicating

confidence to children, preparing together by reading books about school or visiting it, and supporting friendships by having play dates and practising turn-taking skills. Schools are encouraged to create an open dialogue with parents, to anticipate the physical, emotional and social skills that children will require when they start.

Early school experiences have been associated with later school adjustment and can have an impact on children academically and socially for a long period of time (Earley et al., 2001; Eckert et al., 2008). When children adapt well to school, this is thought to have a positive impact on their academic achievement (Entwisle & Alexander, 1998; Gutman et al., 2003) and their peer relationships. Being able to meet social and behavioural expectations early on is also thought to make children more receptive to academic instruction (LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer & Pianta, 2008).

However, research around what constitutes a ‘successful’ transition and the mediating factors associating successful transition with longer term outcomes is not always clear. Opinion varies on what makes transition a ‘success’, as do definitions and outcome measures used within the research. Based on a review of previous research, Rous, Teeters Myers and Buras Stricklin (2007) refer to engagement with the new setting, adaptation to the new structure and culture and continued growth and development, as factors which constitute ‘success’. ‘School adjustment’ is also referred to and researchers have attempted to use standardised measures of ‘school adjustment’, such as the ‘Children’s Adjustment to School’ scale (Giallo, Treyvaud, Matthews & Kienhuis,

2010), and the 'Family Experiences of Transition' scale for parents (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, Digennaro & Wildenger, 2007) to measure perceived outcomes. Others have focused on retrospective teacher reports of whether they feel a child encountered any difficulties (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox, 2000), or parent reports of their child's increased worries, fears, crying, temper tantrums, and showing negative attitudes towards school (Ladd & Price, 1987), which are very subjective. It is also unclear what constitutes issues that one might expect when a child starts school and issues which may have more of a longitudinal impact, or how factors such as the length of time such issues occur for or how frequently, may influence this judgement.

Much of the research has focused on within-child factors which contribute to successful transition, such as cognitive readiness, language abilities, gender, ethnicity and temperament, (LaParo & Pianta, 2000), as well as executive functioning, emotion knowledge, emotion regulation and metacognition (Blankson, Weaver., Leerkes, O'Brien, Calkins & Marcovitch , 2017). However, researchers have found differences in the importance that is placed on the different skills children need to have acquired for a successful transition (often referred to as 'school readiness'), between different groups of people. For example, Piotrowski, Botsko and Matthews (2000) found that parents were more concerned than teachers about classroom based skills, with a higher emphasis on knowledge, while Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2002) found teachers to be more concerned about behavioural regulation, such as managing separation from their parents.

However, what is clear is that within-child factors only account for a small part of what can influence a successful transition. Ecological models of transition, such as the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (EDMT) (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) (see Appendix 1, p.218 for model) and similar models such as the Transition Conceptual Framework (Rous et al., 2007) have been recognised by many as theoretical frameworks for understanding factors which impact on transition. They have formed the basis for much of the existing research. The frequently-referred-to EDTM describes how the child interacts over time with various changing contexts and a dynamic, also changing network of relationships, which influence outcomes both directly and indirectly. The authors point out that whilst there may be associations between children's skills and one factor, such as the influence of their parent or preschool teachers on their social skills, we must consider how those relationships in turn are influenced (e.g. how the child, parent and teacher are all interacting with each other) and how these relationships and contexts change over time. The model thus emphasises the importance of parents, teachers, peers and community involvement in the transition process, as well as the child and in the quality of the relationships between them. The authors suggest that if these relationships are characterised by frequent contact, agreed-on goals, and a focus on supporting the child and the child's development of skills, they will contribute to positive transition outcomes. Whereas if they do not, they pose a risk to the success of the process.

Due to the complex nature of such contexts and relationships, as Welchons and McIntyre (2017) point out, there exists 'an abundance of theoretical literature' which

highlights how important careful transition planning and communication between contexts can be, in order ‘to strengthen connections and create flexibility among the social contexts that support the child’ (p.84). The importance of a good transition is described as an opportunity for building meaningful and responsive relationships which form the basis for ongoing interactions among children, families, and schools (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Parents, preschool staff and school staff have agreed on the importance of all parties having a shared mission, good communication, and mutual respect, and highlight the value of collaboration for all involved (Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke & Higgins, 2001).

2.1.2. Parental Involvement with Transition Planning

Parental involvement in transition planning is widely considered one of the key influences on successful transition outcomes (Dockett et al., 2011; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). What is not always clear within the literature, is exactly what constitutes parental involvement. As Hart (1992) highlights in his ‘Ladder of Participation’ model, participation can take place at many different levels, from ‘tokenistic’ involvement, in which people are invited to attend but have no real influence in decision making, to people being fully engaged in the process. Researchers have stipulated that parent involvement enables parents to bring a wealth of information and insight to decision making processes (Dockett et al., 2011). Parents are also in a unique position to advocate for their child and can support their children to participate in school decisions, based on their experience of the child’s decision-making at home (Beveridge, 2004).

Also recognised is that parental beliefs, experiences and emotions can impact on their child, which emphasises the need for the transition experience to have a positive impact upon the parents. Families play an important role in both preparing children for school (Griebel & Niesel, 2002) and in providing continuity of experience (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Parents who feel more knowledgeable and confident about managing transition are more likely to use more positive parenting strategies that could be important in helping children make a smooth transition to school. These include expressing confidence in their child coping with transition, engaging in preparation for school activities, modelling and reinforcing a positive attitude toward school, coping in challenging transition related situations, and maintaining consistent morning and bedtime routines (Giallo et al., 2008).

The need for parents to be involved with influencing decisions about their child has also been recognised within education policy for some time. In the white paper, 'Excellence in Schools' (DfEE, 1997), the need to provide parents with information, allow them to have a voice and to encourage parental partnership with schools was highlighted. The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice also emphasises the importance of the role of parents, highlighting the need for schools to work in collaboration with parents wherever appropriate (DfE & DoH, 2014). However, it should be noted that whilst parents have a moral right, they do not have a mandatory duty to take part in decision-making for their children and some parents may not wish to, or have the capacity to do so (Fox, 2015).

Parents themselves have expressed a desire for open and honest communication with professionals in order to foster good relationships and confidence (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Dockett et al., 2011; Hess, Molina & Kozleski., 2006). It has, however been suggested that schools do not always involve parents as parents may wish. The Lamb Inquiry (DCSF, 2009) investigated parental confidence within SEN systems and found that many parents felt they were not listened to. Parents felt they had to battle to ensure that the needs of their children were met, that they had passive roles and were not seen as experts on their child.

How do parents experience their child's transition?

It is natural that transition is likely to be a time of both excitement and concern for most parents, as it often means significant change for both the child and the parent. For example, as well as the concerns parents will have for their child, changes to the parents' daily routines and social interactions are likely to occur. While many researchers acknowledge parental concern, few have identified the nature of what makes parents worry, how and why this differs between families or factors which impact upon, or help to reduce it. Much of the literature comes from the USA, which makes it difficult to generalise to parents whose child is entering the UK education system. It also focuses solely on their worries about their children, and only very few additional anxieties they may have about impending changes in their own lives are addressed (e.g. anxiety about

being judged or sharing responsibilities (Dockett et al., 2011)). The terms ‘concern’ and ‘worry’ are both represented in the literature to describe the emotion of unease or nervousness about something (e.g. Giallo et al., 2010) and thus both terms are used interchangeably within this review.

With regard to concerns about their child during transition, common parental worries identified for children with and without SEN include whether the child would behave well and follow directions at school and whether they had the necessary academic skills (McIntyre et al., 2007; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). In a British survey, out of 2000 parents of children transitioning to school, 71% of parents indicated that they were anxious about their child starting school, with 48% claiming to be more anxious than their child. Primary concerns reported included whether or not the child would make friends and settle into a routine and whether they might be bullied (PACEY, 2014).

How is it different for parents of children with SEN?

As Goelman (2008) suggests, the very definition of children with ‘special educational needs’ implies a range of diversity, as the nature of such needs vary greatly and therefore the literature in this area is difficult to generalise. However, there is some suggestion that where a child has additional needs, there may be additional concerns around how a child will cope, not necessarily experienced by other parents (Welcons &

McIntyre, 2015) and thus parents of children with SEN are identified as a group who may experience more anxiety than other parents (Giallo et al., 2008).

A variety of possible reasons for this increased concern have been identified. Children may genuinely lack certain skills considered important for successful transition, thus rendering them less 'school ready' than their peers (Sektan, McClelland, Acock & Morrison, 2010). Further concerns include the availability of appropriate support in the school setting (e.g. staffing, finance) (Hess et al., 2006; Janus., Kopechanski, Cameron & Hughes, 2008). Parents have reported frustration about schools not putting resources or policies into place and families having to wait a long time for support to materialise (Janus et al., 2008). Concerns about siblings already at school having to take on additional responsibilities or younger siblings being given less attention, as parents need to spend time and energy supporting their older sibling with SEN's transition, have also been identified (Dockett et al., 2011).

A lack of communication between preschools and schools is something that parents find frustrating and something which increases their level of concern. Parents feel that it often comes down to them to advocate for their child, which some parents find overwhelming, and others find empowering (Hess et al., 2006). The nature and extent of the advocacy role that parents of children with SEN need to have can be more complex and more challenging than the role that other parents may need to have (Ryan & Cole, 2009). The need to ensure that their children are provided with adequate support comes

with challenges for families, such as financial strain and the impact on their working lives (Breen, 2009). Some note frustration that professionals do not always expect parents to have either the knowledge or the expertise to influence decisions made about their child (Dockett et al., 2011; Hess et al., 2006).

Parents of children with SEN may also be generally more anxious about transition from previous life experiences. Dockett et al. (2011) suggest that separation may be more of a challenge for families, when they have previously faced hard times together. Previous experiences can also impact upon how parents may view their own ability to cope. For example, from their sample of 763 mothers of children with and without SEN starting school, Giallo et al. (2008) found that where children had experienced early learning, behavioural or social/emotional difficulties, parents felt more concerned and less efficacious in their ability to help their children adjust to starting school, than parents whose children had no reported difficulties.

What might influence parental involvement in transition?

Factors identified which are thought to impact on the level to which parents will engage with transition processes include poverty, social class and health. Families with ill health or fewer financial resources were found to be less likely to engage due to difficulties with attending meetings (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). However, from their large sample of 853 parents, Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler. (2007) found that

even when factors such as socio-economic status are controlled for, factors such as parent motivational beliefs (including self-efficacy in supporting their child and beliefs around their role as parents) were key factors which could both encourage parental involvement in their child's transition and promote a smooth transition into school. Parental confidence, or self-efficacy (how competent they feel) is thought to be domain-specific (i.e. must relate to how parents feel they are able to manage this process, rather than simply how they feel about their parenting in general) (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Giallo et al., 2008). Giallo et al. (2010) suggested that providing parents with the opportunity to (a) discuss strategies to help children adjust to starting school, (b) find out how they can get involved in their children's learning at home and school, (c) find out where they can go for further information and assistance on raising children, and (d) meet other families and build social networks, resulted in parents reporting higher levels of self-efficacy around managing the transition (domain-specific efficacy) after intervention than parents in a non-intervention control group. This indicates that parents can be supported in enhancing their perceptions of how well they can help their child to manage transition.

Green et al. (2007) also found parent perceptions of interpersonal relationships between parents and teachers, to be 'the driving force behind involvement in their child's education', (p 541). They recommended training teachers to find ways to engage parents and thus target the parents' constructions of themselves in an 'active role'. This highlights the importance of forming strong relationships and carefully considering ways

to enable parents to feel welcome and encouraged to play an active role in transition, starting at the planning stage of the process.

Authors have also suggested ways to overcome other barriers to parental engagement, such as being flexible about the time and location of meetings (Green et al., 2007) initiating contact and generally being active and reactive agents, i.e. understanding where parents are coming from and responding to their own individual barriers and concerns (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

2.1.3. Pupil Involvement with transition planning

Another consideration for planning for transition, is whether or not children should be involved with the process. The literature provides us with a strong argument for involving children in decisions around their lives, including legal and moral reasons, as well as there being benefits for the decision making process and benefits for the children themselves (discussed below). Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UNICEF, 1989), refers to the ‘voice of the child’ and the ‘evolving capacity’ of the child (cited in Fox, 2015). It states that every child capable of expressing views has the right to express those views in all matters affecting them and to have them given due weight in accordance with the child’s age and maturity. As Shier (2001) points out, it is useful to note that this does not mean that children have to

necessarily be directly involved at the point that a decision is made, but that adults find out what the children's views are and that they are given appropriate weight.

Benefits of pupil participation include more informed decision making, as children have a lot of useful information to offer about themselves (Norwich & Kelly, 2006). Roller (1998) identified a mismatch between how adults and children 'see' the world and noted the risk of adults assuming that a child might view the world in the same way that they do, thus inhibiting the adult's ability to make decisions fully appropriate for that child and highlighting the need for children themselves to contribute.

Additional benefits for the child include increasing their engagement in learning and community involvement (Kirby & Bryson, 2002), fostering a sense of control over their learning (Beveridge, 2004) and reducing the power imbalance between staff and student (Taylor Brown, 2012). However, the majority of the research focuses on children from the age of Year 6 upwards and does not, therefore help us to address potential benefits for children of preschool age transitioning into school. Perhaps, however, it could be hypothesised that beginning this process early may provide important messages for younger children, thus creating a 'pathway' for such benefits. Indeed, Hart (1992) suggests that even from an early age, active involvement of a child supports a sense of group membership and shared ownership.

Concerns have been raised around how genuine children's voices can be and how much weight should be placed on children's views. Researchers refer to 'tokenism' (Aston & Lambert, 2010), where children's voices are not genuinely or fully represented. Fox (2015) identifies the constraints that systems, such as the education system, have on the child's ability to be involved in decision making, through placing little emphasis on the child's contribution.

Naturally, characteristics of the child, such as age and ability will influence a child's ability to participate. For example, children with learning or language difficulties may have limited means to express themselves as they may wish or to understand what is being discussed. As Thomas, Walker and Webb (1998) point out, both being a child and having additional needs 'conjoins characteristics which are doubly disadvantaging as far as having one's voice heard is concerned' (p.18). Fox (2015) suggests that the child's capacity to understand the information, to make judgements about the information in the light of their own values, to intend a certain outcome and to be able to communicate their wishes, can limit or support the child in their ability to make decisions. He notes that there is no acceptable definition or standard of how competent the child should be, in order to decide what weight their views should be given and that competence develops over time.

Parents of children with and without SEN have raised some concerns about allowing children to consider issues they may not fully understand, which may not ensure their

safety and that participating in decision making may put unnecessary pressure on the child (Beveridge, 2004). Beveridge calls for the need to identify what active participation means for children ‘in a way that acknowledges the needs, rights and unique perspectives of **both** children and their parents, and that enhances rather than restricts children’s participation’ (p.5).

Different methods for considering ways to represent children’s views and to increase their understanding and ability to participate were considered to aid design for the empirical work described in the empirical section of this thesis and are summarised in Appendix 2, p.219-220, although suggestions provided for effective representation of pre-schoolers views are not evaluated in the literature.

Summary and Implications

The literature provides us with a strong argument for giving careful consideration to the transition process for children with SEN moving into school. Whilst successful outcomes for transition are difficult to define and measure, the research provides us with some understanding of the complexity of the transition process and what factors can influence the successful transition of children from preschool into school. The need for involvement of parents, children, schools and communities in transition planning is highlighted and communication and collaboration are identified as key factors for establishing important longer-term, flexible and meaningful relationships between them.

Moral and legal expectations for involving parents are discussed and further advantages of parental involvement are also identified. Such advantages include parents providing a rich contribution towards decision-making processes and representing the views of/ advocating for their child. Parents feeling more supported to manage the transition process is also key. If their concerns are addressed, and if they feel more confident in their own and others' abilities to support their children and have positive experiences themselves, this in turn can influence the experience of the child.

The research also provides us with some important insight into how parents of children with SEN might experience transition, what they might be concerned about and why, and issues which need to be addressed. Some such factors are easier to address than others and the complex nature of how such factors interact is still far from clear.

However, research indicates that communication and interpersonal relationships between parents and schools are important. Parents need reassurance that their child's individual needs can be supported, information as to what this support will be, and how it can be accessed and provided. Support for the child to develop skills prior to transition, may also need consideration. Whilst the advocacy role may be perceived by parents in different ways, parents have expressed a need to be heard as experts on their child and to play an active role. Parents also need to be supported to feel confident in their ability to support their children through the process. There is some indication that parents can be supported to feel more confident by allowing them to access more information and discussing strategies to support their child. Barriers such as the cost of time, energy and financial strain need to be minimised and practitioners need to be adaptable to the needs

and concerns of individual families, as each family is unique and will have their own individual needs.

The research also provides us with a strong argument for the need to provide the opportunity for children to participate in their transition planning. It raises our awareness of the moral, legal and potential psychological benefits (to both the child and the other participants and the decision-making process) of child participation. It also highlights the need to consider parental views and potential limitations to what the child may or may not be able to contribute. What this research does not do, is provide us with a clear understanding of when children are able to contribute and to what extent, or how to support them to do this, as the information that a child will be able to provide about themselves will naturally vary depending on the child's age and stage of development and little evaluative research is available around ways to elicit the views of young children. Making judgements about what is 'useful' or 'a genuine representation' of the child is very difficult to do and raises moral and ethical questions. Thus, perhaps we must not assume that a very young child is not able to provide some sort of meaningful contribution to decisions involving themselves and should therefore consider how to provide this opportunity.

Therefore, ways to involve parents, children and their families, to make the transition process positive, to reduce individual parental concerns, and to increase parental confidence and knowledge need to be considered. More specific factors to consider also

include ensuring that parents are encouraged to play an active role, are understood and feel listened to as experts on their children; that how support will be provided is addressed; that ways to involve children are considered and that barriers are minimised. However, clear processes for how this can be achieved are rarely considered.

Something that may go some way towards addressing many of the factors which influence a successful transition is Person-Centred Planning (PCP). Many of the aspects of PCP link well to the areas highlighted as important aspects to address from the literature around transition from preschool to school and this is discussed in the following section. To date, the use of PCP for transition does not yet seem to have been applied to this population of children.

2.2 Person Centred Planning (PCP)

Why PCP?

Using techniques such as PCP has been increasingly part of the national agenda for some time. In 1989, both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) and the Children's act (HMSO, 1989) identified the need to involve young people in making decisions about their own lives. PCP was recognised as good practice as part of the white paper 'Valuing People' in 2001 (DOH, 2001). The recently revised Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2014, p.136) urges us to focus on the children or young people as individuals, to enable them and their parents to express their

views, wishes and feelings and enable them all to be part of the decision-making process, with an emphasis on collaborative working. It refers directly to the person centred approach as a ‘useful tool for ensuring genuine involvement of children and their families by:

- being easy for children, young people and their parents or carers to understand
- highlighting the child or young person’s strengths
- enabling the child and those that know them best to say what they have done, what they are interested in and what outcomes they are seeking in the future
- tailoring support to the needs of the individual
- bringing together relevant professionals to discuss and agree together the overall approach
- delivering an outcomes-focused and co-ordinated plan for the child or young person and their parent.

SEN Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2014, p.136).

What is PCP and what are the psychological theories on which it is based?

PCP was developed in the 1980s in the USA, to support adults with disabilities in overcoming barriers to inclusion and participation. It is defined as ‘a process of learning how a person wants to live and then describing what needs to be done to help the person move towards that life’ (Smull and Sanderson, 2005, p.7). Its roots lie in the humanistic

perspective, in which choice, growth and constructive fulfilment are emphasised (Rogers, 1951), and in positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It also bears similarities to solution-focused approaches (De Shazer, 1985).

Humanistic Perspective

Humanistic principles reflect the notion that humans have vast resources for self-understanding, that they are motivated by the wish to actualise (grow and fulfil their potential), that they have the capacity to choose what is best for them and that they should be helped to choose what they want in order to fulfil their potential (Jarvis, 2000). The aim of PCP, which is to support individuals by enabling their participation and eliciting their personal perspective on what is important to them to facilitate their full inclusion in society (Murray & Sanderson, 2007) is based upon such principles.

Rogers (1979) further explains that 'resources can be tapped if a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided' (Rogers, 1980, p.115). This involves a 'valuing process' which enables humans to develop a clear self-concept and self-esteem from unconditional positive regard from others, through acceptance and focusing on the person as a whole, rather than a set of psychological processes and deficits. This is reflected in the core defining principles of PCP, namely equality, empowerment and collaboration (Sanderson, 2000). A facilitator of PCP must embrace such values, through developing a relationship with the person at the centre, showing unconditional

positive regard and empathy for them and treating them in a genuinely congruent (equal), non-threatening manner (Merry, 2006).

The three distinctive characteristics of PCP identified by Mansell and Beadle-Brown (2003) highlight ways in which such values are reflected within the processes involved in PCP. Firstly, aspirations and capacities are considered, rather than deficiencies and needs, with the emphasis on giving the focus person a voice and attending to what matters most to them, thus enabling their participation and eliciting their personal perspective on what is important to them. The person is actively involved: the aim is to listen to the focus person (child/family) and to avoid professionals imposing their own goals or views on a person. The process is run by a facilitator, who aims to keep the conversation focussed on the core values and goals of the individual. If the person is supported to form an intention or clear goal, through a conversation organised to support them to do so, this is thought to increase meaning in their lives and allow them to take action flowing from that intention (O'Brien, Pearpoint & Kahn, 2010). Individuals are encouraged to 'consider the most promising possibilities in current reality, about what will move things forward a step and what can be learned from what has been tried' (p.17), in order to move towards their intended goals.

Secondly, PCP attempts to mobilise a 'circle of support', inviting to the meeting friends and family who are most invested in supporting the individual and most knowledgeable about the person's interests and goals and thus thought to bring 'huge commitment,

energy and knowledge to the table' (Sanderson, 2000, p.4). This allows loved ones to take control of the support required, rather than services (O'Brien et al. 2010) and family members are treated as partners.

Finally, PCP attempts to emphasise what a person will require to reach their goals, rather than limiting discussions around what a service can manage. If such goals can be reached, the person should be more able to engage with a life of participation and contribution. Sanderson (2000) explains that the aim is to devise a plan for the person, based on their own aspirations, capacities and capabilities and the supports they require. Therefore the process works backwards from the person's goals to forming a plan for how to reach them. This relates well to the humanist perspective that humans are motivated by the wish to actualise (grow and fulfil their potential), that they have the capacity to choose what is best for them and that this can be supported by acceptance and focusing on the person as a whole, rather than a set of psychological processes and deficits.

Positive psychology and solution-focused approaches

Positive psychology aims to promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2004), with a focus on well-being and personal strengths. It highlights that enabling individuals to have a positive outlook can be very powerful in leading to positive outcomes (Seligman, 1991). PCP aims to focus on the

child's strengths and abilities and to build upon these strengths, thus promoting the factors which should allow the child to thrive. The goal-orientated process, in which aspirations are considered and ways to support the child reach these aspirations aim to create a positive outlook.

Well-being encompasses both the experience of positive emotions and the creation of meaning and purpose in life (Keyes & Annas, 2008). The creation of meaning and purpose is previously discussed as something that PCP aims to do, through enabling the person to form an intention or clear goal (to increase meaning in their lives), allowing them to take action flowing from that intention and emphasising what a person will require to reach their goals. Ensuring that the child is understood in an holistic sense is also underpinned by the need to consider the well-being of the child, again helping participants to understand what is important for helping the child to thrive in every aspect of their lives.

Similarly, solution-focused approaches emphasise the resources people possess, rather than focusing on deficits, build upon strengths and consider how these can be applied to the change process. The approach suggests that language and social interactions are the primary tools for changing thinking and behaviour (De Shazer, 1985). The PCP process is a tool for promoting social interaction, with an emphasis on collaborative conversation (Sanderson, 2000).

The solution-focused approach is based on three general principles: that conversations centre around clients' concerns, that they focus on co-constructing new meanings around such concerns and that clients are supported to co-construct a vision of a preferred future, drawing on past successes and strengths to resolve issues (Trepper, McCollum, DeJong, Korman, Gingerich, & Franklin, 2012). Again, this relates well to the key principles identified by Mansell and Beadle-Brown (2003), in particular the emphasis on co-constructing a preferred future (identifying aspirations) and drawing on strengths and resources to reach these goals, rather than focusing on what a system can provide, or on a child's deficits.

PCP Tools

In order to enable 'person-centred thinking', various frameworks and tools for PCP have been introduced over several years. Each of these techniques is based on similar principles (as described above), but differs in the ways in which the information is gathered, how others are engaged in the process and how decisions are made (See Appendix 3, p.221 for a summary). They can also differ in their emphasis on the detail of day to day life or on long term planning (Sanderson, 2000). Many of them use a graphic, for making information visually accessible to all involved. This might include a large poster which records information in written or pictorial form and photographs (Hayes, 2004). However, as Taylor-Brown (2012) points out, the definition of person-centred 'incorporates both philosophy and tools' (p55) and that it is the philosophy of person-centredness that is key to the success of PCP, rather than simply using the tools themselves.

Evaluation of PCP

Research has highlighted that given the complex and dynamic range of PCP techniques and processes and the individualised nature of the meetings and potential outcomes, finding a way to evaluate PCP is not easy. Authors have also noted the challenge presented by demarcating processes from outcomes. Indeed, when researchers refer to a ‘philosophy’ of person-centredness (e.g. Sanderson, 2000; Taylor-Brown, 2012), defining the nature of this presents further challenge.

Some have attempted to find more standardised, or quantified outcome measures. For example, Holburn, Jacobson, Vietze, Schwartz and Sersen (2000) created a ‘process index’ and an ‘outcome index’ (see Appendix 4 p.222), using a range of methods, such as descriptions of the procedures and goals of PCP from the literature, the author’s own experiences of the process and parts of other published instruments not specifically designed for PCP. They attempted to operationally define the ‘five essential outcomes’ described by O’Brien (1987). Holburn (2002) then refined this to describe ‘core elements’ of PCP (See Appendix 4, p.222). However, these ‘elements’ and indexes were created through research on a population of males, around the age of forty, with learning difficulties, living in residential homes and thus their applicability to populations of children within a school context is very limited. One more recent study adapted Holburn’s (2002) ‘five essential outcomes’ to create a rating scale more relevant to the school context (Corrigan, 2014). However, whilst such indexes may serve as a useful prompt for ensuring that certain factors are considered, their use has been heavily criticised (e.g. O’Brien, 2002). The reasons for this, Holburn et al. (2002) accept

themselves: that in order to create specificity, focusing solely on these elements means that there is little room for flexibility, or for capturing aspects not included in the scales, such as ‘mindful engagement’ (p.258).

Therefore, in order to capture a richer, more flexible picture, qualitative methods have primarily been employed as the methodology for evaluating PCP. In order to gain a deeper understanding of existing research which evaluates the use of PCP approaches, a systematic review, with a primary focus on qualitative methods, follows.

2.2.1. Method for review of PCP literature

Several databases were searched, including Psycharticles, Psychinfo, ERIC (Proquest) and the University database, Explore. Searches involving the term ‘person-centred’ were carried out using both the English spelling (person-centred) and the American spelling (person-centered). The initial search generated an abundance of articles which used the term ‘person-centred’ or even ‘person-centred approach*’ for referring to person-centred research methods, or person-centred philosophies within different contexts, such as medicine, or environmental science. Search terms were therefore refined to ‘Person-centred/ centered planning’ and ‘person centred/ centered + School*, person centred/ centered + children, person centred/ centered + young people, student-centred/ centered planning and family-centred/ centered planning’. Despite different PCP tools being used, it was assumed that tools based on person-centred techniques would refer to this within

the abstract and thus a search including article abstracts, which included at least the terms stated above would have captured the majority of relevant articles. Given that the PATH approach specifically is used in the context in which the empirical work undertaken in this thesis took place, search terms including the words 'Planning Alternative Tomorrows' were also carried out, although this did not yield any new results. Electronic searches were also supplemented by ancestral searches (searching the references of included studies for any other relevant articles (Polit & Beck, 2014)). Two articles were found through this method.

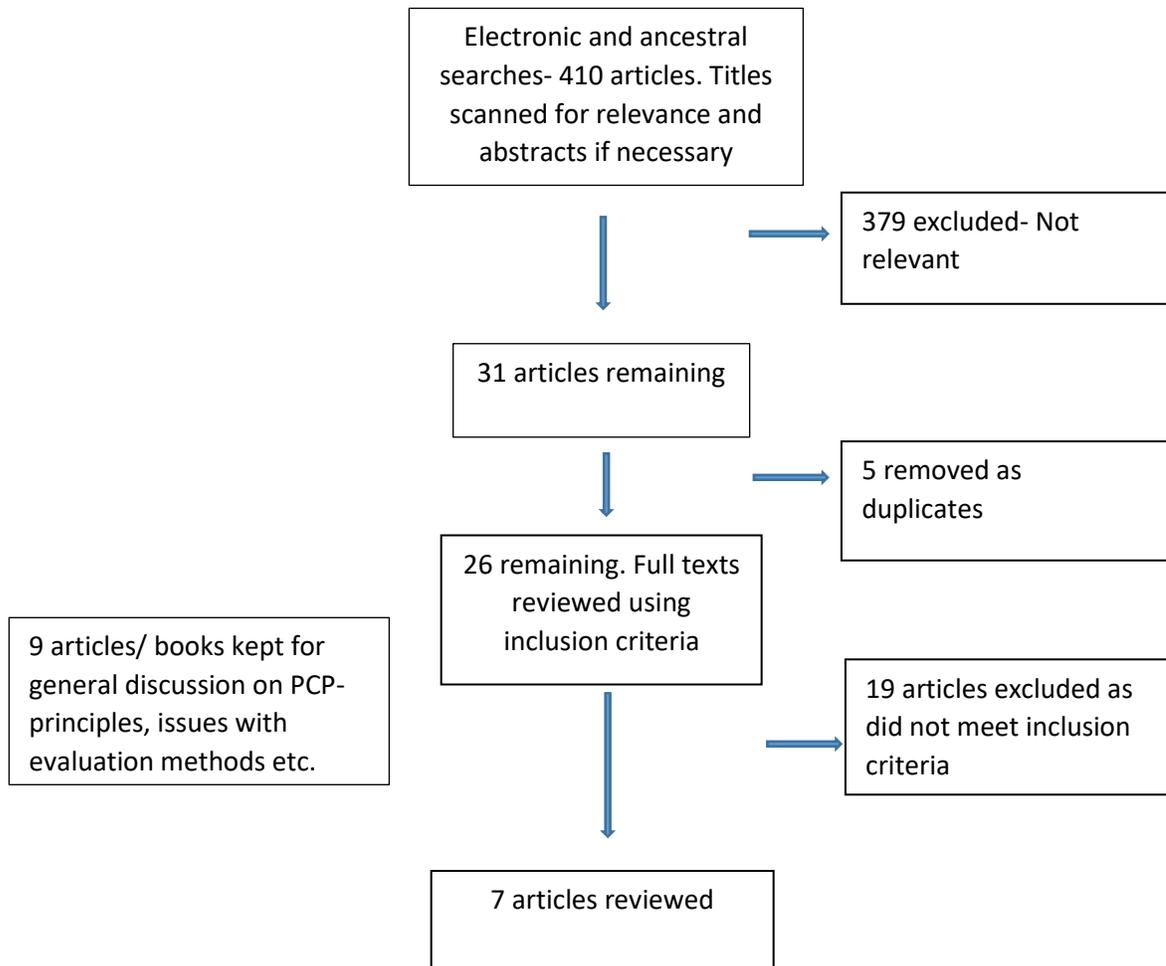
An initial search revealed that the research primarily focuses on how those who have experienced PCP view the process in order to evaluate it. This contributed towards the development of the review question: What are the perceptions and experiences of those involved in person-centred planning? Some of the research focused on the use of PCP within social care systems, supporting young people in planning for their adulthood, or within wider educational systems (e.g. Morgan, 2016). This included very different populations, within a different context, requiring a focus on different outcomes and procedures and was thus less relevant for the population. In order to ensure it was possible to cover the research most relevant to this population in sufficient detail, this led to the further refinement of the review question: What are the perceptions and experiences of those involved in person-centred planning for young people within the school system? Titles and article abstracts were scanned for relevance to this question, e.g. to ensure that they included the perceptions and experiences of people who had participated in person-centred planning techniques (410 articles). Those not relevant or

duplicated were excluded (379 articles). The remaining full texts (31) were then checked for their relevance for this review and their applicability to an appropriate population, using the inclusion criteria in Table 1. Nine articles or books were found which did not meet the criteria for the systematic review, although they were relevant for adding richness to a general understanding of the nature and application of PCP and issues surrounding how it is evaluated. Information from these is included in the preceding discussion around PCP (p.30-34). Figure 1 (p.39) summarises the process of the selection of articles for review.

Table 1: Criteria for inclusion of articles in the review

- Articles reflected use of PCP tools or techniques for planning for a child or young person's future and/or during a time of transition of some nature.
- Initial criteria included use of person-centred planning for a young person/ young people within a range of settings. Due to much of the research focusing on planning for older people preparing for their transition to adult life from either an educational or a community setting, this was later refined to focusing on planning for a young person below the age of 15, within educational settings. This was due to the applicability of such research to the current context of this study.
- Main aim of article was to evaluate impact of PCP. (Articles which focused solely on a discussion about what PCP is or how it should be applied and did not include evaluative data about its use were excluded. Articles in which the aim was to evaluate use of a combination of PCP and other approaches (e.g. positive behaviour support) were also excluded, as the impact of the PCP itself was considered unclear).
- Articles included gathering of qualitative data.
- Articles were written after the year 1997. Earlier than this were considered less relevant due to the changing nature of the use of PCP, the education system and societal changes.
- Articles were written in English.

Figure 1: Flowchart summarising the process for article selection



Once selected, the quality and relevance of the seven articles reviewed were appraised using Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence Framework (WoE). The aim was not to exclude any study, as often useful and usable information is available even in studies which can have a weak rating (Pawson, 2006), but to better understand the value of each article in terms of its quality and relevance to the review. An overview of the criteria developed and the rating process followed is included in Appendix 5 (p.223-228) and a

summary of the scores assigned is included in Table 2. All studies received either a high or medium WoE rating.

Table 2: Critical Appraisal for Quality of Evidence using Weight of Evidence Framework (Gough, 2007)

	WoE A: Quality of Methodology	WoE B: Relevance of Methodology	WoE C: Relevance of Evidence to the Review Question	WoE D: Overall Weight of Evidence
Bristow (2013)	High (2.5)	High (2.5)	High (2.5)	High (2.5)
Childre & Chambers (2005)	Medium (1.8)	Medium (1.8)	Medium (2.3)	Medium (2)
Corrigan (2014)	High (2.5)	High (2.5)	High (2.5)	High (2.5)
Hayes (2004)	Medium (1.8)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)
Partington (2016)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)
Taylor-Brown (2012)	Medium (2)	Medium (2)	Medium (1.8)	Medium (2)
White & Rae (2016)	Medium (2.2)	High (2.5)	Medium (2)	Medium (2.4)

Low: 1.4 or less, Medium: 1.5-2.4, High: 2.5 or above

An overview of all of the studies reviewed is provided on (p.42) and a table to summarise each study is included on p.44-45 (Table 3). The findings of each study were analysed and themes and subthemes identified and described by the authors of each study were extracted and synthesised from the results sections. Appendix 6 (p.229-230) provides examples to highlight how this was done. The themes and subthemes were then represented in a thematic map, using detailed descriptions of the themes/subthemes by the authors to ensure their accurate representation (Appendix 7, p.231-234). Themes are

summarised by study in a table (Appendix 8, p.235) and similar themes across studies were identified. The articles were read thoroughly several times to ensure that contextual information was considered and that themes identified as similar across studies did refer to similar concepts. Findings are discussed as a narrative synthesis (Thomas, Harden and Newman, 2012).

2.2.2. Findings from the Review of the Literature

2.2.2.1. Overview of studies reviewed

Studies have focused upon both what participants in PCP processes thought or valued about the meeting itself and upon how participants felt the meeting had been experienced by or impacted upon the child or young person (CYP) (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Bristow, 2013; Corrigan, 2014; White & Rae, 2016). These two areas are considered below. In order to gather perceptions around how the meetings were experienced by or impacted upon the young person, researchers have sought the views of those that know the CYP well, and some have included the views of the CYP themselves (Hayes, 2004; Taylor-Brown, 2012). This has generally involved pupils over the age of ten.

All used semi-structured interviews, except for Hayes (2004), who used questionnaires for data collection. Open questions were used to enable participants to speak freely and sometimes visual prompts were included to aid discussion (e.g. Bristow, 2013; White & Rae, 2016). Some have attempted to include specific questions (e.g. Corrigan, 2014) to

focus on potential outcomes identified within the theoretical literature and previous evaluative studies (e.g. questions which focus on whether or not parents felt listened to).

Few researchers have also supplemented their qualitative design with measures such as a Locus of Control scale (Nowicki & Strickland, 1973) and rating scales that the authors created for measuring feelings of positivity towards the school, in an attempt to directly measure these constructs within the young person (e.g. White & Rae, 2016).

One study compared perceptions about PCP meetings with perceptions about more traditional meetings and also compared participants' views from both before and after the PCP meeting (Childre & Chambers, 2005)

Very few studies have attempted to measure longer term outcomes of PCP. One study attempted to look more longitudinally at whether or not children met the targets set up for them in a PCP meeting at a later review meeting (Corrigan, 2014). However, the majority of research looks to measure the impact of PCP soon after it has taken place. Table 3 (p.44-46) summarises the studies reviewed and which methods were used in which context.

Table 3: Summary of Studies Reviewed

Author	Participants/ situation	Method	Findings
Bristow (2013)	6 young people, aged 9-15 reintegrating back into school from alternative provision following exclusion in the UK. Used a PATH meeting format.	Semi-structured interviews with young people, parents, head teachers and EPs after meeting and at 3-6 month follow-up.	Improved relationships between pupils and parents and pupils and schools. CYP felt more motivated to reach their goals. Parents felt listened to and equal partners. EPs felt there had been a shift in perception, more reflection and that parents and CYP had more of a voice and felt empowered. More inclusive, child-focused and solution orientated than traditional meetings. Emotions through the meeting and effect of graphic, skills of facilitators and props discussed.
Childre & Chambers (2005)	6 families either attending, transitioning into or out of middle school (grades 6-8) in the USA, taking part in student-centred Individual Education Plan (IEP) planning meetings. (N=1 mother and father, 4-mother only and 1-grandmother only)	Semi-structured interview both before and after IEP planning meetings. Focus on perceptions of 'traditional' IEP meetings and 'student-centred' meetings.	Families reported more satisfaction with the process, more collaboration with all involved, better structure and covering of topics, new perspectives, more purposeful dialogue and broader consideration of family and student input than a more tradition type of meeting.
Corrigan (2014)	6 children aged 5-15 (1 female, 5 male)	Action research involving parents, school staff, EP and other agency	Meetings were: child-centred, positive, enabled a better

	reintegrating back into school in the UK following exclusion using Essential Life Planning Framework.	staff (N=43) after a person-centred review meeting and at a follow-up review meeting 6-29 weeks later. Focus on outcomes for CYP, using Target Monitoring Evaluation (TME) (progress towards individual targets), open-ended self-report questionnaires and rating responses around 'essential outcomes'.	understanding of needs, collaborative, and increased choice and participation for CYP. All CYP met targets follow-up. What was valued for implementing targets: EP as champion for child, facilitator skills, visual, positive school ethos, good communication after the meeting, strong relationships. However, meeting considered too long and too many questions.
Hayes (2004)	Single case study-girl in Y6 with learning difficulties, transitioning from mainstream primary school to mainstream secondary school in the UK. Visual annual review based on MAPs.	Child interviewed using visual aids. Parents and other adult participants given questionnaires.	Adults felt that the meeting was more accessible to and fun for the child, as well as being more relevant for her, useful for planning the next steps for transition. The child reported feeling listened to.
Partington (2016)	3 young people in Y6 transitioning to secondary school in the UK using MAPs format.	Semi-structured interviews with young people, using visual support methods in the term following their transition to secondary school (reflecting on the meeting that took place prior to transition).	CYP reflected on the emotional impact and social implications of transition. Felt that the meeting had helped them to feel more organised and gather information, that others could get to know them and feel supported. CYP felt both anxious and positive about the meeting.
Taylor-Brown (2012)	3 boys in Year 9 of a special school for children with social	Semi-structured interviews with young people.	Meetings were experienced positively by CYP. Although the boys had some difficulties in

	emotional and behavioural difficulties in the UK, following person centred annual review meetings, based on MAP and PATH formats.		articulating what they wanted to say, they felt that the meetings reduced power imbalances and considered them in an holistic way.
White & Rae (2016)	Person-centred annual reviews for 16 young people described as 'vulnerable and with SEN' in Y6 and Y9 in the UK.	Semi-structured interviews with parents and young people. Measures of young people's locus of control, feelings of positivity around the school and motivation, using rating scales.	Emotional process, important role of facilitator, organisation of meeting important, good level of information shared, process was collaborative, outcomes were constructive and CYP more engaged and had the chance to share their views. No change for LOC or feelings of positivity for CYP.

2.2.2.2. What were the perceptions and experiences of participants of the PCP meetings themselves?

All seven articles reported that the majority of participants had reflected on the PCP processes as a positive experience. A small number of negative aspects were mentioned, such as the meetings being time consuming (Bristow, 2013; White & Rae, 2016) and not always being as child-friendly as they might have been (Taylor-Brown, 2012). Please see Appendix 7 (p.231-2234 for a summary of the themes from the findings of the studies and Appendix 8 (p.235) for indication of themes present in each specific study.

The process is collaborative

The literature reflects a widespread perception that PCP meetings are both collaborative and inclusive. This was reflected in every study, by the majority of participants. In their comparison of PCP meetings with more traditional IEP planning meetings, Childre and Chambers (2005) identified parental perceptions that during traditional meetings, parents were required to passively listen to staff, answer questions and to agree with the plan, with very little collaboration or problem solving. Parents reported that they shared only a very small amount of the information they could have done about their children. Some felt that schools were dismissive of suggestions they had made and failed to understand family perspectives. In comparison, PCP meetings are perceived throughout the literature as enabling parents and children to increase active participation. Parents and young people feel listened to and valued (Corrigan, 2014; White & Rae, 2016) the power-dynamic between professionals and families is reduced and families feel more an

equal part of a team than they had anticipated (Bristow, 2013; Corrigan, 2014; White & Rae, 2016). One parent noted that she 'didn't feel ganged up on by do-gooders or looked down on like a bad parent' (Bristow, 2013, p.76). Professionals, parents and young people value hearing and learning from others' perspectives and reaching more of a shared understanding (White & Rae, 2016).

The process is goal-orientated and positive

As PCP methods usually require some consideration of the young person's future, participants have perceived that this enables families to consider something they may not have thought about before and provides the opportunity for more purposeful, solution-focused dialogue. When future goals have been identified, participants are able to identify steps to support the CYP to meet them (Bristow, 2013; Childre & Chambers, 2005). Participants have also noted the importance of valuing a CYP's strengths for empowering CYP and allowing people to build a plan based on these (Corrigan, 2014). The positive nature of the meeting was often noted by participants as contributing to a productive discussion and to positive emotional responses to the process (Bristow, 2013; White & Rae, 2016). As one participant quotes, 'even those who might have been negative were drawn into the positive nature of the process' (Corrigan, 2014, p.276).

A full and holistic picture is formed

Whilst the PCP approaches in the studies reviewed have varied in their aims (planning for transition/ reintegration/ target setting in school) and thus how much they have

focused on gaining a picture of the CYP, many have highlighted value in considering the child as a whole and have also noted the amount of information that is shared at such meetings. White and Rae (2016) note that parents were ‘reassured by the wealth of transparent information that was shared in written form and the comprehensive action plan that was developed as a result’ (p.46). When compared to traditional meetings, participants have noted a key difference in PCP being that families are asked about influences outside the setting and within the home (Bristow, 2013; Childre & Chambers, 2005; Corrigan, 2014; Taylor-Brown, 2012). This is valued as being useful (Bristow, 2013) and informative (White & Rae, 2016) and for making CYP feel important (Taylor-Brown, 2012) and enabling staff to support the wider needs of the CYP (Corrigan, 2014).

However, Corrigan (2014) notes that school staff in one school had reported that they did not feel that they had enough opportunity to go into the child’s history or enough of the child’s difficulties and they suggested that this was due to the focus on the positive.

The meeting is an emotional process

Several authors reflected on participants feeling nervous or daunted before the meeting (Bristow, 2013; Taylor-Brown, 2012; White & Rae, 2016) and some have reflected on this being due to a lack of preparation and/ or a lack of clear expectation of what to expect (Bristow, 2013; White & Rae, 2016). Others reported feeling drained afterwards (Bristow, 2013). However, the majority of these participants reported feeling reassured

after the meeting, and feeling comfortable and enjoying the relaxed and informal atmosphere within the meeting (Bristow, 2013; Corrigan, 2014; Hayes, 2004; White & Rae, 2016). Bristow (2013) specifically discussed the use of props and some of the more unusual aspects of the PATH meeting (such as projecting forward in time) and noted that whilst participants could see that they conveyed an important message, some of the props and unusual aspects caused a level of discomfort and embarrassment. However, other participants in the study felt they added to a fun and relaxed atmosphere.

Childre and Chambers (2005) suggested that whilst parents in their study reflected on generally feeling reassured after person-centred IEP planning meetings, they did not feel that all of their fears about their child had been eliminated. Parents suggested that this was due to an element of the unknown as to what would happen to their child. However, they felt that the PCP process had at least better prepared them for what was to come and that the whole planning process had felt generally easier. The authors suggest that this related to the purposeful focus on future goals, with clear and focused planning of steps towards them.

The child is at the centre

All of the studies reviewed found the child being at the centre of the meeting as a theme. Participants felt that this was due to the child being present (Hayes, 2004) and other factors such as the structure, the ethos and the accessibility of the meeting (discussed in

the next section) (Bristow, 2013; Corrigan, 2014; White & Rae, 2016). Young people themselves even commented on the meeting being ‘more about them’ (Bristow, 2013).

The meeting is easy to follow

All of the studies highlighted the visual as important and unique to a PCP meeting. This has been identified as important for enabling participants to follow and to understand the meeting and providing a clear structure (e.g. Bristow, 2013). As one young person highlighted, ‘it was the way it was writ out, we all like had more understanding’ (Taylor-Brown, 2012, p.58). Other aspects thought to make the meeting more accessible to participants was the reduction of jargon (Childre & Chambers, 2005) and clear, open and honest dialogue (White & Rae, 2016). However, young people and parents in White and Rae’s (2016) study suggested that the CYP did not always understand every part of the meeting. Taylor-Brown (2012) also raises concern that although the CYP in her study did not report not being able to take part in all of the meeting, she noted some issues with their ability to articulate fully what they wished to during the research procedure. There was therefore a question about whether they would have been able to participate as fully as perceived.

Facilitator skills are important

Facilitators are generally regarded within the studies as highly skilled and integral to the success of the meetings. Particularly valued is their ability to be reassuring, non-judgmental, sensitive to others’ feelings and to put people at their ease (Bristow, 2013;

White & Rae, 2016) and to be able to empower people to be heard (Corrigan, 2014).

Studies in which the facilitator was not already well known to the family or school, such as an EP, noted that a 'neutral' facilitator was able to ask questions (sometimes challenging ones) and to support reframing of perceptions until a shared understanding was reached (White & Rae, 2016).

2.2.2.3. What were participant perceptions around the experiences of children and young people of the meeting and the impact of the meeting on the children and young people?

Research has focused on how young people experienced the meetings themselves, both from the perspectives of the young people themselves and from parents and professionals. Some have also attempted to look more longitudinally at outcomes for young people.

Views of the CYP themselves

When asked their views, CYP themselves (from the age of 11 years) noted that they felt important (White & Rae, 2016), understood and reassured by others listening to them. Being present at their meeting helped them to learn about the school and organise their own thoughts about transition (Partington, 2016). Year 9 boys in a special school for

children with BESD (behavioural, emotional and social difficulties) felt that it gave them an opportunity to tell people new things about themselves, to learn about themselves and to hear positive things, allowing them to feel increased pride and confidence (Taylor-Brown, 2012). The level to which these CYP actively participated in the meeting is varied and not always clear in the studies.

How did others perceive that the CYP experienced the meetings?

Young people were present at their PCP meetings in each of the studies reviewed. The presence of the CYP has generally been viewed as positive throughout the literature, with advantages for the CYP identified by adults, such as the CYP feeling listened to (Corrigan, 2014; White & Rae, 2016), having more choice in what happens to them and enjoying the process (Corrigan, 2014).

Childre and Chambers (2005) reported that although only two out of six of their CYP 'actively participated' during their meetings, parents and professionals identified advantages to the CYP simply being present. Although what is meant by 'active participation' is not entirely clear, the authors noted that when the CYP either spoke at the meeting or enabled others to represent their views by sharing them with someone beforehand who spoke on their behalf, they perceived that the CYP would feel more motivated to work towards their goals if they felt they had contributed towards creating them.

Some concerns have also been expressed about CYP being present in their meetings. Some adults were concerned that the CYP might have felt daunted and not necessarily have understood all of the meeting (White & Rae, 2016), or been able to fully articulate what they may have wished to (Taylor-Brown, 2012). Childre and Chambers (2005) found that when parents were interviewed prior to their person-centred IEP planning meeting, they were able to see some advantages for older children, but felt that their Year 6 children may be too young and that adults should be there to oversee things and ensure that what was put in place reflected what was best for the child.

Longer term outcomes for the CYP

Very few studies have directly measured outcomes for the CYP following PCP. White and Rae (2016) failed to find any changes in the CYP's locus of control (LOC) or feelings of positivity towards their new school using a LOC scale (Nowicki & Strickland, 1973) and rating techniques, before and after their person-centred review meetings. They suggested that a one-hour long meeting was not long enough to elicit significant change in such constructs which have built up over long periods of time. However, parents and CYP in their study did reflect confidence that the outcomes identified during the meeting would come about. Bristow (2013) also identified that CYP felt clearer about their goals and future direction up to six weeks after their PATH meeting than they had felt before their meetings. Whilst this has rarely been directly measured, future change is therefore implied.

Corrigan (2014) found positive implications up to six months after PCP. All of the individual targets that were set for CYP during PCP meetings planning for reintegration back into school after exclusion, were considered met either at or above the expected level when rated during follow-up review meetings. Stakeholders reported that the CYP had better attendance, emotional understanding, social interaction and academic progress following the meetings, although establishing causal links between the meetings and the outcomes is difficult. Corrigan (2014) suggests that established school systems and the school ethos, available time and capacity to support the CYP (school and parents), communication and strength of relationships within the systems can all have an influence on how well outcomes from a PCP meeting might be put into place and followed through.

2.2.3 Limitations of the PCP studies reviewed

Research has primarily been conducted through semi-structured interviews, usually by EPs who may have been perceived to be closely linked to the meeting facilitators, which has potential limitations, such as participants being afraid to reveal their true feelings or perceiving potential imbalances of power. In one study, the researchers were also the people who carried out the meetings themselves (Childre & Chambers, 2005), and in others, the same facilitator carried out each PCP meeting (e.g. White & Rae, 2016). This is reflected in the WoE (A) ratings (Table 2, p.41).

As Corrigan (2014) points out, there is also potential that participants' expectations for what they may be expected to say may have been set up through attendance at the meeting. For example, hearing 'this meeting is all about you', may potentially have influenced a child or young person (CYP)'s beliefs about its person-centredness. Childre and Chambers (2005) also interviewed participants prior to the PCP meetings they carried out, which may have influenced participants' perceptions or expectations prior to their attending the meetings.

Additional limitations also relate to the challenges of gathering CYP's views. Whilst attempts were made to facilitate this, such as the use of simple language, rapport building and visual prompts, as Taylor-Brown (2012) points out, difficulties with articulation were sometimes evident and this may have influenced full disclosure of the CYP's feelings about the meetings during research interviews.

Analysis in each study has also been carried out by researchers who are likely to have an awareness of the theoretical basis of PCP, which may have both helped and biased analysis. For the majority of studies, steps were, however, taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data analysis. For example, the systematic creation and presentation of codes, use of another party to validate code generation, evidence and quotations from the transcripts to support these codes and provide rationale for interpretation of the data. For those given a 'high' rating in the Weight of Evidence 'A'

criteria, personal and epistemological perspectives were reflected upon and references made to related research.

Studies which have attempted to evaluate impact of the PCP meetings over time (e.g. Corrigan) are limited in terms of their trustworthiness. As Holburn (2002) points out, one of the challenges to evaluating outcomes of PCP is that what happens after the meeting may have a significant effect. In other words, that the quality of how well things are put into place as a result of what was suggested during a PCP meeting, at least partly determines the success of what may be defined as an ‘outcome’ of PCP, rather than the ‘outcome’ being dependent on the meeting alone. One would also wonder whether the level of success in putting plans into place after the meeting may influence how the meeting is viewed retrospectively.

2.2.4. Summary and Implications for future research

Initial findings indicate that there are many potential benefits for using PCP as a way of involving parents and their children in planning for a child’s future. Given the varied nature of the different techniques, contexts in which PCP has been applied, methodological limitations and individualised nature of the process/ anticipated outcomes, that many consistencies have been identified across several different PCP techniques is impressive.

The research highlights aspects of PCP meetings for older children that were valued, provides insight into how parents and CYP experienced them and highlights factors which have influenced their success. Key areas include: the process providing a full and holistic picture of the child, as well as it being collaborative, positive, goal-orientated and easy to follow, with the child at the centre of it. Parents reflected on their emotional experiences and felt reassured after the meeting. This gives a strong rationale for the use of Person Centred Planning and some insight into what it is about the process that works.

When comparisons are made between the literature around children's transition from preschool into school and the potential benefits of the use of PCP for older children, it is surprising that the use of PCP has not yet been explored for children transitioning from preschool to school. Many aspects identified within the literature for what families require for a successful transition to school relate closely to the benefits identified from the use of PCP. This highlights a strong argument for the exploration of the use of PCP for preschool children moving into school for the first time. Table 4 (p.59) shows a summary of the comparison.

Table 4: Comparison of factors identified as important for transition and what PCP is thought to offer (from theoretical literature and evaluation of use of PCP with older children)

<i>Factors identified as important for a good transition from current review of transition literature</i>	<i>Factors identified as features of PCP from current review of PCP</i>
Good communication and collaboration between all involved	Process is collaborative
Parents are encouraged to be involved	Active parent participation is encouraged
Parents feel invited to take an active role	Meeting is accessible
Parents feel listened to and seen as experts on their child	Parents feel listened to and their views are taken seriously
Parents feel confident in their ability to manage transition	Parents feel reassured
Parents do not feel overwhelmed by their need to advocate for the child	Process is positive and goal-orientated
Child is supported to develop skills as much as possible prior to transition	Schools gain a clear picture of the child and make a plan as to how to support them
Issues around support for the child are addressed	Child is encouraged to participate and is kept at the centre
Child is given the opportunity to participate	
Child's views are given 'appropriate' weight	
Barriers such as time, finance and inflexibility are minimised	

Research indicates that the transition process is complex and that deciphering more longitudinal outcomes for young people, which would be attributable to the PCP process

rather than other factors is difficult to do. However, as the literature indicates, if the PCP process could enable changes such as reducing parental concern, or building meaningful and positive relationships between parents and schools, this would have a positive impact on the child's transition. As O'Brien (2002) highlights, the process of PCP should perhaps be seen not as the 'cause' of change, but 'a way to improve the odds that purposeful change will happen'. Thus, this indicates that an exploration of the impact of PCP soon after the event provides useful insight into both its immediate and longer-term potential.

In addition, whilst the views of parents, staff and other key stakeholders have been explored with regard to how they found the PCP process, the research primarily focuses on how the meeting impacted on the young people. Research has scarcely focused in depth on how PCP impacts upon parents or staff directly and what influences this, which is surprising given that staff and parents are key stakeholders in the transition process and have an influence on its success. For example, it does not provide us with a clear picture of what parental concerns were and how these were addressed. This is an area for development, given that both of these parties are key to the transition process, particularly given the evidence from the literature on transition about the importance of parental involvement in transition for pre-schoolers into school.

Researchers have also looked into the potential benefits of children or young people over the age of ten being present at their meetings. These include young people feeling

important, more confident and more motivated and being able to contribute important information about their goals and what is important to them. When this is considered alongside the literature around pupil participation, this provides further argument for the need to involve CYP in planning for their futures. However, research has only focused on children over the age of ten and participation of younger children has not yet been explored. It does not provide us with a clear understanding of how the process may be used for younger children, how younger children may be able to contribute and to what extent, or what the benefits may be of involving them.

3. Empirical Paper

3.1. Introduction

Transition from preschool into school is considered a crucial time in a child's life (Eckert et al., 2008; Earley et al., 2001). The transition process has an influence on children's academic achievement (Entwisle & Alexander, 1998; Gutman et al. 2003), peer relationships and school attendance (Ladd & Price 1987). Previous research around transition to school indicates that this is a complex process, with a wide range of child, school and environmental factors having an influence on its success (Boethel, 2004; Giallo et al., 2008; Graham & Hill, 2003; LaParo & Pianta, 2000; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

One of the most salient factors described as important for positive outcomes in transition is family involvement (Dockett et al., 2011; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999) and family involvement is also mentioned in the Code of Practice for working with children with special educational needs (SEN) (DfE & DoH, 2014), making it part of the government's current agenda. Parents are able to provide invaluable information about their child in order to plan appropriately for them and act as advocates for them (Beveridge, 2004). They also benefit from learning from others how best to support their child (Griebel & Niesel, 2002). Positive parent beliefs, attitudes and feelings about school have been found to impact positively on a successful transition (Dockett & Perry, 1999). Whereas parental anxiety in managing

the transition period has been associated with poorer academic and social adjustment outcomes for children, and greater resistance to go to school (Giallo et al., 2008). Although it is sparse, research indicates that transition can be a worrying time for all parents, but in particular, those with children who have special educational needs (SEN) (Wildeneger & McIntyre, 2011). Additional concerns for parents of children with SEN include concerns about how support will be provided, and that their child will not have the necessary skills for school (Janus et al., 2008; Sektnan et al., 2010). Their anxiety is often raised by previous experiences they may have encountered, or by the financial and time demands that advocating for their children brings (Breen, 2009; Dockett et al., 2001; Giallo et al., 2008). Therefore, parental concerns for this population of children need to be addressed.

Models for successful transition indicate that transition to school for children with SEN should involve families and professionals working together (Dockett et al., 2011; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Central to this is the co-ordination of support and providing opportunities for building meaningful, flexible and responsive relationships which form the basis for ongoing interactions among children, families, and schools (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Welchons & McIntyre, 2017). Parents themselves have also highlighted this as important (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Dockett et al., 2011; Hess et al., 2006). Careful planning is therefore crucial. In practice, evidence indicates that parents in the UK do not always feel as though they are given opportunity to play an active role in their child's transition (Childre & Chambers, 2005; The Lamb Enquiry, 2009). Some feel that the experience

is challenging and negative and that communication is poor (Dockett et al., 2011; Hess et al., 2006).

One possible method for involving families in planning for transition may be through the use of Person Centred Planning (PCP). PCP is specifically mentioned within the Code of Practice for SEN (DfE & DoH 2014) as being something which schools should be adopting as a useful way to genuinely involve pupils and their families more closely in planning for their futures. PCP uses various techniques, which have three common characteristics. Firstly, it aims to consider aspirations and capacities rather than deficiencies and needs. Through enabling the focus person (or family) to voice their aspirations, the focus remains on what matters most to them. Secondly, it attempts engage those who are most invested in supporting the individual and finally, it attempts to focus on the support a person will require to reach their goals, rather than on what the service can manage (Mansell & Beadle-Brown, 2003).

One such PCP technique is known as PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope), originally developed by Pearpoint, O'Brien and Forest (1993), to help marginalised people to be included in society and to enable people to develop a shared vision for the future. This technique involves gathering together those most invested in supporting the child to plan for their future in a positive and informal way. The meeting begins with the 'Dream', in which hopes and aspirations for the focus person's future are discussed. It then moves on to discuss where the focus person

hopes to see themselves in a year's time. Once the goals are established, the group consider how things are for the focus person at present and how the group can then support that person to reach those goals. It ends with members of the group committing to specific actions for supporting the focus person. (www.inclusive-solutions.com accessed 17.9.2018).

A growing body of evidence is gathering within the UK, for the use of PCP techniques as an effective way of involving older children and their families at times of transition. Benefits identified have included families and young people feeling reassured, able to participate, and forming positive relationships (Bristow, 2013; Corrigan, 2014; Hayes, 2004; White & Rae, 2016). Attempts have been made to identify which aspects of the processes were valued by participants. These include the process providing a full and holistic picture of the child, being collaborative, positive, goal-orientated and easy to follow, with the child at the centre (Bristow, 2013; Corrigan, 2014; Hayes, 2004; White & Rae, 2016).

However, research to-date has primarily focused on the use of PCP techniques for older children, for children re-integrating back into school after exclusion (Bristow, 2013; White & Rae, 2016), or for annual reviews or IEPs (not at transition) (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Corrigan, 2014; Hayes, 2004; Taylor-Brown, 2012). It has not yet been adapted for the population of children moving from preschool to school, despite the potential advantages for using such a method for planning their transition. Also,

though parents and staff members have been asked about their views and experiences of the process, and though there is some indication as to how they feel about the process (that they feel reassured, for example), much of the focus has so far been upon parent and staff perceptions about the process itself, or about the impact of the process on the child or young person. Research has scarcely focused in-depth on the perceived impact of the meeting on the parents themselves (such as on whether individual concerns were addressed) or on staff. The potential impact of the meeting has important implications for parents, given their potential levels of concern around the transition process and the potential impact of this on the family and the child. The impact on school staff is also important, given that the majority of such meetings would usually be negotiated with staff initially and that they clearly have an important role to play in transition. In addition, very few studies have explored the use of the PATH meeting (Pearpoint et al., 1993) specifically.

Strong argument is given in previous research for allowing young people to participate in matters relating to themselves. For example, children's rights to express their views in all matters affecting them and to have them given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity are highlighted (UNICEF, 1989). Benefits of participation in making decisions about their education have been found for older children, including enhancing a person's personal responsibility (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004), increasing their engagement in learning and community involvement (Kirby & Bryson, 2002), fostering a sense of control over their learning (Beveridge, 2004) and reducing the power imbalance between staff and student (Taylor-Brown, 2012). Whilst the benefits

identified for older children may or may not apply to this age group, researchers acknowledge that young children still have a right to express a view and what constitutes ‘due weight in accordance with their age and maturity’ (UNICEF, 1989, p.5) is a matter of debate.

Some consideration has been given to what constitutes genuine participation of children and young people and barriers to real pupil participation have been identified, such as the age and needs of the child and inflexibility of systems (Beveridge, 2004; Fox, 2015). Staged models have been proposed which attempt to define different levels of genuine participation (Hart, 1992; Shier, 2001) and some attempts have been made to identify ways in which to facilitate the participation of children (Clark & Moss, 2001; White & Rae, 2016). However, what kind of contribution children of this age group might be able to have, what might help with this, whether this could be achieved through a PCP meeting and what the impact of it may be is still unclear and requires exploration.

3.1.1. Aims of the Study

This study therefore aims to explore the use of an adapted PATH meeting for children and their families, as a potential way of involving them during the transition process. Please see Appendix 9 (p.236-240) for a detailed description of the PATH process and of the adapted pre-school version.

This type of PCP meeting is to be trialled for the first time in the author's authority and this study aims to explore its impact on parents and staff through investigating what parents and staff say about how they experience an adapted PATH meeting designed to support transition. As Pawson & Tilley (1994) explain, measuring impact in qualitative research refers to whether something has addressed what it needs to and whether it has produced any other outcomes, and whether it was the intervention itself which led to such changes.

Therefore, it aims to look at what parents of children with SEN worry about, to both contribute to the dearth of research available about this group of parents and their feelings about transition, as well as to better understand whether a PCP approach, specifically the adapted PATH meeting, helps to address their concerns.

It also aims to consider what impact the meeting has on school staff (whether it has led to any perceived changes for them), through understanding what concerns members of school staff may have with regard to the transition process and whether they feel their needs were met.

The study also aims to critically evaluate perceptions around factors which influence participant experiences and the impact of the meetings, thus contributing to research

around participants' perceptions about the process itself and helping us to understand factors to consider when potentially carrying them out in future.

Finally, given that having a preschool child as part of a transition meeting is something that has rarely been explored and that the nature of their participation is likely to differ from that of older children, the study aims to specifically consider multiple perspectives on the participation of preschool children in the meeting, in order to provide insight into how this is viewed and what facilitators might need to consider when deciding whether to involve preschool children in meetings in future.

Through these areas, the aim is then to decipher what the implications for using and improving the adapted PATH process for families with preschool children with SEN in future might be.

The following research questions will therefore be considered:

- What do parents of children with SEN worry about with regard to their child's transition?
- What was the perceived impact of the meeting on parents? Did it address their concerns?
- What was the perceived impact of the meeting on school staff? Did it provide them with what they felt they needed from the meeting?

- What factors did participants perceive as having an influence on how the meeting went? (How and why did the process impact on them as it did?)
- What are the views of parents, school staff and other professionals around children of this age with SEN, participating in an adapted PATH meeting? (What were multiple perspectives on the presence of the child at the meeting?)

3.2 Method

3.2.1. Design

As this is, as far as the author can establish, the first time this type of meeting has been used for this population, an exploratory, flexible, qualitative study design was deemed to be appropriate. Qualitative research aims to understand how people experience events and make sense of the world (Willig, 2013), thus making it a useful approach for better understanding how people experience an adapted PATH meeting and addressing the aforementioned research questions. Quality and credibility criteria for qualitative research (Guba, 1987; Shenton, 2004) were taken into consideration to ensure quality of design. This is discussed in the Critical Appraisal (from p.178).

The research was developed in line with a critical realist paradigm which fit both the research questions and the epistemological and ontological position of the researcher. A realist approach assumes that the world is made up of structures and processes of a

social and psychological nature, which have cause and effect relationships with one another (Maxwell, 2011). Research then seeks to gain an understanding of these structures and processes and to generate probable inferences about what characterises the behaviour and thinking of the participants (Robson, 2011).

Semi-structured interviews were carried out as a method in order to explore and gather in-depth perspectives. Individual interviews were carried out face-to-face with parents and school staff (where possible, otherwise this was done over the phone). Other perspectives were also explored for triangulation of data, as suggested by Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach and Richardson (2005) for more consistency of evidence from multiple sources, as well as for exploring different perspectives for the research question ‘what were multiple perspectives around the presence of children at the meeting?’. This was done through individual interviews with pre-school staff and focus groups with other professionals who attended the meetings, such as EPs and Portage workers.

Thematic analysis was the chosen method for interpretation of results as this allowed for organisation, description and interpretation of a complex set of data to make it more accessible and communicable to others, (Boyatzis, 1999), within the chosen critical realist framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data was analysed within different sets of groups according to the research questions it aimed to address (e.g. to answer the question ‘what was the impact on parents?’ Data from parents only were analysed

initially, and then other groups for any other information relevant to the question).

Please see p.88-92 for detail of analysis procedure.

3.2.2. Participants

An opportunistic sample of participants was identified. Following whole-service training around the process of facilitating a typical PATH meeting, a group of Educational Psychologists (EPs) worked together to adapt the process for preschoolers. All EPs within the service were then asked whether they were planning to facilitate a PATH-type transition meeting for a preschooler that they were involved with, using the agreed format for their meetings and if so, to discuss participation in the research with the families. Families were provided with information as to what the research would involve (Appendix 10 p.240-242). All families who were asked agreed to participate; six families in total and provided informed consent (Appendix 11 p.243-244). Key members of staff from the child's preschool and the school staff due to be involved with the meeting were then contacted, with permission from the families, to see whether they would also be willing to take part in the research. Again, all agreed to participate. Information and consent forms were created for these participants. None of the families had previously had any prior involvement with the researcher.

All of the families had a child aged between three and four years, due to transition from preschool into school the following September. All of the children had Special

Educational Needs (summarised in the Table 6, p.76), and had already been referred to an Educational Psychologist, due to their needs being judged by preschool staff and the Educational Psychology service, as being potentially significant enough to meet the authority's criteria for an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP). In each case, at the time of the meeting, the EHCPs had either been applied for, or were in the process of being applied for and families were awaiting responses from the authority. In all but one of the cases (Case 4), an EP had been involved with carrying out a statutory assessment for the child and had thus had some involvement with the family. The EP involved with each family carried out the adapted PATH meetings, with assistance from one other EP (not the researcher). The EPs assisting the meetings volunteered to do so. The nature of contact between the family and the receiving school varied in each case and is summarised in table 5 (p.74)

Table 5: Nature of contact between family and receiving school prior to the meetings by case

Case 1	Knew the school very well. Older brother had been taught by the SENCo. School had attended a Team Around the Child meeting for the child, had had frequent contact with parents and preschool and had supported the preschool with their EHCP application.
Case 2	School had read reports on the child by professionals. Child had visited school for three induction sessions.
Case 3	School had attended a Team Around the Child meeting and the child had visited the school for 'snack time'.
Case 4	School had not yet had contact with the family or preschool. Had received some paperwork from the Special Educational Needs Department.
Case 5	Child was attending nursery attached to the school and staff had had several conversations. Older sibling had gone through the school, although had not needed any additional support
Case 6 (parent not interviewed but info shared by school)	SENCo had visited the preschool and carried out an observation

One member of staff from each school or preschool was asked to participate in the research, usually the Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCo). Where more than one parent attended the meeting (in two cases), families were asked whether one or both parents would like to participate, and both opted for the mother only. In cases 2 and 5, both children were due to transition into the same school and therefore the school SENCo was only interviewed once (after both meetings had taken place). The family in Case 6 took part in two transition meetings with their school as they had twin girls and chose to have a separate meeting for each child. In this case, the parent was not interviewed. After initially agreeing to take part in the research, she was then unfortunately unavailable at the time of interview (although was happy for the data collected from other sources from her daughters' meetings to be included). However, the school and preschool SENCos from these meetings were both interviewed, as were the other professionals present. Information specific to each case is summarised in Table 6 (p.76).

Table 6: Summary of background information for each case

Case	Age group of Parent	Ethnic Origin of parent	Siblings	Information relating to Receiving School/ School staff	Present at the meeting	Nature of Child's Primary Needs
1	26-35	White UK	Two older siblings- both have been through the receiving school	Mainstream infant school SENCo with four years' experience	Both parents, child, head teacher, School SENCo (also child's class teacher), 2 preschool staff, 2 EPs	Speech and language difficulties
2	26-36	White UK	None	Mainstream school with specialist unit for children with language difficulties SAME SCHOOL AS CASE 5 SENCo with over ten years' experience	Both parents, child, head teacher, school SENCo, 2 preschool staff, Portage worker, 2 EPs	Social communication difficulties
3	18-25	White UK	Younger brother	Mainstream infant school SENCo with over ten years' experience	Mother, child (for part) school SENCo, 2 preschool staff, younger sibling, Portage worker, 2 EPs	Global learning difficulties, high anxiety

4	26-35	Sri Lankan	Younger brother	Mainstream school with specialist unit for children with severe and complex social communication difficulty/autistic spectrum disorders SENCo in first year of role	Mother, child, school SENCo, preschool SENCo, younger sibling, 2 EPs	Social communication difficulties, physical difficulties
5	36-45	White UK	Older sister who has gone through the school	Mainstream school with specialist unit for children with language difficulties SAME SCHOOL AS CASE 2 SENCo with over ten years' experience	Mother, child (for part), grandmother, head teacher, school SENCo, preschool SENCo, Portage worker, 2 EPs	Speech and language difficulties
6	36-45	White UK	Twin girls- both had a separate PATH meeting	Mainstream infant school SENCo with over ten years' experience	Mother, child 2 (not child 1), school SENCo, class teacher for child 2, 2 preschool staff, Portage worker, 2 EPs	Both girls- Social communication difficulties

Seven EPs were also interviewed, six as part of a focus group and one individually over the phone, as she had been unable to attend the group. All were female and all had either facilitated or created graphics for at least one of the meetings. All had previously had experience of facilitating more traditional transition meetings (see Appendix 12 p.245 for a description) and had received training in PCP and in running a PATH meeting. All had also had previous experience of facilitating PATH meetings for older children.

Three Portage workers also participated in a focus group and two TOP (Autism Outreach) workers. Portage workers have a background in the education of children in the Early Years and are employed to work with children with significant and complex needs on specific targets, within the home and the preschool, usually on a weekly or fortnightly basis. TOP workers similarly work with preschool children in the home and the preschool setting weekly or fortnightly, although they specifically work with children with a diagnosis of Autism. All workers had attended at least one adapted PATH meeting for a family with whom they had been involved and some had attended other adapted PATH meetings held for preschoolers for whom parents/ preschool staff/ school staff were not interviewed. Each of them had experienced traditional transition meetings in the past.

3.2.3. Procedure

The development of the intervention

Within the author's service, all EPs were trained in PCP and more specifically, PATH meetings. It was deemed necessary to make adaptations to the usual format of the PATH meeting due to the age of the children. Discussions were held within the service and with the original trainers (Colin Newton, www.inclusive-solutions.com) around how the PATH might be adapted for preschoolers, ensuring that the meeting remained as close to the traditional PATH method as possible. The core principles of PCP were studied and key elements relevant both to PCP and the PATH meeting itself were identified from the literature to ensure that these were adhered to where possible. The aim was to ensure that the meeting was 'family centred' and that children were encouraged and supported to participate as much as possible

Guidance for EPs facilitating the meetings was created by three EPs within the service (Appendix 13 p.246-250) including the researcher, and reviewed within a larger team of 20 EPs. The researcher facilitated three adapted PATH meetings for preschool children using the guidance and this was then further refined, for example, eliminating sections such as 'how will we stay strong?' to reduce the amount of time the meeting took. The format was then again discussed with participating EPs to ensure that they understood the aims of the process. A leaflet explaining the process to families and educational establishments was created and shared by EPs with anyone considering taking part in the process (Appendix 14 p.251-253).

Preschools taking part in the process were provided with a format for collecting the child's views prior to the meeting and were asked to fill this in, in collaboration with the parents of the child and with the child as appropriate (Appendix 15 p.254). Written and verbal guidance was provided by EPs as to how to carry this out (Appendix 16 p.255-256). This was created in conjunction with service colleagues, with the principles of PCP in mind and professional judgement as to what kind of information might be useful and relevant for children of this age group. The Mosaic Approach (Clark & Moss, 2001) was also considered, to gain insight into methods for gathering the views of preschool children, as well as previous research indicating ways to support child participation (e.g. Corrigan, 2014; Hayes, 2004).

Parents were encouraged to discuss with their EP and preschool staff whether they would be happy to bring their child along to the meeting. If the child was due to attend, discussions were held between the parents and their EP about any resources or adaptations which might make the child feel more comfortable at the meeting. Parents were also asked who the family felt they would like to invite and where they felt comfortable to hold the meeting. These issues were also discussed with school and preschool staff by their EP.

Research procedure

Prior to participants being selected, ethical approval for the research was sought (see Appendix 17 p.257 for confirmation of approval). Ethical considerations are discussed below. Before the study was carried out, a school SENCo and a parent were interviewed together, following a PATH meeting carried out within the researcher's usual work, to gain insight into the appropriateness of the questions. The data from these interviews was not used, but as a result of these conversations, interview questions were refined. For example, useful information was gained when the SENCo debated whether or not she would opt for this type of meeting again, so a question about this was added. An additional question around how the child was involved in the meeting was also added as initial responses described what the child mostly did during the meeting but did not always address the issue of whether the child had actually had any involvement with the meeting itself.

Prior to the meetings, participants were sent written information about the adapted PATH procedure (Appendix 14 p.251-253) and about the research (Appendix 9 p.236-239). They were invited to ask any follow-up questions about the research. If they were then happy to participate, they were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix 10 p.240-242). Participants were contacted by phone to arrange a time and a place to be interviewed following the meeting and were given the choice of whether they would prefer to be interviewed in person or over the phone.

All meetings were carried out within the term prior to the child's transition to school. The researcher did not attend the meetings, to ensure that the research and researcher were seen as neutral and separate to proceedings as far as was possible.

Following the meeting, participants were contacted as arranged, within a week of the meeting and were asked again whether they were willing to participate. Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any point of the process until their data had been analysed and incorporated and informed what would happen to their data. Semi-structured interviews were carried out. Interview questions included a mixture of open questions to elicit general views and more specific questions (e.g. did you feel that you came out of the meeting with a clear plan?). Questions were designed to take participants through various aspects of the meeting, which related to the research questions and were highlighted in the literature as being factors which make this type of meeting distinctive, e.g. questions around the structure of the meeting and what parents were concerned about with regard to transition. The schedule started with more general open questions, such as 'what were your initial thoughts about the meeting?' as suggested by Drever (2006), before asking more specific questions, in an attempt to allow participants to speak freely without being prompted in any particular direction. Robson (2011) also suggests that more general questions at the start are less threatening and thus help participants to relax. Efforts were made throughout the interviews to ensure that questions were not leading participants towards any particular direction. Questions were adapted as necessary, either not being asked if they had already come up

as part of the discussion and new questions created to more deeply probe something that had been raised. See Appendix 19 (p.260-262) for interview schedules.

Questions were put forward in a clear, concise way and consideration was given to the language used, to ensure that questions were accessible to all. Modification of language was particularly necessary for the case in which English was not the participant's first language (participant was offered an interpreter but did not feel that this was necessary).

Participants were encouraged at the start to speak as openly and honestly as they could, with reassurance that the researcher was looking for honesty and openness and that information they provided would not be directly shared with any other parties before anonymisation and analysis. Attempts were made beforehand to build a rapport with participants to support them to feel relaxed. The researcher also made efforts to be sensitive to non-verbal cues given by participants, as suggested by Silverman (2001) and to adapt her interpersonal style as appropriate.

Throughout the interview, participants were encouraged to provide as much detail as they felt comfortable with and prompts were used to provide a thorough but non-intrusive examination of what was initially expressed. Willig (2013) describes the need for the interviewer to allow the interviewees enough space to 'redefine the topic under investigation and thus to generate novel insights for the researcher', (p.29). The researcher summarised and reflected back to participants as appropriate, for clarification

as to what had been said, as well as prompting further information. Pauses, non-verbal cues (such as nodding) and an interested facial expression were also used to demonstrate active listening and to promote further discussion. Questions were also used for clarification as necessary to ensure that the researcher fully understood the meaning of what the interviewee was trying to say. Participants were given several opportunities to add anything else they may have wished to. Interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes, depending on the content. Interview dialogue was recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher and anonymised (identifiable only by case number and role) within twenty four hours (see Appendix 18 p.258-259 for an example transcript).

Three separate focus groups were held within the same academic term as the adapted PATH meetings, one with the EPs facilitating the meetings, another with Portage workers and another with TOP (Autism Outreach) workers, all of whom had also attended some of the meetings. Interviews were again conducted, recorded and transcribed (see Appendix 20 p.263-265 for schedules). Care was taken to ensure that group interaction and discussion took place as appropriate and that questions were used to refocus the group and provide general structure to the discussion as appropriate, as suggested by Robson (2011). The researcher also relied on her experienced facilitator skills to ensure group members felt able to express their own views and that groups were not dominated by any particular members (e.g. through reassuring members that all opinions were useful and directing questions towards those who had not had much chance to speak).

3.2.3.1.Ethical Considerations

Prior to beginning work with participants, ethical consent for the research was sought from the UCL Departmental Research Ethics Committee, in accordance with the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2014). A risk assessment form and data protection form were also shared with and approved by the committee (See Appendix 17 p.257 for departmental approval). The main areas for consideration and precautions that were taken to address these areas are summarised in Table 7.(p.86) These areas are based upon the four ethical principles outlined by the British Psychological Society (BPS) (2014). These four principles include respecting the autonomy, rights and dignity of the person, social responsibility, maximising benefit and minimising harm and scientific integrity.

Respecting the autonomy, rights and dignity of the person involves ensuring that participants were treated as individuals with intrinsic worth, with a right to determine their own priorities. This included endeavouring to treat participants with respect, to build a rapport with them, to listen carefully and without judgement and to consider issues such as consent and confidentiality (outlined in Table 7, p.86).

The principle of responsibility requires the researcher to act in a trustworthy and accountable manner and to prevent any harm being caused. As with the principle of prevention of harm, again, this requires awareness of and consistent reflection upon

ethical issues. Many of the factors considered, such as confidentiality, safeguarding and being non-judgemental are outlined below. In order to maximise benefits to participants, participants were encouraged to speak freely about their experiences and were provided with a summary in writing of the findings of the research.

Integrity requires a researcher to be open and honest about their qualifications and role and not use their role to exploit others. Measures were taken to be clear about the aims of the research, to inform clients what it involved and to ensure their informed consent.

Participants were treated with respect at all times and their views listened and responded to. Further detail is provided in Table 7.

Table 7: Areas for ethical consideration and how they were addressed

Potential Area for Concern	Steps taken to Reduce/ Address Concern
Participant consent	Participants were asked to opt in, with as clear an understanding as possible of the process of the adapted PATH meeting itself, as well as what the research was about, what it entailed and how their data would be used. Participants were asked to sign a consent form and were informed both verbally and in writing, when asked to volunteer, when asked to sign and when carrying out the interviews, of their right to withdraw at any time until their data had been processed and analysed.
Confidentiality	Interview data was made identifiable only by number and role of the participant, except for information held by the researcher alone (e.g. contact details) which was securely destroyed when no longer needed. Should participants have wished to withdraw, they could opt to have their data destroyed up until no longer possible (e.g. once it had been analysed). Data was destroyed once analysed, following UCL procedures. Until then, data were stored securely on a password-protected laptop.

	Participants were reassured that their data would not be discussed with any other parties in specific terms, only as generic findings. During the focus groups, specific children, families or schools were not mentioned by name, nor any personal information shared. Meetings were discussed anonymously and in general terms.
Safeguarding issues being raised	Participants were informed that information would only be passed on without their consent if any issues around safeguarding were raised, in line with Local Authority policy. Wherever possible, this would have been discussed with the family before any information was passed on. This did not become necessary.
Raising parental/ staff expectations about what can be achieved	It was made clear to participants being interviewed that the researcher was not involved in the meeting itself and that any concerns expressed would not be passed on to the participating EPs or settings. If concerns had arisen, participants would have been told that they should contact the participating EP about any specific concerns or that they would be signposted to other relevant professionals, as appropriate. Again, this did not occur during the process.
Participants not feeling as though they can be honest/ that their comments will affect their child	Participants were reassured verbally and in writing that information would only be shared as general findings once it had been anonymised and that specific information would not be passed back to their EP/ school/ preschool. They were also reassured of the researcher's neutrality and that the aim of the research was to gain as accurate view as possible of participants' true feelings around the topic, whatever they may have been.
Participants feeling judged through what they say	Participants were listened to in a respectful way and their views were not commented on, only reflected back to them or clarified to ensure understanding. The researcher also made an effort to put participants at ease and build a rapport with them before and during the interview.
Participants being misinterpreted	Any ambiguous information given was reflected back to participants or clarified through questioning to ensure understanding.
Participants directly benefitting from the research	The research aimed to understand what families, preschools and schools think about the adapted PATH meeting, whether it has an impact, in what context and how the process could be improved- in order to benefit future children and schools and

	also to benefit current participants through giving them an opportunity to air their views and see how others viewed the process. Adult participants received a debriefing in terms of generalised findings.
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3.2.4 Data Analysis

In order to address each research question, the data was analysed in groups determined by the participant's role. Where questions related to specific groups, for example; 'what do parents worry about? Or 'what was the perceived impact of the meeting on parents? Did it address their concerns?', the transcripts for that specific group (i.e. parents) were analysed initially. This was also the case where questions related to school staff. Other groups were then analysed (transcripts from those in different roles), where references had been made which were also relevant to these questions, in order to triangulate the data. For example, where preschool staff or other professionals had commented on what parents or school staff had said to them, or had made any observation with regard to parent responses.

In order to address the question, 'what factors did participants perceive as having an influence on how the meeting went? (How and why did the process impact on them as it did?), the data were analysed first by group, with a primary focus on parents and school staff, as key stakeholders, to gain a deeper picture of their perceptions on how and why the process might have influenced them and to better understand any general themes around what was valued by particular groups. Due to several common factors

between both parent and staff groups, themes identified by both groups were merged and refined and anything that was specific to each group identified in the narrative. Other groups were then analysed (transcripts from those in different roles), where references had been made which were also relevant to these questions and themes were further refined. Again, anything that was specific to each group was identified in the narrative.

With regard to research questions which explored views from ‘what are multiple views around the presence of the child?’, dialogue relevant to this question was extracted from each interview and analysed separately. Finally, the data were also analysed in groups based on the PCP meeting that participants had attended (where this was known) so that cross-references could be made between participants. This enabled a fuller understanding of the context within which information was collated.

A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) approach was used to analyse the data. This includes six phases of analysis.

In the first instance, the researcher became ‘immersed’ in the original data, through both conducting the initial interviews and transcribing them personally. Dialogue was transcribed verbatim (see Appendix 18 p.258-259 for example) and recordings were listened to several times to ensure accuracy. Significant gestures or changes of tone in voice were also noted in the transcripts. The full transcripts were read and re-read

several times and notes made of initial observations, summaries and interpretations for each interview, as well as for groups of participants.

Similar to phase 2 of Braun and Clarke's (2006) model, each interview was then re-analysed and initial codes created, using the software package, Atlas TI. Initial codes refer to 'the most basic segment, or element of the data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way...' (Boyatzis, 1998, p.63). Full and equal attention was given to each part of the data at this stage. Another researcher was asked to check a sample of the initial codes created against the transcripts at this stage to ensure that the codes created made sense and also at a later stage to check the creation of themes from the codes. Examples of coding from a transcript is included in Appendix 21 (p.266-269).

Initial codes were then analysed for each transcript, moving towards summarising and mapping connections into emergent themes, with close and consistent reference to the data behind the codes (Phase 3- Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes are described by Braun and Clarke (2006) as something which 'captures something important in the data...and represents some level of patterned response or meaning...' (p.82.). As Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest is appropriate, the analysis involved frequent movement between the original data (transcripts), the codes and the analysis. This helped to ensure that context did not become disregarded or forgotten and that themes could be refined as appropriate.

Patterns and connections were then analysed between groups (as defined previously). The emerging themes within groups were organised into clusters, using mind maps, connected by their meaning or relatability and key themes and subthemes were identified. Subthemes represent themes within a theme, useful for giving structure and hierarchy of meaning to a large or key theme. Data inconsistent with these themes were also identified and the context in which this occurred studied, to better understand circumstances in which these occurred.

A semantic and interpretive approach ensured that data was organised to summarise the semantic content of what was said and to include interpretation some of the broader implications and meanings (Patton, 1990). Deductions were made from the language participants used, the tone of their voice, or inferences they made, with reference to the context of each meeting and this was again done in conjunction with another researcher to ensure consistency in analysis. For example, where one parent had quoted:

'We have a lot of meetings where there are lots of people, but it was the fact that there was now child what's the word? Psychologists. Actually them, which is a bit 'hmmmm'. What are they gonna be thinking?' (Parent 3)

Deductions were made here that the parent was implying that she felt nervous about the presence of the EP and was perhaps concerned about any judgments the EPs might be making. Original transcripts and notes were re-referred to frequently to ensure accuracy in interpretation.

As Braun and Clarke's phases 4 and 5 suggest, themes were reviewed, refined, defined and named through an iterative process of revisiting the themes and the coded data extracts several times, to ensure that the themes identified formed a coherent pattern and were distinct from each other, as far as possible. Codes were reassigned to different themes and redundant codes were merged with others as appropriate. At times, there was some overlap of subthemes, relating to different key themes, but these were kept separate as they provided meaning and context for the key themes that they related to. Please see Appendix 21 (p.266-269) for examples of analysis.

Stage 6 of Braun and Clarke's (2006) model involves producing a report of the analysis, which is detailed from p.93 in the 'Results' section.

3.3. Results

The following section is structured around the research questions. It firstly addresses what parental worries were identified, then goes on to address how the meeting impacted upon the parents and whether it addressed these concerns. Next, school staff needs and how the meeting impacted upon them are considered. Participant views on what it was about the meeting that influenced the impact it had are then considered together, due to several common factors identified. Where views between groups differed, this is described in the narrative. Finally, multiple views around having the child present at the meeting are described. For each research question, themes and subthemes are identified and presented in a table. Illustrative quotes are also provided in order to increase the trustworthiness of the data and to provide richness to the descriptions of the themes identified. A narrative follows to explain themes in greater depth, in relation to the context in which they were identified.

3.3.1. Parents- their concerns, the impact of the meeting upon them

Parental concerns with regard to their child's transition to school, how the meeting impacted on parents and ways in which it addressed their concerns were both directly stated by parents and inferred from parent interviews. Information from others including preschool staff, school staff, Portage or TOP workers and EPs, including their observations of parents, or things parents had reported to them, were also considered. Concerns that parents had around the meeting itself, prior to the meeting, were directly

stated by parents or preschool staff or inferred from aspects of the meeting which they highlighted as important for addressing their concerns.

3.3.1.1. RQ: What do parents worry about with regard to their child's transition?

All parents expressed concerns about their children, which often related to how well others would know and understand them and how this might in turn affect their child.

They also expressed some concerns they had experienced prior to the meeting, about the meeting itself. This is presented as three broad themes:

Table 8: What parents worry about with regard to transition and transition processes

Themes	Subthemes	Illustrative quotes
Staff knowing, understanding and accepting the child	<p>The child may not be supported</p> <p>Staff may have a negative reaction to the child</p> <p>The child may not make progress/ learn</p> <p>Progress already made might alter</p> <p>The child may need to have skills they may not have acquired in time (e.g. potty training)</p>	<p><i>'My concern was that he's not very good with routine, not very good with change, so if his routine changes, you know, he almost goes back to bad behaviour when he throws himself on the floor and that kind of thing, you know. So, I just wanted them to be aware that these things can happen and that we need to make the transition go as smoothly as possible.'</i> (Parent 5)</p> <p><i>'I don't want some of the teachers to get annoyed at how she can be...It's just fresh air isn't it, knowing that you're not going to get a phone call every two minutes to say '(Child) is doing this, what do I do?''</i> (Parent 3)</p> <p><i>'...after the meeting I think I am not worried because they gonna give support to her to the development of skill. I think before the meeting I was worried because I am thinking how is she going to get through the reception and how is she...she's very behind with everything.'</i> (Parent 4)</p> <p><i>'At the moment, she's very happy and very willing to talk, so I'm quite anxious that that continues.'</i> (Parent 1)</p>
Peers knowing, understanding and accepting the child	<p>The child will not be understood</p> <p>Peers may have a negative reaction towards the child</p> <p>The child will not feel accepted</p> <p>The child will not belong/ feel included</p>	<p><i>'...his communication skills are very bad, his language is very bad. And that affects all areas; socializing. It's very difficult to make friends if you don't talk...'</i> (Parent 2)</p> <p><i>'Children say it as they see it and we've already had the sister of a friend say that she talks like a baby.'</i> (Parent 1)</p> <p><i>'I'm worried that he won't be able to do what these kids do, like these kids can count to ten and she could maybe only count to three. Cos she has been called stupid by some people. By some of her friends. Because she couldn't do some of the stuff that other people could do. So I don't want her to go there and say that she</i></p>

	The child will not be happy	<i>hates it or that she's not included' (Parent 3)</i>
Concerns about the meeting itself	<p>Feeling unsure what to expect/ how to prepare</p> <p>Influence of previous experiences</p> <p>Concerns around how others might view them</p> <p>Anxiety around child's presence at meeting</p>	<p><i>'I was feeling quite apprehensive actually, I didn't really know what to expect if you know what I mean.'</i> (Parent 5)</p> <p><i>'...it's interesting because in the medical model, I have had so many parents, who have had their child in the room when they've been given a diagnosis. Year ago I had a child...the first meeting I had him in there with mum, they came into my office, got the Lego out and he flipped. We tracked it back to smiley lady, lots of Lego, Mummy cries'. (SENCo 2,5)</i></p> <p><i>'Interviewer: 'So you hadn't met the EP before? Parent: 'I'd met her but only for about 5 minutes. But it was only a quick 'Hi, how are you?' I've never really been in a room with one. So I was like, 'Oh God What they gonna be thinking?'' (Parent 3)</i></p> <p><i>'I was worried that the expectation for (child) to express his opinion would be too high. His understanding is not great and I was worried it might be a bit too much to cope with.'</i> (Parent 2)</p>

Theme 1: Staff knowing, understanding and accepting the child

Parental concerns were often initially expressed in relation to children's specific needs, for example, difficulties with communication, or moving around the school. However, often the underlying anxiety around concerns mentioned related to how those needs would be recognised and how others would adapt to them. Important to parents was the child being **accepted** and **understood**, both by staff and by the child's peers. Parents

hoped that staff understanding and accepting the child would enable them to have a more positive emotional reaction to the child, be more willing to provide support and more knowledgeable as to how to do so. Appropriate support was associated with keeping the child safe, keeping the child happy, enabling the child to make/ continue making progress (developing their skills, especially as demands on the child increased), and supporting them with their peer relationships.

One more specific concern noted by a few of the parents was that of toilet training, particularly as they were unsure how schools would manage this and some had been given messages that this was something that schools do not expect.

Theme 2: Concerns around the Peer Group knowing, understanding and accepting the child

Concerns around their child being accepted and understood by peers were expressed by all parents, with regard both to the reaction of the peers to their child and to the comparisons their child might make between themselves and the peer group. Not being, or feeling included was strongly associated with the child potentially feeling less happy.

Parents were concerned about the impact of their child's difficulties on their peers' responses. For example, that the child might hurt their peers, or struggle to communicate

with them, causing them to be rejected. Parents also reflected on an underlying anxiety around not being able to predict or control the reaction of the staff or the peer group towards the child once the child enters their new environment. Within their current preschool environment, children were seen as feeling settled, being understood, being accepted and having a sense of belonging. Moving to a lesser known environment carried risk that this may not continue.

Theme 3: Concerns about the meeting itself

Parents commented on feeling anxious generally prior to the meeting, as they were unsure what to expect. This was compounded by preschool staff and school staff who were also unfamiliar with the format and thus may have been unable to reassure them. Some aspects of preparation were a concern, such as not knowing who to invite or how to accurately represent the child's views. Anxieties about the meeting itself included: feeling alone, feeling judged by others, not knowing what to say, worries about how the child would behave and how the meeting might impact on the child and wanting to feel as though the meeting would be worthwhile and not waste others' time. Anxieties were increased where there were questions over provision, or where there may have been previous tensions between parents and education establishments.

Three parents reported having experienced difficult meetings previously, for example, when seeking assessment or medical help for their children, and reported having heard

negative things about their child, formal atmospheres and not understanding what was being said. Such experiences had made them wary of meetings, although they were reassured by the hope that these meetings might be ‘different’. Existing anxieties around coming to terms with diagnoses and working with professionals also contributed to feelings of apprehension.

3.3.1.2. RQ: What was the perceived impact of the meeting on parents, did it address their concerns?

*‘I had one particular parent who was so anxious about transition coming into the meeting but afterwards said that all her fears about her child going to school had gone.’
(Portage worker)*

‘Usually when we have some meetings with Speech and Language or the Paediatrician, I feel very emotional afterwards, but this was more...very positive, because we were looking at positive outcomes’. (Parent 2)

Many of the parents’ key objectives, both for how they wanted the meeting to go and what they wanted to gain from the meeting were met. All parents reported feeling reassured after the meeting. Key to this was parents feeling an increased confidence in the school having a better picture of their child, as well as the way they felt that the school had responded to them and their child. This is discussed as two broad themes.

Table 9: Impact of the Meeting for parents

Themes	SubThemes	Illustrative Quotes
Confidence that the school have a clear picture of the child	<p>That a full discussion was held</p> <p>A clear plan was made</p> <p>A shared understanding was reached</p>	<p><i>'I think the fact that her new teacher was there and she listened to everyone so she actually knows what (child) could be like on a bad day when she's there and could help her out.'</i> (Parent 3)</p> <p><i>'I feel that we finally have the direction we are going to. I mean to be honest, time will show (child)'s ability. But it was very reassuring'</i> (Parent 2)</p> <p><i>'I think it's just the reassurance really that there are other people around that are going to help us, you know and we're not completely on our own'</i> (Parent 5)</p>
Positive impact on the relationship with the school	<p>Positive relationships were built:</p> <p>Feelings of trust and confidence in the school</p> <p>Feeling accepted by the school</p> <p>Feeling listened to/ playing an important or equal part</p>	<p><i>'...she understood it. She was like 'yeah we'll know how to manage her' and that so it was good.'</i> (Parent 3)</p> <p><i>I: So what are your feelings towards the school after the meeting?</i> <i>M: Positive. I think that wherever we end up, they will be extremely supportive. That was the feeling I had. Amazing support.'</i> (Parent 2)</p> <p><i>'...they've always been very positive with all of the children and very accepting of their differences and needs. I felt that they were encouraging and involved.'</i> (Parent 1)</p> <p><i>"I wasn't sitting in a room with everybody telling me what I already knew about my child... It felt like I was kind of being listened to."</i> (Parent 5)</p>

Theme 1: Confidence that the school have a clear picture of the child

Feeling as though the school both knew and understood who their child is, and that the school had a clear plan for supporting the child, enabled parents to feel more confident that their child would be accepted and supported and that they would make progress. Parents felt that they had been able to raise specific concerns and that these had primarily been addressed. Some concerns remained, particularly with regard to funding and resources (many were awaiting confirmation of, or information regarding an Education Health Care Plan or funding) and often this was seen as being beyond the control of the school. Other factors, also perhaps considered difficult for the school to have so much of an influence over, caused ongoing concern, such as how the peer group might respond to the child, or how the specific nature of the child's needs would impact upon their interaction with others.

'I was reassured, to a point. Until you're there and doing it there's always a worry.'
(Parent 1)

However, parents widely acknowledged that at this stage of transition, providing the school with as much information and as clear a picture as possible was a priority and perhaps the best that could be achieved for now.

'...it gave the lady from the infant school such a good idea of what (child)'s going to be like, so she can give him the best possible start there, you know, until they get to know him 100%.' (Parent 5)

Theme 2: Positive impact on the relationship with the school

All parents reflected on the meeting as a positive and productive encounter. Regardless of previous involvement with the school, all parents reported feeling very positive about the school. They conveyed trust and confidence in their ability to cope when presented with a picture of their child and in their commitment to carrying out the plan. They also expressed confidence in approaching them with anything in the future. Parents reported feeling that they and their child were accepted and that they and the school were working collaboratively together as a team. Parents, schools, preschools and professionals were all referred to as having a role in carrying out the plan together and ensuring that the support is put in place.

Parents reported initially feeling daunted by other professionals in the room but by the end of the meeting, reflected on having enjoyed the meeting and indicated feeling not only less daunted, but saw themselves as part of a team working together. Parent 3 frequently reflected feelings of inferiority to others and anxieties around being judged in a negative way. However, she also reflected on feeling that she had played an important and more equal part by the end of the meeting, indicating some shift in how she viewed herself alongside those present at the meeting. She noted that she had not felt judged as she had expected to.

'Everyone was just at one level so it just felt nice and no-one made themselves more superior than me. Cos, everyone's got such a big part, and sometimes you just feel like 'what am I doing here?' but no.....they were lovely. I can't fault anyone.' (Parent 3)

Many participants referred to feeling less intimidated than they might have done in alternative types of meeting, with some parents comparing the meeting to meetings they had attended within the NHS. Some parents had not always felt that their view was as valued as others' views may have been in previous meetings they had attended, but reported feeling listened to during the adapted PATH meeting and that their view was important. This reduced the feeling of others making decisions without their being involved, but made them feel as though their view was listened to and taken fully into account. Others commented on the parents having the most important role.

One factor which influenced the extent to which the meeting had an impact on parents and on staff, was the nature and frequency of contact between the parents and the school, prior to the meeting. For example, in Case 1 where the parents had already established a strong relationship with the school prior to the meeting, fewer positive comments about changes in their relationship or in the picture gained of the child were noted, when compared to Case 2, where the parent re-iterated several times feeling very reassured by 'getting to know the school better' and the school 'getting to know' the child better.

3.3.2. RQ: What was the perceived impact of the meeting on school staff? Did it provide them with what they felt they needed from the meeting?

Staff perceptions of what they felt they needed from the meeting were explored through directly asking staff what they had wanted to gain and also through exploring what they highlighted retrospectively, as important for addressing their concerns. Ways in which they felt the meeting had impacted on them, how well they felt their needs were met and perceptions about the process itself were directly stated by staff and inferred from their interviews.

Staff had varying expectations prior to the meeting. All except for School SENCo 4 had attended traditional transition meetings and most had some experience of other types of person-centred meetings, such as Circles of Adults (www.inclusive-solutions.com). SENCo 4 had attended PATH meetings for older children. All SENCos had discussed the format of the meeting with the EP beforehand.

Very few anxieties about the meeting were expressed. Some expressed interest at something new, with their only reservations relating to time and resources, or how the child might cope.

'I was quite interested actually, I thought it might be a new thing. I wasn't worried or anything, but I was interested to see how it was going to work' (School SENCo 1)

Primarily, staff were interested in getting to know the child as well as they could and reported wanting to gather a clear picture of the child, from different perspectives. This included having information which was up to date. They were concerned that it should be a good use of time and to come away feeling more confident about meeting the child's needs to the best of their ability, with specific actions to take.

'I was looking for strategies and ways to help her. I wanted a full picture from where she was from, in order to help us to make our decisions about where we're going with her.' (School SENCo 3)

Staff also expressed a desire to get to know and to reassure parents and for parents to better understand them and have a realistic picture as to what the school may or may not be able to provide. How school staff felt the meeting addressed these needs and the impact they felt the meeting had upon them is discussed as follows.

Table 10: Staff perceptions of how they felt the meeting impacted upon them

Themes	Subthemes	Illustrative Quotes
<p>A better understanding/ 'enriched picture' of the child</p>	<p>A clear plan of how to support the child</p> <p>Increased feelings of confidence in the transition/ being able to meet the child's needs</p> <p>Some residual concerns</p>	<p><i>'I think from all perspectives, having been able to speak to schools and to other professionals that have been there, everybody feels that they have come away feeling that they know a lot more about the child. They have more to take away with them, so that's really positive.'</i> (Portage Worker)</p> <p><i>'I think it leads to a greater understanding'</i> (School SENCO 6)</p> <p><i>'I feel that I know what works now fairly well....so I kind of have those strategies to fall back on. I mean, you know what it's like, you never quite know how it's going to be. It may have been the biggest thing coming into nursery and it may be that in big school, she may breeze in. I mean, it may not be, you have to be prepared for it not to be, so. It's good to know what works....in case it does go rocky'</i> (School SENCo 3)</p> <p><i>'... I think from my perspective it's about budget. I really want for all children starting school to have the best that they can have. Last year we had 4 children who needed an EHCP and we just employed people for them. This year we just don't have the budget for that...'</i> (School SENCo 6)</p>
<p>Improved relationships with parents</p>	<p>Increased empathy with parents</p> <p>Better knowledge and understanding of parents' views</p> <p>Better understanding of parents' perceptions of their child's needs</p>	<p><i>'...it enables me to hear the parents' perception of what the need is, because their perception of what the need is might not be my perception of what the need is. So, at least, I'm hearing their thought processes so I can at least respect those and bring them in to, you know when I'm having a conversation with them in future'</i> (School SENCo 2,5)</p> <p><i>'...he said 'oh I'm just his Dad' and he'd already listed all the things he was doing with regards to books and things, so I was</i></p>

	<p>A better understanding of where to ‘pitch’ future discussions with parents</p> <p>Feelings of satisfaction from reassuring parents</p>	<p><i>able to reassure him and say ‘well you’re doing a great job’.</i> (School SENCo 2,5)</p>
<p>Increased feelings of confidence in this type of meeting</p>	<p>A feeling of having experienced a meeting in which they felt mostly comfortable, relaxed and positive</p> <p>Some feelings of discomfort around aspects of the meeting, e.g. props</p> <p>Felt able to have mostly an open and honest discussion</p> <p>Most felt that the child was comfortable, although some remaining concerns</p>	<p><i>‘I would be more than happy to go to further PATH meetings....It’s value for money isn’t it? I think you are getting good value for the time that you have spent.’</i> (School SENCo 2,5)</p> <p><i>‘I just think it focuses more on the positive rather than the difficulties the child might have...I really enjoyed it.’</i> (School SENCo 6)</p> <p><i>‘...it was a lot more interesting, a lot more relaxed.’</i> (School SENCo 1)</p> <p><i>‘I think the bit where she got the wig out and asked people to put the wig on....everyone was a bit like ‘oh no! I don’t want to put the wig on!’ Everyone sort of sat back at that bit sort of thinking ‘oh no! Is it going to be one of those kind of meetings, you know where you always have those ice breakers don’t you on courses’</i> (School SENCo 1)</p> <p><i>‘I think what worked well was that everybody felt....there was a good circle of trust in the meeting....everybody felt that they could share things.’</i> (School SENCo 3)</p>

Theme 1: A better understanding/ ‘enriched picture’ of the child

Five out of six school SENCos reported coming out of the meeting with a much better picture of the child, than they would have had without the meeting. Despite having some

existing information about the children, even in the case where contact regarding the child had been high (Case 1), staff reported having a much clearer, richer picture of the child following the adapted PATH meeting. (Please re-refer to Table 5 p.74 for a summary of the nature of contact prior to the meeting). Staff commented on the fact that much more information had been shared than might have been shared through their usual transition processes, in much more detail. They felt that discussions had ‘brought together’ information previously shared between parties through other transition processes (e.g. seeing reports or chatting to preschool staff) , as well as providing up to date information. Participants described the process as ‘constructive’ and ‘productive’.

The SENCo in Case 4 was the only SENCo who did not express the same perception. In this case, the school SENCo felt that she did not have a clear picture of the child after the meeting due to the lack of information brought to the meeting by attendees. This is discussed in detail in the ‘Quality of Information’ section. She did, however see this as an exception as in her previous experiences of PATH meetings with older children, she felt that she usually gained a much clearer picture.

Although she did express that she felt she had a fuller picture of the child, School SENCO 1 highlighted some reservations about whether or not she did have as full a picture as she might, as she questioned how honest the preschool staff had been at the meeting. In this case, the SENCo knew the family well and felt that the family and the preschool had a differing view about the child and was aware of some previous tensions

between them. She was concerned that the preschool may have been anxious about being entirely honest in front of the parents and thus felt that she would need time to see what transpired following transition.

As a result of having a better picture of the child and thus a clearer idea of how to support the child, staff reflected feeling more positive about the transition and more confident that they would know how to support the child. One SENCo referred to liking the fact that she had a 'back up plan', and that she had some ideas to 'fall back on', should she need them (School SENCo 3) and another SENCo referred to the child as feeling 'less of an unknown' (School SENCo 6). Often, SENCos reflected a desire to 'get it right' and indicated that the clearer the picture they had of the child, the more they felt that they would be able to achieve this. Even in Case 2, where the school had raised some concerns about whether they would be the right place for the child, the SENCo still reflected a feeling of increased confidence in knowing how to support the child.

Naturally, some other anxieties remained with regard to the transition. Again, resources were a concern, particularly for School SENCo 6, who expressed anxiety in whether she would be able to carry out all of the aspects of the plan if the school were not provided with the EHCP they had applied for.

Similarly to parental concerns, school staff also acknowledged that it was not possible to predict how the child would respond to the environment, given some of the less

predictable factors such as the peer group. However, staff appeared more confident in the transition generally and expressed fewer such concerns than parents, perhaps due to their being less emotionally connected to the child and having experienced the transition process before to a much greater extent.

Theme 2: Improved relationships with parents

Staff valued seeing parents feeling reassured and relaxed and expressed a desire for them to be able to say what they wished to. Words such as ‘circle of trust’ and ‘everybody working together’ were used to reflect a feeling of working together with parents as a team. Staff saw the meeting as part of a process and felt that they would be able to continue discussions with parents and preschool staff over time.

The school SENCo for cases 2 and 5 talked in detail about how the meeting impacted on staff and parent relationships. She mentioned early on that she herself was a parent of a child with Special Educational Needs and that she felt she could understand things from a parental perspective. She expressed satisfaction from being able to reassure parents and from seeing their anxiety levels reducing. As well as feeling empathy with them, she also noted that when parents became more relaxed, it made their relationship easier.

‘...because as you know, parents at that part of the child’s school career are very often in fight mode and I very often have to say, you know, I’ve had to talk down lots of parents...because they carry on in fight mode even though the child is here. I hear

myself saying it's ok...you can stop fighting. You don't have to fight me, I'm one of the good guys' (School SENCo 2,5).

The same school SENCo also described finding it useful to understand parental views and parental perceptions of what their child's needs were, which enables her to 'pitch' any future discussions she has with the parents more accurately.

Theme 3: Confidence in this type of meeting

Out of the five school SENCos, four of them said that they would definitely like to do this type of meeting again. SENCo 3 said that she possibly would. Even in case 4, where the SENCo had not felt she had come out with a good picture of the child on this occasion, could see the benefit of this type of meeting,

Staff particularly valued the relaxed, positive and collaborative aspects of the meeting. They enjoyed that the child was the focus of the meeting and that everyone involved had been able to have a full, honest and open discussion. All staff said that they had been able to say everything that they had wanted to.

Some commented on moments of discomfort during the meeting, relating to the use of props or actions to music which were unfamiliar and considered by some as

unnecessary. Some were concerned when presented with the props that they would have to do something which would make them uncomfortable, which related to their being unfamiliar with the process and nervous about the unknown.

One SENCo (Case 2/5) reported feeling 'squirmy' about some of the things that she hadn't felt used to, such as receiving an invitation from the child and the use of music, but acknowledged that this was due to her not being familiar with this way of working and commented at the end that after attending two adapted PATH meetings, she would now prefer to continue working in this way. Perhaps underlying this was a perceived threat to staff being able to present themselves to parents and other professionals as they might wish, which might naturally vary with personal factors such as their own confidence in their role. Similarly, feeling put on the spot, particularly at the start when asked to make a comment about a child they perhaps did not yet know very much about elicited similar discomfort. However, these were reported as moments, and the overall 'feel' was very much one in which they felt comfortable to speak freely.

Another part of the experience that was enjoyed less, was that staff sometimes felt uncomfortable about not always knowing what to say for every section. This was particularly relevant to the dream, as this is at the beginning when the staff know very little about the child.

'I think it got easier as it went through, bearing in mind that I'm new to (child)....the first bit was about everybody's wishes for (child) and again...I can have some very

generic wishes for her, you know that she'll come and she'll settle and she'll make friends and that she'll succeed at school....but those are kind of the wishes that I have for everybody coming into my class, so...I couldn't be specific'. (School SENCo 3)

3.3.3. RQ: What factors did participants perceive as having an influence on how the meeting went?

In order for participants to feel that the school could have as full a picture of the child as possible and for them to then be able to create a full plan of support and for positive relationships to develop between parents and school, there needed to be: people at the meeting who could provide a high level of information and knowledge, both about the child and about appropriate supportive strategies, a clear and constructive framework to the discussion and an atmosphere which encouraged participants to be working collaboratively together and positive relationships to be built. Themes and subthemes which emerged are summarised in Table 11 (p.114), with descriptors providing elaboration for each subtheme. A following narrative provides further description.

Table 11: Factors identified which influenced how the meeting went and contributed towards the impact of the meeting on parents and staff

Theme	Subtheme	Descriptors (codes)
Quality of Information shared	A deeper discussion	Ability to pick up on what is said and build upon it
		Opportunity to ask questions
		Opportunity to discuss things not usually discussed
	Value of input from different perspectives	Tried and tested strategies from parents, school and preschool
		Input from professionals
		Meeting has less impact where lots of info previously shared
		Clear addressing of specific concerns
		Learn from others' perspectives
	Willingness of participant to engage	Participants need to be willing to try something new
		Participants need to be open to new ideas and possibilities
		Engagement of staff affected by previous relationships with other participants
	Honesty of participants	Appreciating honesty from participants
		Allows objective consideration of a forward direction
	Opportunity to observe the child	Opportunity to see the child
		Family dynamics
		Different interactions between child and others
Child's reaction to an unfamiliar situation		
Strategies for supporting the child modelled		
Structure of meeting	Starting with the dream	Barriers removed, anything is possible
		Unique chance for parents to express hopes

		Needs clarity around when referring to
		Depends on ability/willingness of parent to remove from here and now
	Pulling out foundations	Key important factors are identified, keeps focus
	Meeting was easy to understand	Language used is accessible
		Use of props to reduce jargon
		Use of visual structure
		EP role: paraphrasing, summarising, keeping focus
		EP as an 'enquirer', asking probing questions
		Learning from others' responses
		Relaxed nature allowing for questions
Collaborative nature of the meeting	Feeling of a 'team' working together	Staff and family members supporting each other
		Information shared by all
		Strategies suggested by school as well as parents and preschool
		Plan includes all involved with the child
	All playing an important part	Meeting accessible for all
		EPs bringing people in
		EPs asking same questions to all
		Not feeling judged
		Reduction in 'power dynamic'
	Relaxed nature of meeting	Interpersonal factors, e.g. friendliness of EPs
		All sitting at same level
		Props, music, biscuits
		Time, including pauses
		Familiar people present

	Positive nature of the meeting	Starts with strengths and aspirations
		Barriers come later
		Emphasis on problem solving/ being constructive
		Child focus
Parents receiving positive responses from school	Staff reassuring parents	Staff providing direct reassurance to parents
		Specific concerns addressed
		Staff reassuring parents that their child is not the only child with additional needs
		Staff sharing with parents ways in which they have managed children with similar needs
	Positive reaction to descriptions of the child	Staff not appearing surprised or worried by descriptions of needs
		Proactive strategies being created to support the child
		Parents feeling their child is accepted as they are
	Positive reaction to child (if present)	Staff interacting with the child
		Staff being warm and friendly towards the child
		Efforts made to make the child comfortable during the meeting
	Parents feeling listened to	Staff reflecting back parental concerns
		Staff addressing specific concerns and suggesting related strategies
		Having the chance to talk honestly and openly
Opportunities for staff to talk with parents	Listening to parents' concerns, hopes and dreams	Benefits for parent
		Allows school to understand parental perceptions of need

		Allows school to know where to 'pitch' future discussions
	Being able to address specific concerns and make a plan	Staff can reassure parents-benefit to their relationship and feelings of satisfaction
		Parents make an important contribution to understanding of the child
	Being able to reassure parents that they can help	Feelings of satisfaction for school staff
		Parents more relaxed and positive towards school; benefits to the relationship
	Parents feeling more relaxed and positive towards the school/ parental reactions towards staff	Relationship starts off on a more positive note

Theme 1: Quality of the information brought to the meeting

A deeper discussion

A salient factor in how clear a picture was formed was how well those present knew the child and what they were able to bring to the meeting. In the majority of meetings, participants felt that between parents, preschool staff and professionals, a wealth of information was provided. Staff commented specifically on the discursive element, allowing for people to pick up and elaborate on or question something that had been said. This was seen as a deeper discussion to that which might usually occur in more traditional transition practices.

When the quality of information shared was not considered high, this made it difficult to form a clear picture of the child. In Case 4, the SENCo noted that she did not feel that

she had grasped a full picture of the child. In this case, the only people present at the meeting were the child's mother and one member of preschool staff, as well as the two facilitating EPs, who had not met the child. The school SENCo commented that neither party had brought the amount of information she would have valued. She questioned how well the parent understood the child's needs and felt that without verbal or written additional information from others who knew the child well, an accurate picture was hard to gain. This view was not shared by the parent.

Value of input from different perspectives

Parents and staff valued hearing others' perspectives on the child, both from those only just meeting the child (e.g. first impressions of EPs or school staff) and from those who knew the child well in a different context to the participants' own, with parents noting that they had learned new things about their child. School staff valued hearing directly from parents and preschool staff what strategies worked well and not so well for them. Hearing directly from school staff what they were planning to do, based on what had been said helped parents to develop a sense of confidence in school staff and to feel their commitment in supporting the child;

'Interviewer: So are you saying it was the teacher herself that made you feel more confident?'

'Parent: Yeah, she's so nice. She was just thinking of all these ways that would help (child) out, it was lovely.' (Parent 3)

When asked if they would have liked input from anyone else at the meeting, some participants commented that they would have liked some input from Speech and Language Therapy, as this was this child's main area of need. In other cases, some had had previous input from such professionals and therefore had some information that they could bring along, meaning that input from other professionals was either not needed, or could be incorporated as time went along through the transition process.

Honesty of participants and willingness to engage

Naturally, interpersonal factors played some part in the quality of information shared between participants. One SENCo mentioned that she felt that preschool staff had felt reluctant to share information due to previous disagreements between themselves and the parents. One EP also commented that some of their school SENCos had showed some resistance to trying something new and found it difficult to accept both the style of the meeting and some of the possibilities suggested by parents, perhaps as they differed to things they might have been used to for a long time.

One parent noted objectivity and honesty as important for reaching a shared understanding and everyone having a clear picture, as they felt that staff were realistic, rather than ideological. In this context, the school had been clear that they were unsure as to whether they were the right school to meet the child's needs and therefore made plans both for whether the child started with them, or whether the child went elsewhere. Whilst other professionals at the meeting had wondered whether this might have made

the parent uncomfortable, the parent herself commented that the honesty helped her to be more informed when faced with difficult decision making.

'Everybody was honest as well which was good to hear, because sometimes it is difficult as a parent to make a decision for your kid. And sometimes people want to give you direction, but we have to have all the opinions to be able to make that decision.

Everybody was doing that' (Parent 2).

Opportunities to Observe the Child

Where the child had been present at the meeting, many school staff commented that this provided a good opportunity to observe the child, which added to the picture. Benefits to observation in this context included seeing how the child coped with a new situation and how they were managed by those that know them well, family dynamics and interactions. Staff felt that this was an element which made the adapted PATH a unique context and often felt reassured, as well as more knowledgeable, from what they had seen. Some, however, noted that staff were not necessarily seeing a true picture of the child, as the context in which they were seeing the child was not usual.

'He was just playing on the I Pad so they didn't see him doing much. He coped really well but they didn't see what they needed to see perhaps' (TOP worker)

Theme 2: Structure of the meeting

Participants noted that the clear structure of the meeting, with progression from the ‘Dream’ to the ‘One Year from Now’, was useful for structuring thoughts and linking ideas together (i.e. we want to get to this, so we will try this). This gave participants some clear strategies to follow and a better understanding as to why these particular strategies had been chosen, i.e., how values, aspirations and needs linked to action points. One parent noted however, that she had found it confusing to work backwards.

Starting with the Dream and Pulling out Foundations

Many participants found the Dream very useful for exploring the unique and individual nature of each child and felt that it added to the ‘holistic picture’ they were able to capture. Staff felt that they had learned things about the child that they would not have done otherwise and the Dream element was considered a mechanism for this.

‘It makes it really individual to that child and helps to start unpicking his core values.’

(Educational Psychologist)

Having this element at the beginning often helped to ‘set the tone’ for thinking without barriers and focusing on aspirations and to maintain focus on the child as an individual. EPs breaking down the information presented into ‘core values’ helped participants to focus on key elements of what was important to the family. .

One SENCo also felt that it was good for parents to be asked to express their dreams for their child, as this is not something they might ever have been asked to verbalise before and the meeting provided a safe environment in which to do so.

However, some concerns were expressed that starting with the Dream does not allow parents to air their concerns about the immediate future, straight away. Staff and parents felt that this could potentially cause anxiety, particularly if parents were not sure what to expect or felt highly stressed. Some failed to see the relevance of thinking so far ahead into the future when they were so concerned about the present and thus found it difficult to think too far into the future.

'...because for them... their future is 'has he got a place in the provision?', 'has he got an EHCP?' They don't want to look any further than that and they can't emotionally look any further than that, so that's something to be aware of.' (School SENCo 2/5)

'...I guess when you're worried about the here and now, it's hard to think about and concern yourself with the Dream.' (Parent 1)

Further criticisms of the Dream include the opinion that this part of the meeting was very long and that it was not always an easy thing to do. This was due to the time element being unclear (i.e. whether it was referring to the near future, or much further away). Where participants had been asked to think about the child as an adult, some felt that this was too 'far away' and therefore hard to imagine. Others found that they were

not given a specific time point to think about and found that some participants in the meeting were focusing on a few years from now, whereas others were thinking into adulthood, which became confusing.

Meeting was easy to understand

Table 12: Illustrating quotes

'...it's not like....you know when people are talking and knowing what's going on and I'm just like, 'what?'. They actually explained it all to me who doesn't know all the words.' (Parent 3)

'...they (EPs) were just, sort of giving...not ideas, but just saying 'what about this?', 'Were there any thoughts about that?' Like friendship or that kind of thing...then we were literally free flowing by then on our own' (Parent 2)

'It seems a bit strange that they (EPs) don't (know the child) but I think by the end they do. I think in every single one the facilitator has been more or less able to highlight the key points of the child and that's the purpose, so...' (Portage Worker)

'...It did break it down quite well into different sections and I guess when it's on a big bit of paper in front of you, I guess when you're looking at the next bit, to relate them together, because it is there in front of you.' (Parent 1)

The structure of the meeting was valued by participants as being easy to follow and to understand, which supported their contributions to the picture of the child, as well as impacting upon parental feelings towards the school and to other professionals.

Factors contributing to the meeting being easy to follow heavily depended on the facilitators' role. EPs using skills such as paraphrasing back and summarising, using

simple language and asking probing questions were considered useful for developing group understanding. Facilitator skills of bringing people into the discussion were also mentioned as ways to keep the discussion going and ensure that everyone got to speak. EPs were noted as being good at keeping people ‘focused’ and ‘on track’, by referring people back to questions asked and points being considered. EPs were also described as ‘really listening’, which involved paraphrasing back what had been said and confirming their understanding before things were written down. Both parents and other participants recognised EPs as helpful in assisting thought processes and thus enabling people to formulate more easily what they wanted to say, through asking probing questions and providing structure for thought processes.

In most cases, the adapted PATH meeting was facilitated by an EP who did not know the child well (although usually the EP working with the child was present, often taking on the role of writing the graphics). Some commented that this was useful, as it put the facilitating EP in the role of ‘inquirer’, asking questions and genuinely seeking information from those who know the child well and then helping participants to identify the key points that had been brought to the meeting.

The use of the visual was also noted as helpful for keeping people on track, helping people to focus and acting as an aide memoire for what had been discussed. Some found it slightly distracting, particularly in one case where EPs had taken a long time over drawings and had not always made clear representations of what was being said (one participant was unsure what each picture related to).

Staff noted that it was useful not having to write anything down as it ensured everyone was listening. Others, however, were unsure about not having notes to take away as they did not feel that the visual always included everything that notes from such a meeting might usually contain and the information was not always easy to read or distribute to others from a photograph.

Theme 3: Collaborative Nature of the Meeting

Feeling of a team working together and all playing an important part

Participants highlighted the value of ‘combined thinking’, including different perspectives and ideas from each party. Parents, schools, preschools and professionals were all considered as having a role in creating and carrying out the plan together and ensuring that the support is put in place. Working together involved all parties engaging with the process and playing an important part and feeling able to speak honestly and openly

A reduction in the power dynamic between parents and professionals was key for helping parents to feel that they were able to make an important contribution.

‘I feel that it’s done more neutrally, no one is in charge of that meeting, and that’s really stood out for me through all of it. I think some of the usual transition meeting sat around the table, especially with certain schools, that whole emphasis shifts, as to how empowered the parents feel, because it’s an alien place, it’s almost like that balance has

been tipped before the meeting even starts. And it's about meeting the school's needs rather than the child's needs or who will do what. And I think every single one, without doubt has been about the parents, with the parents and the child at the centre rather than the school and not been about the school's needs and whether they can be met or not. That's eliminated that as far as I can see.' (Portage Worker)

The EP facilitators played an important part in encouraging all parties to have equal input. Asking the same questions to each party, showing equal respect to all and ensuring that everyone got the chance to speak were highlighted as important factors. All parties were asked to contribute to a shared understanding of the child and to suggest strategies for support. Participants felt that EPs listened carefully to all responses, clarified and summarised what was being said, perhaps contributing to the feeling that each response was valued. Measures were also taken to ensure that everyone was able to easily understand what was going on, allowing full participation. This has been discussed in the 'Structure of the Meeting' section. Environmental factors, such as everyone sitting at the same level were also highlighted as important.

Relaxed and positive nature of the meeting

Table 13: Illustrating quotes

'...it just felt very comfortable. Everyone had a fair talk. Everyone was able to sort of chip in when they wanted to as well.' (Preschool staff 6)

'(EPs) were both so friendly they made us feel really comfortable straight away.'
(Parent 5)

'...It was good to take the edge off the mood as well. I think that everybody was a bit like, we didn't know what to expect, you know, would it be formal, would it be pleasant/unpleasant? It (use of props) took the edge off the mood and off the nerves'
(Parent 2)

'.....because it starts off with 'if there were no boundaries where would you like to see your son?', so then it was like, 'well actually this is where we'd like him to be' and then that's obviously now our focus. Then you sort of go back so, I think it's a good way, because rather than thinking of everything negatively which is so easy to do, it's actually looking at things more positively and saying, 'well look, if we do all this then maybe this could happen. There's no reason why we couldn't get to that end goal.'
(Parent 5)

The relaxed and positive nature of the meeting was frequently commented on by all participants, as being key to allowing everyone to feel that they could speak up and work together, thus forming a clear picture and support plan for the child.

Many referred to the relaxed feel as different from the types of meetings they usually experience. Contributors for this included pauses for people to think, it being less target driven, the lack of judgement in the room and the friendliness of the facilitators. The set-up of the room, including snacks and not sitting around a table were also thought of as contributors to a more relaxed feel, as were the props in some circumstances.

Participants valued the use of props as something that ‘broke the ice’ and reduced tension. Some found them amusing or a ‘bit of fun’, which helped to contribute to a more relaxed feel and also valued what they represented (e.g. not judging others);

Others, however commented on the props making them feel a little uncomfortable, or thinking that they were for the children, without seeing their relevance to the adults.

Attending with familiar people was a contributing factor for parents, preschool staff and other professionals feeling more relaxed. Observing and learning from other people in the room also encouraged parents to feel comfortable about speaking. Parent 2 noted initially not feeling confident in knowing what to say, particularly as she found it difficult to articulate strategies that were part of a daily routine. She felt that hearing others speak had spurred her on, perhaps as it made her feel confident in what she wanted to say. Perhaps also because it gave her new ideas/ new directions of thought.

The meeting being very positive also helped parents to feel that the meeting had been collaborative and productive. Parents attributed this to the EPs maintaining an emphasis on problem solving and exploring solutions which were relevant and meaningful to the family. As previously discussed, the dream element was also highlighted as important, for starting with and maintaining focus on positive outcomes and possibilities, rather than over-focusing on deficits.

Theme 4: Parents receiving positive responses from the school

All parents felt that they had received a positive response from the school during the meeting and for some parents, this positive response had also been experienced in other encounters with the school. This contributed to parents feeling reassured and more confident about their child's transition. Even in Case 2, where the school had openly stated to parents that they were unsure that they could meet the child's needs, parents still felt that the school's response was positive. This gave them confidence not just in the school itself, but in the education system.

Interviewer: 'So what are your feelings towards the school following the meeting?'

Parent: 'Positive. I think that wherever we end up, they will be extremely supportive.

That was the feeling I had. Amazing support. Plus all the opinions were based on actual fact and experience. They did not just say everything will be good. They were just up to the point which is exactly what we needed to hear.' (Parent 2).

Staff reassuring parents, listening to parents and reacting in a positive way

Parents valued school staff showing that they were actively listening to them and taking their concerns seriously; through reflecting back what parents had said, asking relevant questions and contributing their own thoughts in relation to what parents and others who knew the child had brought to the meeting. Parents felt better just knowing that staff

were 'aware' of things and were not upset or shocked by them, but accepting and proactive in their support. Staff were able to reassure parents, both around specific concerns they had, indicating how they would address such concerns and were also able to offer more general reassurance, by directly stating that they would work hard to support the child.

'I know they will give (child) the best support they possibly can, because (School SENCo) said they will do everything they can within their powers to make sure he gets what he needs.' (Parent 5).

Parents appreciated staff listening to what was working currently for their child, within the preschool environment, bringing the familiar and 'tested' strategies into the new environment. Specifying similar strategies or resources that would be used helped in conveying the sense that the resources and support which had enabled progress in the preschool would continue.

Parents reported that staff mentioning experiences with other children they had supported in the past helped parents to feel that their child would not be alone in needing extra support and confident that if the school had supported children with similar needs, they would be able to support their child also.

Positive Reaction to the child

In circumstances where the child had attended the meeting, staff responding in a positive way to the child, or children gave parents a feeling of reassurance. Where efforts had been made to make the child more comfortable, such as toys being provided for the child, this also added to feelings of positivity and acceptance.

'They was really relaxed with the kids around. That's what I really liked. No one was like 'go away' with them everyone was nice and just like 'come and play!'' (Parent 3).

Theme 5: Staff valued opportunities to talk with parents

Staff valued being able to talk with parents in a relaxed environment, particularly being able to reassure them and address their specific concerns, which gave staff satisfaction and enabled parents to relax and enjoy a more positive relationship with staff. They valued hearing parents speak, to gain a better perspective of where parents were coming from, as well as a better understanding of the child, particularly when parents were asked to express hopes and dreams.

3.3.4 Presence of the child

To consider multiple views on the presence of the child at the meeting, the views of all participants were considered. Parents, school staff, preschool staff, Portage workers, TOP workers and EPs were all directly asked their views on the child's presence at the meeting and inferences were also made from spontaneous comments relating to the topic.

RQ: What were multiple perspectives on the presence of the child at the meeting?

All six of the families opted to bring their children to the meeting and some also brought younger siblings along. The family with twins opted not to bring their child to the first meeting, but then brought the second twin along to her (the second) meeting. Preschool staff suggested that this was perhaps due to the different nature of the children and questions around whether the child who did not come would have coped with the meeting.

Families valued being able to choose whether or not to bring their child, although some did note feeling pressure from EPs to do so, as EPs had often tried to encourage it. Many participants noted concerns prior to the meeting about how the child might cope during the meeting, particularly the school staff, and had questioned what value having the

child there might bring and what the child might be asked to do. However, when asked afterwards whether they would bring the child again, the majority of parents and professionals felt that they would.

Two broad themes were identified in the data; what the meeting may mean for the child and what the child’s presence at the meeting may mean for the adults in the room.

Table 14: Perspectives on the presence of the child at the meeting

Themes	Subthemes	Illustrative Quotes
What the meeting may mean for the child	Child should be given the opportunity to be ‘part of it’	<i>‘I understand that they are part of it and that is the point, at some point they definitely should be part of it, you know I’m not saying they shouldn’t be involved..... I don’t want to put a ceiling on what they’re capable of doing’ (School SENCo 2/5)</i>
	The child receives an important message	<i>‘I’ll be honest I was a little bit worried it was going to be a waste of time because he won’t be able to express himself very well but it turned out to be absolutely unworrryful...I think that whether he understood it or not, he was part of it, it was about him and that was important for him. He enjoyed that.’ (Parent 2)</i>
	Questions around level of genuine participation	
	Assumptions around children’s emotional experiences	<i>‘My only concern was how much (child) was involved with it. That was the only thing. I thought for the adults there, it went really well, but for (child), she wasn’t really involved.’ (School SENCo 1)</i> <i>‘I mean obviously he still had a few wobbles because it was different, but when he was obviously not happy to be there, it was good cos they were happy for him to go back to preschool’ (Parent 5)</i>

<p>What the child's presence at meeting may mean for the adults in the room</p>	<p>Child's presence keeps adults focused</p> <p>Child as a distraction</p> <p>Anxiety about speaking negatively in front of the child</p>	<p><i>'... it still helps people in the room to remember who that meeting is about... it stops it going off on the adult agenda' (Educational Psychologist)</i></p> <p><i>Interviewer: 'Ok, so from your point of view, did you want her there/ not want her there?'</i></p> <p><i>Parent: 'I did, but I also didn't. I did because I think it's nice that they do it for the children, but I didn't in case she had a meltdown and then I'd have been like 'oh god!' (Parent 3)</i></p> <p><i>'I think perhaps to have the child in for some elements of it but not for others and that has been generally the feedback from parents so far that I've been working with. They're quite happy for the child there when we are talking about their strengths and what they want to happen in a year's time, but in terms of the barriers and what's going to happen next they're not so keen for the children to be involved in....maybe because it might increase their anxiety' (School SENCo 4).</i></p>
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Theme 1: What being present at the meeting may mean for the child

Child should be given opportunity to be part of the meeting

Participants alluded to the fact that children 'should' be there, although did not always clearly explain why this was. Some stated that it was because the meeting was about them and therefore morally, they should have some part in it.

Children's views were generally considered important for informing decisions about their lives and participants felt that any chance of the child being able to express those

should be encouraged. Participants could see more clearly how older children would be able to participate to a greater extent and expressed that excluding children from participating due to their age or the nature of their difficulties would not be the right thing to do. Excluding children with the assumption that they would not be able to participate would perhaps cut off possibilities;

'I can imagine ...you know if you do it with older children, then obviously their dreams and aspirations for themselves are more formed aren't they? I can see how it would be lovely, so from that point of view you wouldn't then want to say 'let's cut off from children under 7', I can quite understand the thinking behind it'. (School SENCo 3)

Child receiving an important message

A number of parents and professionals noted that enabling children to feel part of a meeting which is about them, regardless of the level to which children were engaged, was considered to provide an important message for the child, as well as a positive experience for them. Indications were that by having some awareness that the meeting was about them and being at least asked to join in, in whatever way they were asked, that the child felt important and valued, that their contribution mattered and that others were there for them.

Questions around the level of genuine participation

Questions were raised about how much children really took part in the meeting. Most of the participants raised questions around the child's level of understanding and acknowledged that the child would not have been able to follow most of the meeting, particularly when the child's level of language and communication or cognitive skill were considered areas of need. Participants noted that much of the meeting was above the level to which children were able to understand, for example, 'One Year from Now' being too abstract a concept for preschool-aged children generally. Others questioned how safe such a young child might feel about speaking in front of so many adults.

Some efforts had been made to collect the children's views before the meetings. These were referred to at various points of the process, although only in Cases 1 and 2. In other cases, these were not made available or EPs had forgotten to collect them. In one case (Case 1) the information the preschool had prepared with the child was noted as a useful starting point for a child to be able to make some kind of verbal contribution (what she liked doing at preschool). In the other meeting (Case 2), the adults referred to the information briefly at the beginning without asking the child to contribute further. Generally, referral to the child's views was seen as more of a 'token effort' rather than again the child being able to make a meaningful contribution.

For some, this meant little meaningful participation and although they could see some benefit to the child being there, generally questioned what the point was of the child being present if they were not able to understand what was going on. However, many participants recognised that whilst the children may not have contributed verbally to the process, their views **could** be represented through those who care about them and know them well;

Interviewer: 'Were her views represented in any way?'

Preschool worker: 'Yes, through me and her mum. We could talk about what she likes to play with. Some stuff about her communication and what she means and what behaviours indicate certain things.' (Preschool staff 4)

Opinions varied as to what constituted being 'involved' and what was considered as meaningful or beneficial for the child. Ways in which children were reported as being *engaged* with the meetings included asking them questions, allowing them to draw on the paper and allowing them to use/ play with the props. EPs varied in their attempts to ask the child to contribute to the process itself. Some asked parents to gauge whether the child would be able to contribute and to say if they felt they might wish to. In other meetings, EPs asked questions directly to the child, for example in Case 1. This was not always considered successful as it took a long time for the child to answer and often her answers were not relevant to the questions, which participants saw as her not making a meaningful contribution. The parent in this case also raised a concern that the child's views might be misrepresented due to a lack of understanding on the child's and/or the adult's part;

'I would question the involvement of preschool children. I don't know how you'd get more out of them without leading them down a certain path. Unless they are very articulate and then...I can imagine some of her friends might be able to tell you what they want. I think probably it depends on the child' (Parent 1)

In cases 2 and 3, parents appreciated any kind of attempts made by EPs to engage the child in some way, such as talking to them in a way in which they understood, or allowing them to play with props, both for helping the child to relax and feel accepted and for allowing them to feel involved. Participants did not necessarily see this as a meaningful contribution as such, although appreciated these as actions as enabling the child to feel part of the meeting.

Assumptions around children's emotional experiences

Assumptions emerged around children's emotions during the meeting. Enjoyment was frequently noted; some participants felt that children had enjoyed having everyone they knew together in a room, to talk about them. In one case (Case 3), staff felt that the child had really enjoyed listening to lots of positive things about herself. Others were concerned that children found it difficult having lots of adults together in one room, in an unfamiliar context or noted that the meeting was too long, particularly if the child was required to stay there throughout.

Things that helped children feel more comfortable often related to familiarity, such as the child having familiar toys and adults there and also the child being familiar with the room, either if they were in their own home or preschool. Having breaks and snacks were also considered useful. People also valued having toys in the room and having a big open space for children to play.

Many participants suggested that having the child there for part of the meeting added some value, although providing the option of the child having elsewhere to go was frequently mentioned as it provided both an opportunity for the child to leave when they were no longer enjoying the meeting, as well as an opportunity for adults to talk more freely.

Theme 2: What the child's presence at meeting may mean for the adults in the room

Child's presence keeps adults focused

Participants recognised that the child's presence in the room helped adults to remain focused on who the meeting was about and kept the child at the centre of the discussion.

'You couldn't really say she was an active participant. But I guess, because she was there. It probably kept people focused on her, in a way that it wouldn't have done had she not been there' (School SENCo 3)

Child as a distraction

Adults across each of the different roles noted the child's presence as a distraction to some extent. This included comments about both parents and staff members interacting with the child, rather than being able to focus on the discussion. Others noted the potential emotional impact on parents, that they might be worried about how the child might behave and thus feel stressed and distracted over the impression that might be formed by school staff or other professionals. This was also the case for some preschool staff.

Indeed, some parents commented about having felt anxious before the meeting about how their child might behave. Two parents also alluded to the child's presence causing them some stress during the meeting, as they were concerned about the child's behaviour during the meeting, which related to their anxieties around both themselves and their child being judged in a negative way.

Many participants felt that the advantages of having the child present still outweighed the disadvantages that this provided:

'It wasn't anything we couldn't deal with but my concentration was sometimes a little bit more on him than on the meeting, but once again, the benefits of him to be with us was much better than that.' (Parent 2)

Whilst some staff members felt that they would have preferred not to have the child there.

'He was quite happy at first lining things up under his chair but by the end he was pulling mum's ponytail and the sibling was there too, so he was having a nibble on her legs and she was trying to say to dad to take him. So, for that one, I think it probably would have been better if he wasn't there really' (Portage worker)

Ways around reducing the distractions suggested were that those adults who were considered as perhaps having less to contribute to particular sections, such as Portage workers or preschool staff could help to entertain the child whilst other discussions were going on.

Anxiety about speaking negatively in front of the child

Some parents and staff reported feelings of stress around not wanting to talk negatively about the child whilst the child was present. One SENCo (School SENCo 2/5) noted that anxiety about what the child might hear had put some parents off bringing the child to the meeting and that they had felt very uncomfortable about doing so. She hypothesised that where parents are particularly anxious, or where they have had previous negative experiences of not being able to have a full and frank discussion in a meeting, they would find the idea of talking about the child in front of them very difficult.

Others, however felt that the child hearing positive things about themselves was a good experience for them and for the child.

'You couldn't talk about her as a case or anything because she's there. So we were just talking about our favourite things about (child) and all of the positive things. And it's lovely for her to hear. I think sometimes she forgets herself' (Preschool staff 3)

Many came back to the question of how well the child was able to understand. If they were considered old enough to understand and participate in some of the meeting, such anxieties persisted. However, if considered less able to understand, due to their age or needs, they might wonder what was the point of bringing the child to the meeting?

Again, most of the participants suggested that having the child there for some of the meeting was useful but that having some time without the child would also be of some value.

3.4. Discussion

As previous research has established, parents play a key role in their child's transition to school. They provide insight and information for decision making processes (Dockett et al., 2011), advocate for their child (Beveridge, 2004) and play an important role in preparing and supporting them (Griebel & Niesel, 2002). Despite some debate over what defines a 'successful' transition; positive parent beliefs, attitudes and feelings about school have been found to influence how well their child's transition into school might go (Dockett & Perry, 1999; Giallo et al., 2008). Therefore, the need to provide parents with a positive experience and to address their concerns is clear. The first part of this study looked to understand the nature of parental concern with regard to transition, before exploring the use of PCP as a potential method for addressing such concerns.

3.4.1. What do parents of children with SEN worry about with regard to their child's transition?

Up to this point, research into what parents of children with SEN worry about with regard to transition and how such concerns are addressed has been sparse. Much of it comes from the US and thus is difficult to relate directly to the parents of children in British schools. This study found commonalities in key areas of concern, both within this group of parents and with previous research. Despite differences between family

contexts, their children's needs, which settings they were going into or coming from and so on, parental concerns related to how their child's needs would be recognised and how others would adapt to them. Underlying this was concern about whether the child would be accepted and understood by peers and by school staff. Given the nature of the aim of a transition meeting and the context within which this research took place, it is perhaps not surprising that such concerns would be at the forefront of most of the parents' minds.

The findings also provide insight as to why such concerns were significant for parents. Being accepted and understood by staff was associated by parents with the schools' ability and willingness to support the child appropriately. Appropriate support was associated with keeping the child safe, keeping the child happy, developing the child's skills and supporting them with their peer relationships. The importance of a child being accepted by their peers is well-supported in the literature and as previous research indicates (e.g. PACEY, 2014), is often a common concern for parents. As Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggest, feeling accepted by one's peers, having a sense of belonging and 'maintaining at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships' is fundamental to individual well-being (p.497).

Whilst parents of children with SEN were not compared to parents of children without additional needs in this study, the nature of their children having additional needs was found to foster some particular concerns. For example, parents reported specific concerns about their child not speaking clearly or being toilet trained and were worried

about how the school might manage such issues and how this might influence both the child's academic and social progress. This provides further rationale, as indicated within previous literature (Hess et al., 2006; Sektnan et al., 2010) for paying particular attention to the concerns of parents of children with SEN, as well as providing some insight as to what these concerns are and why they are considered important.

Similar to previous research involving PCP (Bristow, 2013; White & Rae, 2016), parents had some concerns about the meeting itself (e.g. not knowing what to expect or feeling judged by others). Factors increasing levels of concern around the meeting were also identified, such as preschool staff not knowing what to expect, which meant that they were not able to always reassure parents.

It should be noted that this study did not aim to provide an exhaustive measure of parental anxiety over the transition period and therefore assumptions about the nature and levels of parental anxiety over time should not be made. Implications from previous research indicate a range of factors which impact upon parental concerns, such as parents' perceptions about their own abilities to support the child (Giallo et al., 2008) and families having been through difficult times together in the past (Dockett et al., 2011). These are not explored in-depth.

However, having an idea of some of the key areas of concern that parents may be experiencing with regard to their children is useful for school staff and practitioners and

may help them to better understand how to support parents. For example, knowing that acceptance and belonging may be something that might concern a new parent, staff can ensure that they give clear messages of acceptance from the start and that they are prepared to offer reassurance and practical solutions for supporting the child's relationships, if appropriate. Having an understanding of what parents might be concerned about with regard to the meeting itself should also help practitioners to better understand how to improve the experience for parents, for example, through reassuring and preparing both parents and pre-school staff. This part of the study also contributes to our understanding of whether an adapted PATH meeting can help to address some of these concerns, as discussed below.

3.4.2. What was the impact of the adapted PATH on parents? Did it address their concerns?

The results strongly indicate that the adapted PATH meeting was perceived by parents to provide them with what they felt they needed at this stage and to address and reduce many of their particular concerns. Generally, parents felt hugely involved in and reassured by the process. In some cases, to such an extent that one parent reported feeling as though all of her previous concerns had completely disappeared.

Whilst the impact that the reduction in parental anxiety had on the child or the transition process was not directly measured, the influence of parental beliefs, experiences and

emotions on the child and the transition process has been established in previous research. For example, parents who feel more knowledgeable and confident about managing transition are more likely to use more positive parenting strategies that could be important in helping children make a smooth transition to school (Dockett & Perry, 1999; Giallo et al., 2008). Thus a reduction of parental level of concern has important implications for the child and their transition process.

It must be noted that not all parental concerns were addressed and caution must be taken here not to overestimate the potential there is to do so. This was perhaps to be expected. As parents acknowledged, certain concerns could not be fully addressed while funding issues remained unresolved, or until the child had started at school and beyond, due to an element of the unknown and a recognition that some things would be more difficult for the school to have control over, such as the reaction of peers towards the child.

Interestingly, parents reported having had concerns around peers accepting their child, although such concerns were rarely referred to when parents were reporting which concerns had been addressed and how. Perhaps the notion that the school understood the child well may have provided enough reassurance to parents that the child would be well supported, or that they might perhaps be able to provide the child with support for developing peer relationships.

As Childre and Chambers (2005) suggest, however, while the PCP process is limited in what it can achieve, parents can at least feel better prepared and more reassured than they might otherwise have done. In order to be able to put in appropriate support for the child (a key concern highlighted by parents), parents and schools both understood the need for the school (and themselves) to have as clear a picture of the child as possible and to have a clear plan as to how to support them and felt that this had been achieved. This supports earlier findings from similar PCP meetings (Bristow, 2013; Childre & Chambers, 2005; White & Rae, 2016). Knowing that the school had a good picture of their child enabled parents to feel more confident that their child would be accepted and supported and that they would make progress. They recognised this as an appropriate expectation for what could be achieved at this stage of the transition process and valued it highly.

The other key area of impact identified was that positive relationships were formed between parents and schools. Ecological models for transition (e.g. Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) highlight the importance of the quality of the relationships between parents, teachers, peers and the child in the transition process and suggest that good relationships contribute to positive transition outcomes. If good relationships are not fostered, this poses a risk to their success. Therefore, the findings from this study indicate that this type of meeting can support schools to do what researchers, including Dockett and Perry (2007) suggest they ought to be doing; building meaningful and responsive relationships which form the basis for ongoing interactions among children, families, and schools, from the start.

3.4.3. What did school staff perceive they needed from the meeting? What was the impact of the adapted PATH meeting on school staff?

The third aim of this study was to explore the impact of the meeting on school staff, as key stakeholders in this process. Previous research has elicited the views of staff on the impact of PCP meetings on children and young people and what contributed to this (Bristow, 2013; Corrigan, 2014), but has rarely directly explored the views of staff around how the meeting has impacted upon them.

What staff felt they needed from such a meeting corresponded well with what they felt they had gained from the meeting and were similar to those identified by parents: that they had a full, enriched picture of the child, that they felt they had better relationships with parents and that they had acquired more confidence in this type of meeting.

Naturally, one might expect that staff attending a transition meeting would primarily be aiming to gain as clear a picture of the child as possible, in order to better understand what to expect, what kind of support they will need to put in place and how best to create a clear plan. Findings also highlighted how this was helpful to them. For example, feeling as though they had achieved this enabled staff to be more confident that they would be able to support the child to the best of their ability, with some specific actions to fall back on.

An encouraging implication for the use of such meetings in schools is that staff said that the picture they gained from this type of meeting provided them with an enriched holistic picture, containing information in much greater detail than that which they had gleaned through their usual transition meetings or processes. That this was the case, even when the school had already shared a high level of information with the preschool and the parents, is even more encouraging. The one case in which this did not happen (the school did not feel they had a good picture of the child), however, highlighted the need for having particular aspects of the meeting in place for it to be successful and therefore carries important implications for considering the context of the use of PCP (e.g. having participants who are able to present a detailed and realistic picture of the child present).

That staff saw the meeting as a good starting point for opening lines of communication between themselves and parents in a positive way is encouraging as again, such positive communication and mutual respect has been established in previous research as an important factor for transition (Dockett & Perry, 2011; Pianta et al., 2001). That staff also felt that they had gained a better understanding of and more empathy with the parents as well as the child, has important implications for their ongoing relationship. The positive impact of empathy on relationships is well-documented (e.g. Denham Denham, Caverly, Schmidt, Blair, DeMulder & Caal, 2002; Eisenberg, 2000).

Again the limitations of what can be achieved must be acknowledged as, like parents, staff had some remaining concerns about the transition. Concerns around resourcing were perhaps more significant for staff as funding decisions would influence whether or not they would be able to put in place the support the child would require. Perhaps having the meeting after financial decisions had been made, may have altered staff perceptions around what their concerns were to some extent and how the meeting helped to address them.

3.4.4. What factors did participants perceive as having an influence on how the meeting went?

Perceived factors which contributed towards how the meeting went were identified. These indicated how and why the meeting may have impacted on parents and staff as it did. These included: participants having a high quality discussion (supported by the information brought to the meeting from different perspectives, with a particular emphasis on the family perspective being at the centre), the structure of the process, the collaborative nature of the discussion and positive interactions between parents and staff. Not only was there a high level of consistency between individual participants and participant groups within this study, but many of the findings were consistent with findings identified in previous studies from within different contexts.

Findings from both the current and previous research have therefore been used to identify factors which will be important for facilitators to consider (a ‘checklist’) when carrying out similar meetings in future. These are summarised for each section as follows and are also collated together in Appendix 22 p.270-272.

Quality of Information Shared

As previous research indicates, communication and information-sharing is a vital part of the transition process (Pianta et al., 2001; Welchons & McIntyre, 2017) and a lack of communication can increase levels of concern and feel frustrating to parents (Dockett et al., 2011; Hess et al., 2006). The richness and quality of information shared identified by participants both highlights what was valued and helps to explain why and how the process led to having the impact that it did on parents and staff (e.g. forming a clear, holistic picture and making a clear plan). As suggested by White and Rae (2016), the more information that is shared, the more individualised a plan of support can be.

These findings also supported findings from other research, that information-sharing about the child’s life outside of school, both in the present and the potential future enables staff to support the wider needs of the child (Bristow, 2013; Corrigan, 2014) and that awareness of the child’s aspirations is considered important for understanding what is important to that child and family and thus creates meaning and motivation for the individualised support strategies created in connection with them (Sanderson, 2000). It

also links with the ‘valuing process’, referred to by Rogers (1979), which enables humans to develop a clear self-concept and self-esteem from unconditional positive regard from others, through acceptance and focusing on the person as a whole, rather than a set of psychological processes and deficits.

Naturally, the quality of information shared was influenced by interpersonal factors within the groups, due in part at least to how able or willing participants felt to engage with the process. Whilst many factors encouraged people to feel relaxed and share information, some were inhibited by issues such as difficulties with previous relationships or not feeling able to yet trust in the process. Much of this is not something that can be controlled for, although it could be suggested that facilitators having an awareness of any such issues might be useful and that opportunities to address them could be provided outside the meeting as appropriate. One might also assume that as participants become more familiar with this type of meeting, an increased trust in the process might ensue, thus potentially enabling people to relax and engage more with it. Until then, adequate preparation of participants for the meeting may also allow participants to engage more fully. This is addressed in the ‘Collaboration’ section on p.158.

Table 15: Related Suggestions for Consideration when carrying out the meeting

<p>Good quality information is shared</p> <p>Participants with different perspectives who know the child well are present and input is encouraged from all. All contribute towards the plan.</p> <p>Consideration is given to who might bring different and useful perspectives. Consider who to invite with regard to who will be involved in future, e.g. class teacher.</p> <p>Participants listen and are seen to listen to each other, are willing to engage, open to new possibilities, honest.</p> <p>There is a focus on different aspects of the child, including outside of school</p> <p>Staff bring positive experiences from previous knowledge (tried and tested strategies), listen carefully, address specific parental concerns, provide reassurance, ask questions and pick up on parts of the discussion.</p>

Structure of the Meeting

As Mansell and Beadle Brown (2003) highlight, the characteristics of PCP which make it distinctive include a focus on the person/ family's goals, with support related to these goals (actions from intentions) rather than what the system suggests, and a focus on outcomes, aspirations and capacities. This study identified ways in which the structure of the meeting contributed to this (e.g. the dream highlighting what was important to the family, clear links from this to the plan and focusing on positives and strengths from the beginning) and how this impacted on parents and staff.

However, the findings also highlighted some issues with the structure which need to be addressed, for example that some found it confusing, particularly the dream element. (some were unclear as to which period of a child's life the dream was referring to and felt that adulthood was too far away to picture). In most circumstances, the process will have been a new experience to parents and many school and preschool staff alike. Perhaps better preparing participants for the structure and potential questions, and explaining the rationale to parents for doing the dream section may have addressed some of this. If these parents had known that they would be able to address the here and now later in the process and understood why the structure is how it is, they might have been better able to enjoy the dream section. It would also perhaps be useful to provide more structure to the dream section or stage the dream; thinking about once the child is an adult, separately to 'in five years' time', or even making explicit to parents that this element could refer to any period in the child's life and they should choose what feels most relevant to them. Providing better information about the format and the types of questions likely to be asked before the meeting, as well as providing reassurances and opportunities to discuss concerns may help to reduce anxiety around the unknown and contribute to a more relaxed and positive experience, both prior to the meeting as well as during the meeting itself.

The use of simple language, the visual and the clear structure, as well as skilled facilitation by EPs helped participants to follow the meeting. In addition to promoting useful, focussed discussion, to which all were able to contribute, previous research highlights that this can help to ensure that participants feel they have played an equal

and important part in the meeting, thus reducing power dynamics and previous anxieties while promoting collaboration (Corrigan, 2014). It could also be suggested that the sense of acceptance and belonging that parents reflected on would have been influenced by their being able to feel completely part of the meeting, due to its accessibility.

Table 16: Related Suggestions for Consideration when carrying out the meeting

A clear structure is followed

Start with the positives and the strengths. The barriers come later.

Clear guidelines are provided for the dream (when are we referring to) both before and during the meeting. The focus is on those who know the child well.

A visual is present, with key points made clear

Clear links are made between each section of the meeting, particularly aiming to see clear links between family goals in dream and action plans

Understandable language is used, no jargon

Facilitators keep discussion focussed and use skills such as summarising, clarifying and asking probing questions

The emphasis is on problem solving

Participants know what to expect

Appropriateness of this type of meeting discussed with staff and possibly parents prior to set-up

Parents and/or preschool staff are supported to collect the child's views visually and that they understand why this is important

Rationale and aims of the meeting shared beforehand

Format is shared with all adult participants beforehand with potential questions to consider (in particular, awareness of the dream section and awareness that the here and now will also be discussed later in the process)

Three 'rules' represented on posters shared beforehand and displayed throughout: lack of judgement, chains of the past and that it should be easy to follow

If appropriate, potential questions are shared with the child for them to consider before and during the meeting

Participants given opportunities to discuss any concerns about the meeting beforehand

Collaboration

Similar to other PCP research, the collaborative atmosphere of the meeting was key for reducing the power dynamic between participants, allowing people to feel their contributions were equally important and that they were working together as a team, thus creating a more productive, trusting, and relaxed atmosphere (Bristow, 2013; Corrigan, 2014; White & Rae, 2016) and addressing some of the parental concerns about the meeting. The distinctive relaxed and positive nature of the meeting was widely acknowledged by participants in this study and is also reflected in the literature (Bristow, 2013; Corrigan, 2014; White & Rae, 2016).

One factor which perhaps needs further consideration is the use of props. Views were mixed regarding the impact of props on the relaxed feel of the meeting. Many saw the necessity of both acknowledging and having a visual reminder for what they stand for; not being influenced by things which have happened in the past, not judging others and not using jargon. Indeed, each of these factors were referred to by participants as things which made them anxious before the meeting, or influenced their ability to relax and speak freely during the meeting. Thus, this provides argument for acknowledging such factors and having some way of re-referring to them if necessary during the meeting. Some viewed the props themselves as objects of fun, which contributed towards a more relaxed feel, particularly when tensions were high at the start of the meeting. However, as Bristow (2013) also found, others found them silly and felt that they created more feelings of discomfort, particularly members of school staff. Because there were many

other factors which contributed towards people feeling more relaxed, how important the props were for reducing tension is unclear. It may be useful therefore to explore a different way of representing the three elements which need addressing (jargon, judging, the past), for example through posters on the wall.

Table 17: Related Suggestions for Consideration when carrying out the meeting

Attempts are made to ensure everyone is relaxed and working together
Environmental aspects are considered, such as seating, props and refreshments. Facilitators are friendly.
All are treated equally, encouraged to contribute, asked the same questions and asked to contribute to the plan. People are not 'put on the spot' but gently encouraged.
People that are familiar and trusted by the family are present
Focus remains on the family
Attempts are made to encourage not judging others or worrying too much about anything negative that may have happened in the past
Attempts are made to reassure participants that they can talk openly, but the situation is managed by facilitators if discussions become inappropriate

Positive Interactions

This finding highlighted the need for an element of professionalism and interpersonal skills on behalf of the school staff and raises a question about how successful a meeting might be if these were not present. While factors relating to the context of the meeting,

such as staff and parents having the opportunity to talk openly in a relaxed atmosphere were identified, the majority of the factors identified as having a positive impact on relationships related to the behaviour and responses of the staff themselves (e.g. directly reassuring parents and addressing their specific and individual concerns and responding well to the child). As Desforges & Abouchar (2003) have suggested, staff understanding where parents are coming from and responding to their own individual barriers and concerns (being active and reactive) is important for parental engagement with transition and can help overcome barriers to this.

These findings perhaps enable us to identify certain things that staff can do to foster positive relationships with parents (see Table 18 p.161). However, it must be acknowledged the value of this is likely to be limited and to remain dependant to an extent on the quality of the interpersonal skills of the staff themselves. This is because the nature of interpersonal relationships and individual differences is complex and thus difficult to capture fully.

An interesting issue raised by the findings of this study was the issue of honesty and openness. Some participants reported feeling pressure to focus only on the positive, which they felt inhibited them from being able to be as honest as they might normally have been. Staff, for example, reported feeling nervous to ask questions or make points which might elicit a less positive response, thus being responsible for changing the tone and potentially causing upset. Indeed, Holburn and Cea (2007) warn us of the risk of

'excessive positivism' leading to potentially creating unrealistic goals and ignoring certain perspectives and suggest that this occurs when principles of PCP are misapplied. However, others highlighted honesty and openness as something to be appreciated, as necessary for addressing concerns and as indicators of authenticity.

Again, some of this is likely to relate to individual differences. However, it could be argued that perhaps having a better understanding of the format and expectations of such meetings may reduce some of these concerns. Much of this could also be managed by skilled facilitation; for example providing reassurances of the need to talk openly and honestly, with careful redirection if what is said becomes genuinely inappropriate or hinders productive discussion. This indicates that facilitators need to use a level of appropriate skill to address this.

Table 18: Related Suggestions for Consideration when carrying out the meeting

Additional pointers for School staff (positive reactions):

Parents value the following

Active listening- showing you have heard what has been said.

Directly reassuring parents of the commitment to supporting their child

Using experience and knowledge of successes with other children

Responding in a positive way to descriptions of need

Addressing specific concerns and proactively making suggestions for supporting the child

3.4.5. What were multiple perspectives on the presence of the child at the meeting?

The final aim of this study was to explore different perspectives on the experience of a pre-school child being present at their PCP meeting, as previous research to-date has involved older children. The presence of a preschool child at a PCP meeting is also often one of the key differences to more traditional transition meetings. General consensus amongst the majority of participants indicated that there are both advantages and disadvantages to having a preschool child present at the meeting. The majority of participants felt that the advantages of the child being present outweighed the disadvantages. Participant views reflected ways in which they perceived the child's presence at the meeting to impact on both the adults in the room, as well as on the child.

Impact of the Child's Presence on Adults

Perceived advantages to having the child present at a PCP meeting included opportunities for school staff to observe them, thus adding to the clear and enriched picture of the child. This enabled staff to better understand and to relate to the child and reduced some staff anxiety about the child's transition into their school. One might assume that a reduction in staff anxiety is likely to have a reciprocal effect on parental anxiety- that when staff appear to understand and accept a child's needs and come across as confident in dealing with them, this may be reassuring to parents. Indeed, although there was some element of anxiety for parents initially, around how the child might

behave, when school staff responded well to their child, they too felt reassured and accepted. Thus, it could be suggested that under such circumstances, the presence of the child at the meeting could have contributed towards the positive effect highlighted on early relationships between staff and family.

As suggested by Hayes (2004), participants also felt that the child being there kept the focus of the discussions on the child and the child at the 'heart' of the meeting. This was viewed as contributing towards the meeting being more productive (as the focus was clear) and more personal to the child (as the focus was on them, rather than the system/ anything else), thus providing a picture which is detailed and individualised. One might even suggest that the simple act of asking if the child would like to be present conveyed a message, even prior to the meeting, to parents, staff and the child themselves about the child being at the centre of the process.

Disadvantages of the child's presence for the adults in the room included the child and/or their siblings being seen as a distraction, which may indicate a potential threat to the elements of collaboration and equality if not carefully managed. Similar to White and Rae's (2016) findings, another disadvantage to the child's presence also highlighted was that people were concerned about saying anything negative in front of the child. Whilst there were mixed perceptions around how much the child could understand (discussed from p.167), participants reported feeling uncomfortable, either through

concern that the child would understand, or perhaps even through a sense of loyalty for the child.

In most cases, the issues which caused concern were often managed better, or suggestions were made that they would have been managed better, if the child was present for some of the meeting, but not all of it. An obvious solution to this suggests holding the meeting somewhere where the child would be able to go elsewhere when either they wish to, or at an agreed point of the meeting. This would allow times for adults to both attend better and to speak more freely and to allow the child to have a break if required. It is possible that concerns could be raised here in terms of the message that this might convey to the child, in terms of their really feeling included, although this was not something that was mentioned by participants as a concern.

Impact of the Meeting on the Child

How the meeting impacted on the child was not explored with the children directly, but those living and working with the child directly were asked for their view. Similar to Corrigan's (2014) findings with older children, assumptions were made that the children generally enjoyed the experience (from perhaps having people they knew all together and having toys to play with), although that in some circumstances, the meeting was thought to provoke some anxiety for children (perhaps faced with a room full of adults).

Regardless of how it felt for the child, several participants often acknowledged a notion that children ‘should’ be present at their meetings and that they have a right to do so. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UNICEF, 1989) (that every child capable of expressing views has the right to express those views in all matters affecting them to the extent which they are able) was not directly referred to. However, participants in this study alluded to the child’s right to take part, showing an awareness that children should be encouraged to participate in something which is about them and that excluding them from this does not perhaps reflect respect of the child’s rights or the principle of inclusion. School staff in particular were aware of the need not to make negative assumptions about the child’s potential capacity to participate and therefore not to limit this. It is acknowledged therefore that some attempt needs to be made for preschoolers to participate in some way.

However, the extent to which a preschool child is able to genuinely participate in such a meeting remains unclear. More often than not, children were present in the room, playing with toys or interacting with adults generally, but seemingly not being part of the discussion. To some participants, this was enough to allow children to feel ‘part of something’, to understand that these people were all there for them and that they were therefore important. As with previous research, such 'active involvement' of a child was considered important for supporting a sense of group membership (Corrigan, 2014; Hart, 1992; White & Rae, 2016).

However, the extent to which these children did feel involved is based on the assumptions of adults, rather than evidence from the children themselves. Further research is needed here. Perhaps what is reflected here is a parental sense of having seen their child as part of the group and efforts being made to include their child and listen to their views. Observing positive interactions between their child and school staff may have promoted parental perceptions of acceptance and mutual respect for their child.

Questions were raised by many participants about the level and nature of input that this group of children were really able to have. Previous research reflects similar concerns, even for children who were older and thus more likely to understand (e.g. Childre & Chambers, 2005; Taylor-Brown, 2012). As Article 12 stipulates, participation is about more than a child being present. It involves actively seeking a child's views in order for them to be able to participate in all matters affecting them. Discussion takes place in the literature with regard to 'appropriate weight' being given to a child's views and the child's 'evolving capacity', as well as their age and maturity as something which influences how much weight should be given (Fox, 2015; Shier, 2001). Lundy (2007) warns us against limiting a child's input by underestimating what a child might be capable of. She points out that children's rights to express their views should not be dependent upon their capacity to express a mature view; it is dependent only on their ability to form a view, mature or not and that their ability to express their views relies to an extent on adults making the effort to enable them to do so.

While some participants in this study acknowledged that they would not want to limit a child's potential capacity to express a view, it could be argued that efforts made to support children to express their views were not adequate enough, or considered helpful for their purpose. Despite efforts having been made to encourage preschool staff to seek the child's views prior to the meeting, this was frequently either not done, or not referred to by EPs when it had been done. In five out of the six cases, the child was also not directly asked for their input during the meeting. Greater exploration is required as to why this was not carried out. Perhaps a need for clearer guidance on process was required, or perhaps participants were questioning whether true representation of the child's views was possible.

All participants made judgements about the child's capacities for understanding. Some suggested that the children concerned were not able to fully follow the discussion in the room, did not really understand what was going on for the majority of the meeting and were not able to make a meaningful contribution towards decision making. Others assumed that children may have been able to pick up on some of the discussion. Reasons for not being able to follow much of what was being said were attributed to the child's age and level of cognitive skill and this is also reflected in the literature as limiting for enabling children to take part in decision making (Beveridge, 2004; Thomas et al., 1998). Perhaps this is a genuine reflection of these children's abilities, as those close to the child are likely to have observed the child's capabilities in other contexts.

It is also possible, as many participants suggested, that the child's views were represented by others that knew the child well, for example parents and preschool staff highlighting their child's likes and dislikes through having observed what they do and don't respond well to over time. At this stage, perhaps parents and others who know the child well are more effective in representing their child's views and advocating for the interests of their child based on their knowledge and experience of their child's decision making over time (Beveridge, 2004). However caution must be noted here. As Fox (2015) and Roller (1998) point out, we cannot assume that parental or staff perceptions of the child's view would necessarily always match the child's.

It could be argued that perhaps participants underestimated what the children were capable of and that their presence simply reflects the 'tokenism' suggested by Aston and Lambert (2010). What is not completely clear, therefore, is whether the assumptions made about these particular children's capacities to express a view were correct, or whether with more effort to elicit their views, they may have been better able to express themselves.

As staged models of participation (Hart, 1992; Shier, 2001) suggest, one of the first steps or stages of participation includes a willingness or intent to listen to the child, moving on to overcoming barriers and providing opportunities and support for the child to express their views. Whilst the level to which appropriate opportunity and support for the child to express their view has been questioned, indications are that this type of meeting at

least presents a willingness to listen to a child and some opportunity to support the child to express their views, which could potentially be expanded. This study has shown that at least attempting to enable a level of participation is something which is appreciated by parents and schools and perhaps benefits children too. Within this idea of participation developing through stages, perhaps through promoting participation of children this early on in their education, it is possible that we may be starting off an important trajectory, creating a culture towards greater participation for children and young people, conveying the message to children, their parents and their schools that their views are important.

Table 19: Related Suggestions for Consideration when Involving a Preschool Child in an Adapted PATH Meeting

<p>Child is present for some of the meeting</p> <p>Parents have been consulted about whether their child attends and feel that this is appropriate</p> <p>Parents have an element of choice about whether their child attends</p> <p>Parents are given clear guidelines as to what this might involve</p> <p>Parents are reassured that they and their child will not be judged and that professionals will adapt to the child's response to the meeting (if something goes wrong, not to worry)</p> <p>Efforts are made to make the child comfortable, e.g. toys, food, breaks. Parents/ those who know the child well could be consulted on what they would respond best to</p> <p>Child is given the option to leave the meeting at any time should they wish and have somewhere to go (e.g. back to preschool/ upstairs with an adult)</p> <p>Opportunities are given for participants to speak without the child present should participants so wish</p> <p>Child is encouraged and supported but not pressured to express views</p> <p>Child is supported to have their views represented visually, these being prepared before the meeting</p> <p>Child is given opportunities to feel included, such as holding props, drawing on visual, choosing where to sit</p> <p>Familiar adults present who can support the child when others are speaking as appropriate</p> <p>Staff are able to observe the child whilst aware of the context</p> <p>Staff and other participants are given opportunities to interact positively with the child as appropriate</p>

3.4.6. Limitations of the Study

The sample in this study is small and specific to a certain area. All participants were female and only one member from each family and educational establishment was interviewed. Whilst some participants reported the views of other members of their families or settings, their views were not collected directly. Whilst use of a small sample size was intentional, in order to gain depth and richness from the data, it limits application to a wider population and requires caution, professional judgement and understanding of context when considering how and where to apply these findings.

Research was carried out through interview, with the interviewer an EP working in a team with those who carried out the adapted PATH meetings. Whilst measures were taken to ensure that participants were encouraged to be as honest and open as possible and that their data would be anonymised and shared only as general findings, it is likely that some participants may have still have been cautious about what they said. It is also prudent to note the potential limitations of data taken from focus groups. Again, while steps were taken to ensure that everyone was encouraged to share their own opinion, there is a possibility that members of the group may have been influenced by the opinions of others and dynamics within the group (Robson, 2011). Additionally, the EPs taking part in the focus group will have had training in and a good understanding of the theories behind PCP and PATH and the expected aims and outcomes. It is therefore possible that their views may have been influenced by this.

3.4.7. Implications for the Use of an Adapted PATH Meeting for the Preschool Population: Conclusions, Practice and Future Research

This exploratory study strongly suggests that the use of an adapted PATH meeting has a positive effect on both parents and on school staff during the transition of preschoolers into school. Firstly, it both supports and adds to research within the UK into what parents of children with SEN worry about with regard to transition. It highlights that transition for such parents can be a worrying time and that whilst what parents worry about varies, there appear to be some common strands of concern. Such areas of concern primarily revolve around whether the school will be able to meet their child's needs, particularly with regard to their social and emotional well-being, their safety and their learning. Worries are exacerbated by concerns about whether their child's skills have developed as much as they would wish, in order for them to be ready to tackle school life. Having an awareness of areas around which parents may have concerns is useful for practitioners to be aware of, for example in terms of their having more empathy towards parents, asking appropriate questions and considering the type of potential support they may need to be prepared to offer.

Whilst it is implied both in this study and in the literature that some concerns will remain for parents and school staff with regard to the child's transition throughout the process, this study strongly indicates that the adapted PATH meeting goes a long way towards providing parents with what they have identified as important to them at this stage of transition and towards addressing many of their concerns. It also clearly

addresses staff needs and concerns. It is perceived from different perspectives, as highly valuable for providing schools with a clear, enriched picture of a child that they would not necessarily have gained otherwise. This enables schools, parents and others involved with the child to have a clear plan, in order to support the child through their transition and beyond. It is also perceived as effective for promoting positive relationships between parents and schools. Parents are able to feel reassured, happier and more confident about their child's transition into school.

Many of the factors perceived as influencing the success of the use of an adapted PATH meeting within this context correspond well to previous qualitative research evaluating similar person-centred techniques within different contexts, and to the theories behind PCP itself, both regarding its philosophies and the tools it uses. For example, many of the contributing factors which were valued relate to the 'core elements' of a PCP meeting, classified by Holburn (2002), which enable participants to create a vision, identify the child's strengths and support needs, build relationships and connections, develop action plans and establish accountability. The factors identified by participants as to what they valued and saw as integral to the success of the meetings also relate closely to the rationale and aims for the use of PCP stipulated within the Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2014), thus indicating that it fits well with the current government agenda.

Therefore, this study both supports previous research and adds new insight into what people perceive as valuable for influencing positive outcomes for this kind of meeting and why, particularly with regard to its unique application to the preschool population, which has not yet been studied to date. Thus, it enables us to provide practitioners with some guidance as to whether this type of meeting is appropriate for this population and what factors they need to consider whilst carrying out such meetings.

Due to the personalised nature of the adapted PATH meeting, each meeting will differ to some extent and different factors will naturally have a variable impact on different participants. Therefore an understanding of contextual factors is key and this study highlights some of these factors. However, it must be borne in mind that different authors have attempted to define what is behind the success of PCP, for example deciphering both process factors and outcomes over time and that capturing the true essence of some of the factors of impact and of change remains very difficult. O' Brien (2002) acknowledges that there are 'process essentials', but emphasises spending time in 'clarifying purpose, creative problem solving and mutual support to challenge 'stuckness'', (p.263), rather than accurate implementation of any particular approach. He indicates that in order for change to happen, a programme simply needs to get people moving, uncover opportunities, provide a direction, improve situational awareness and facilitate respectful interaction, in which trust and self-respect can develop, which these findings suggest is possible to achieve through an adapted PATH process. As Sanderson (2000) points out, it may simply be that the philosophy of 'person-centredness' rather than a specific set of tools (Sanderson, 2000) is what has an influence. Therefore, the

guidance created for facilitators is intended for consideration of what is valued and perceived as potentially contributory towards positive impact, rather than a set of 'rules' to be followed in any situation. Both professional judgement and an understanding of context should be applied when using them.

One would assume that if schools have as clear a picture as possible of the child and if the relationship between school and parents starts on a positive note, with parents feeling less anxious about the process, as this study has shown the adapted PATH meeting to have, that this would only have a positive impact on the child and their transition.

However, as this study has aimed to focus on the perceived impact of the adapted PATH meeting on parents and staff in the time immediately following the meeting, it has not directly addressed the impact on the child, or on their transition, nor was a longitudinal understanding of the impact of the meeting on the transition process as a whole sought. Further research will be necessary to explore this. Several authors highlight the need to invest in the process of follow-up and putting proposed actions into place (e.g. Holburn, 2002; O'Brien, 2007). Therefore, even following a successful meeting, the quality of how well things are put into place as a result of what was suggested during a PCP meeting, will influence the success of the outcome of the transition process as a whole. Factors such as schools having a positive ethos and good communication following the meeting have been found to influence this (Corrigan, 2014). This supports the notion that whilst a transition meeting using PCP can have a positive impact, it should not be seen as a one-off intervention, but part of an ongoing process (Sanderson, 2000).

As well as exploring more longitudinal outcomes from PCP meetings, it would also be interesting to further explore other influences on the transition processes, such as parental anxiety over time and the mediating effects of such a process (PCP) on such factors. Desforges and Abouchaar, (2003) and Giallo et al. (2008) for example, have indicated ways in which domain-specific beliefs about how well parents feel they might manage transition (self-efficacy) might influence their behaviour towards their child. Further research might better help us to understand how anxiety might influence this, other factors which help to reduce anxiety and increase self-efficacy and how this might impact on the child and the transition.

Finally, this study has begun to explore the nature of participation for preschool children in a PCP meeting. The findings are encouraging and provide some rationale for involving pre-schoolers, including benefits to both the child and the adults present, as well as consideration of the rights of the child and the current government agenda. The findings also provide some insight as to how this might be done. It is possible that parents and those who know the child well are best placed to represent their child's views, that children of this age are likely to be limited in how much they are able to contribute with 'appropriate weight' (Fox, 2015) and that the ways children have been involved with the adapted PATH are appropriate to some extent. Naturally, there will be variation between children and families as to what this might involve. Parents and professionals must therefore perhaps continue to use some level of judgement about a child's capacity, in order to enable them to contribute, without causing them any distress, putting them or their parents under pressure or putting too much emphasis on

potentially transient views. However, a full picture of the potential of the participation of preschool children is far from clear and further research is necessary, with greater efforts made to explore ways in which children could be encouraged and supported to express a view, should they wish to and how this would then influence how decisions about them are made.

4. Critical Appraisal

4.1. Reflections on Epistemological Standpoint

In order to better understand assumptions that can be made about the validity and reliability of the claims this research can make to knowledge, it is important to consider the ontological and epistemological stand point, from which this research was undertaken. Ontology refers to the nature of the world, what is there to know? Epistemology asks the questions how and what can we know? (Willig, 2013). A realist approach to ontology and epistemology assumes that the world is made up of structures and processes of a social and psychological nature ('realities') which characterise the behaviour and thinking of the participants, even if they are unaware of this. It also assumes that such structures and processes have cause and effect relationships with one another (Maxwell, 2011). While such realities are not seen as indisputable 'facts' and inferences can only be made probabilistically (Robson, 2011), the assumption is that through research, we can seek to generate valid and reliable knowledge of such structures and processes and to capture as truthfully as possible something that is happening in the real world. This fits with the theoretical view that whilst different participants may hold different perspectives or viewpoints, PCP meetings, their particular characteristics and their possible impact represent some such kind of 'reality', and that it should be possible to identify some reliable knowledge about what this 'reality' is to some extent.

Pawson and Tilley (2007) explain that through having some existing understanding of theory and deep knowledge of a situation, we can seek to understand the mechanism or mechanisms ('complex causation'- Robson, 2011) which lead to an outcome and the context in which this occurs. They suggest that much of this is speculative, but allows us to begin to understand some of the 'imperfect causal relationships' between people's unique experience of an intervention, including their views and feelings and the complexities of the context and its outcomes (Robson, 2011). This fits with the researcher's view that it should be possible to identify some of the social and psychological processes which might underpin some of the cause and effect relationships between people's unique experience of a PCP meeting, the complexities of the context and its outcomes (how it impacts on those experiencing it). Whilst this type of research does not enable us to predict a specific set of experiences or outcomes for future PCP meetings, Pawson and Tilley (2007) highlight that through seeking to explain and understand what factors may have led to a change, we should be able to gain insight into what might lead to change in future and therefore what factors might be useful to consider when planning future transition meetings.

4.2. Reflections on Personal Standpoint/ Reflexivity/ Motivation

In my role as an Educational Psychologist, I first became aware of Person-centred techniques and the PATH, through a training course provided for all EPs within the authority. Theories for why it works, anecdotal evidence of it being well-received and techniques for how to facilitate the meetings were presented in a positive light. Having

then carried out several PATH meetings with older children, I had experienced positive verbal feedback from parents and schools and had also had discussions with colleagues who had also had seemingly good experiences. Within my specialist Early Years role, I have frequently encountered parents who appear anxious around transition from preschool into school, and have also experienced anxiety as a parent around transition into school with my own two children. Therefore, the motivation to find a positive, anxiety-reducing experience for such a population was strong and the PATH was something I viewed positively and hopefully as something which may be applicable. However, this has also made it necessary to be mindful of potential bias, such as an overemphasis on the positive.

It has also been necessary to reflect on the possibility that my being of a similar age and gender as many of the parents and being a parent of similarly-aged children may have influenced my ability to relate to the parents and that my teaching background may also have influenced relationships with staff members. Whilst this may have made it easier for me to understand and relate to what was said and to build rapport with participants, there may have been some danger of making inaccurate assumptions. Therefore, it has been important throughout the research process to be consistently reflective and mindful of potential positive bias and the danger of making assumptions about participants' views. Particular care was taken during interviews, for example, through checking for clarification of parental concerns and during data analysis. Raw data was consistently re-referred to throughout to ensure that themes were drawn from the data itself, rather than my own viewpoint. A research journal was also kept throughout the process and

regular reviews and discussion were held with my university tutor, as well as colleagues within the authority, to support the process of reflexivity.

4.3. Reflections on the Design Process

The realist view is compatible with the pragmatic approach, which enables methods to be selected on the basis that they fit the purpose of the enquiry, the questions being investigated and the resources available (Pawson and Tilley, 2007). Having completed the literature review, different avenues for research were initially considered, in order to clarify the purpose of the enquiry and the questions to be investigated, prior to selecting the method. One option considered, for example, was to explore parental concerns and experiences over time (including prior to and after transition) using a case study design. However, given that this is the first time that PCP has been explored, to the researcher's knowledge, with this population, the obvious angle was an initial exploration into how PCP might be used for transition with this population. A different focus was therefore necessary to gain appropriate depth in our understanding of what the impact of PCP might be for those involved with the transition of preschool children (providing a potential rationale for use within the author's service) and in what context, starting with the meeting itself (providing potential insight as to how this might best be achieved).

The nature of the research was therefore to be exploratory and evaluative. Robson (2011) points out that evaluations need to have a purpose for them to be worthwhile

(utility) and can either be formative or summative. Formative evaluations aim to provide information around a process and therefore how it can be improved, whereas summative evaluations aim to assess the effectiveness of a programme. This study had both formative and summative elements and a clear purpose; to find out the impact of the meeting on parents and staff (summative- does it work? What were some of the effects? Should we be doing this?), and to better understand what it was about the meeting, or process, that was valued. The aim of the latter carries formative elements, for enabling practitioners to better understand what needs to be considered when carrying out these meetings in future.

Qualitative methods were used to gather as rich an understanding as possible of the views of those who had taken part in the process and the context in which the process had occurred. As Willig (2013) points out, qualitative research enables researchers to gain a deep understanding of how people make sense of the world and experience events in their lives. The design was flexible, to allow for changes as the process went on and frequent discussions were held with the university supervisor and peers within the authority, to ensure consistent reflection and broadening of ideas.

Thought was given to different methods of data collection. In order to gain rich, qualitative data, semi-structured interview methods were considered, rather than questionnaires. Whilst these may have enabled the researcher to reach a larger sample, these would not have enabled exploration of views in such depth.

With regard to the research questions relating to the impact of the meeting and the factors which influence this, some researchers have attempted to use quantitative measures to measure specific constructs (e.g. locus of control- White & Rae, 2016) and thus a mixed-methods design was considered. Given the evidence around parental self-efficacy and how that can effect transition (Giallo et al., 2010), a scale such as the Parent Self-efficacy in Managing the Transition to School Scale (PSMTSS) (Giallo et al., 2008) to measure parental perceptions of their own self-efficacy may have been useful. Asking parents to rate their level of concern (both before and after the meeting) using a rating scale was also considered.

However, given the small sample of participants needed for in-depth qualitative analysis, statistical significance of such data has not been possible to gain in previous research. Such measures have often failed to add to the rich picture already provided by the qualitative data. Scales asking specific questions could also potentially lead participants to consider things they may not previously have considered relevant or important.

Such methods would also usually require some collection of data prior to the meeting, in order to gain an understanding of how things had changed from before to afterwards. This raised concern that interviewing, or even asking participants to reflect on their concerns before the meeting may have had some influence over their expectations about the meeting beforehand, or how they experienced the meeting itself. Indeed, as Curtis and Curtis (2011) point out, given the interaction between interviewee and interviewer

during an interview, it is possible for both of them to gain from each other new understandings and different ways of thinking about something.

However, it could also be argued that only asking participants retrospectively after the adapted PATH meeting how they had felt and what they had been worried about before the meeting may have been influenced by their experiences of the meeting, which may have made this a less accurate reflection of their true feelings prior to the meeting.

Perhaps only asking parents what they worried about with regard to the transition, immediately after a transition meeting may have limited exploration of parental worries in-depth. It is possible that parents will have had a whole range of worries relating to the transition process at different points over the process. Perhaps, for example, they may have worried about things relating to their own potential experiences, such as getting to know other parents or getting used to changes in routine. Given more time, asking parents to complete reflective diaries over a longer time period may have given more in-depth information about parental concerns around transition and about the true nature of the impact of the meeting on these.

Consideration was also given to potentially interviewing participants again after transition (a few months after the meeting), to see whether their views about the meeting had changed having had more time to think about it. However, the focus was kept on gathering views immediately after the meeting, as the purpose of the research was to gain a better understanding of the impact of the meeting itself. While making

attributions about the impact of the meeting so long after the process might have been interesting, many other factors could have potentially influenced views about the meeting, depending perhaps on how the transition had gone, or what others may have shared about their own perceptions of the meeting.

With regard to the research question relating to what parents of SEN children worry about, the rationale for using interviews was again to gather an in-depth understanding of the emotions and experiences of these parents and to understand how the meeting might address some of these concerns. Perhaps in addition to this, a questionnaire to a wider population of parents of SEN children may have been useful here, to gain a broader insight into the question of what parents of SEN children worry about as a population.

4.4. Reflections on Methodological Issues

Participants

Participants were chosen as an opportunistic sample. Due to limited involvement of EPs with preschoolers at that time within the local authority, the number of adapted PATH meetings that it was possible to arrange was limited. Out of all of the meetings that were arranged and EPs who had agreed to ask their participants to take part in the research, all participants agreed to take part. This meant that choice of participants from the range of people taking part in adapted PATH meetings was not selective. There may have been some bias in circumstances leading up to a family being involved in such a meeting.

There were some transition meetings which took place without the use of an adapted PATH and reasons for this were not explored. It could be suggested that for an adapted PATH meeting to have been agreed, schools, families and EPs may for example, have required a certain level of being invested in the process from the start.

Interviewing different groups both enabled the views of different parties to be represented, and also allowed for triangulation of data. Groups were chosen through consideration of the key investors in the intervention (who the meetings were intended to support; families and staff. The rationale for this is presented in the empirical paper) and other parties who had experienced the same meetings and may have formed an objective view. The perspectives of preschool staff and other professionals such as Portage and TOP workers were particularly useful, as many of these participants had strong relationships with families that they had built over time, which meant that they were often party to open and honest parental opinion. TOP and Portage workers were also able to provide insight into other PATH meetings that they had attended where families and schools did not take part in the research (whilst research was still under design). Whilst care was taken not to share specific information from named families and the researcher was aware of potential bias in the interpretation participants may have made from such information, this helped to support and supplement information given directly from parents and schools. For example, Portage workers reporting that each family they had spoken to had felt reassured after the meeting validated the view that the parents themselves had given. Where preschool staff had been interviewed, specific families to which they were referring were identifiable and in many cases, the information they

provided added a richer picture of the context, for example, where preschool staff had a different view of children's needs or where they had witnessed parental anxiety prior to the meeting. Again, care was taken in the interpretation of such data as it became evident that opinion often differed between assumptions participants made about what others might have felt and what was actually said by others. Transcriptions were referred back to and where views had differed, their source was made explicit.

Due to time constrictions, it was not possible to interview every participant of every meeting, thus other staff members and family members' views were not represented, in particular the fathers' views. Whilst only two fathers attended the meetings, their views were not represented directly and may have provided different views and insights. Both parent and staff views are heavily represented by females and this should be taken into account when considering application of this research to other contexts.

Semi-Structured Interview

Reasons for selecting semi-structured interview are discussed above (p.182). As detailed in the Method section of the Empirical paper (from p.70), steps were taken to ensure increased rigour, reliability and validity. Some of the details are reflected on below.

All interviews were carried out by the researcher to ensure consistency and full immersion in the data. This was useful for navigating the discussion, for example, being able to probe more deeply something that was raised where appropriate and for

interpretation of findings. For example, facial expressions and tone of voice were reflected on to interpret meaning. When looking at the interview data collected retrospectively, there were areas in which participants might have been probed further. As is the nature of the interview process, despite efforts to prevent through tactics such as pausing, slowing down and summarising, there were times when the interview took perhaps a certain direction, or when lots of information was given at once and thus certain areas were not probed as deeply as they may have been.

Basing the questions on aspects of the meeting which related to the research questions and were highlighted in the literature as being factors which make this type of meeting distinctive was useful because it allowed exploration of certain areas highlighted as potentially significant in both theory and previous research. As Maxwell (2011) highlights, existing theory can help a researcher to conceptualise some ideas with which to lead, or ask questions and then revise such theories in accordance with what the 'real world' then tells us. However, there is the possibility that it may have kept the focus narrow, replicating similar results to previous research and that new information may have been missed. Willig (2011) describes the need for the interviewer to allow the interviewees enough space to 'redefine the topic under investigation and thus to generate novel insights for the researcher' (p.29). Therefore, attempts were made to ask open questions, not to restrict the content of the answers and to analyse the data initially without specific focus. For some participants, this was enough to enable them to bring new information and to speak honestly and openly about things they wanted to say.

Others, however, required a high level of prompting and this perhaps generated a narrower focus.

As acknowledged, the researcher carrying out the interviews, as a local authority EP, may have added limitations to the research, in that participants may have been influenced by knowing that the researcher was a colleague of those carrying out the meeting and potentially invested in the process. The researcher was also aware of her own potential bias in interpreting what was said (as discussed from p.179). Steps were taken to address some of this (such as reassuring participants of confidentiality and the need to be honest, the researcher being reflective and attempts being made to build a rapport with participants to support them to feel relaxed). However, indications from the data raised some questions about the credibility of what was being said. In two cases, comments made by school SENCOs suggested that despite reassurances by the researcher of the researcher's neutrality, of the need to be honest, and of confidentiality, their responses reflected a feeling that there was a need to sound positive. For example, 'that sounds awful, doesn't it?' and '...not wanting to be too negative...' both indicate that although the SENCOs were still expressing thoughts that they considered negative, there may have remained some inhibition around expressing views entirely honestly.

Focus Groups

A similar, semi-structured interview schedule was carried out for focus groups and therefore much of the previous section applies to these groups. However, due to the nature of the interview being done in a group, there were some additional factors to consider.

One advantage to talking to groups of people who are already established and know each other well is that it can enable group members to feel relaxed and to stimulate discussion. Robson (2011) suggests that group members may provide each other with a sense of safety in expressing conflicts or concerns and all groups were already familiar with the researcher. Conversations appeared to reflect a level of openness and honesty, with professionals including both positive and negative information.

Willig (2011) suggests that group members can extend, develop and challenge each other, providing rich data for the researcher. Group members often supported each other in the discussions, asked each other for clarification and built on each other's points, helping each other to reach a shared understanding. For example, the Portage workers compared and contrasted their experiences of how they perceived the child experienced the meetings they had attended, agreeing on some points and identifying differences between different contexts/ families.

However, as Kreuger and Casey (2000) point out, caution must be taken with pre-existing groups of people who know and work closely together, due to their already being likely to have pre-existing hierarchies and dynamics, which may also influence their responses. Group rules, such as respecting others, allowing others to speak and confidentiality were established at the start of each group. Care was taken throughout, to ensure that all had a chance to speak, with questions being posed again to those who had not given their view around a particular topic, should they have wished to contribute. Questions, such as ‘do you feel that way too, or do you think differently?’, or ‘what about in your opinion/ experience?’ were also asked to probe those who had not yet had a say. Care was also taken during analysis of the data, to ensure that views were represented as a collective view, rather than individual ones where appropriate, that distorting influences were disregarded and that care was taken in not making assumptions about the strength of views from group members (Sim, 1998; Willig, 2011).

Participants may also have felt pressure to demonstrate knowledge and understanding, or conform to a particular view. The group of EPs, for example, had been through the training for PCP and may perhaps have felt pressure in front of colleagues to reflect an understanding of the theory around what makes PCP work and to view the process in a positive light. Data from this group could potentially have reflected an understanding of or an enthusiasm for the principles of PCP, rather than what they may have actually experienced. In hindsight, it may have been useful to interview such participants separately to reduce the potential for this, although this would not have eliminated the factor of their being interviewed by a colleague/fellow EP. It is also important to note

that the rest of the data came from parents, staff, Portage workers and TOP workers who had not received any training and only basic background information about the theory behind PCP and what to expect from this type of meeting.

Ethical Issues

As discussed in the Method section of the Empirical paper (p.85), several factors were taken into account to address ethical issues which may have arisen. During the process, particular challenges were raised around confidentiality, consent and remaining non-judgemental. Challenges to confidentiality arose when the researcher was asked on several occasions by colleagues to reflect back on what particular participants had said following meetings undertaken by these colleagues. Care was taken to reiterate to colleagues the need for confidentiality and only to impart general, anonymised data after analysis. Questions were raised around consent when Parent 6 was unavailable for interview. This raised concern as to whether or not this parent still consented to the data from interviews with staff who had attended her daughters' PATH meetings being used. This was addressed by leaving messages for the participant, reiterating to her the option to withdraw consent for this, should she wish to. As discussed on p.189, issues were also raised around the question of participants potentially feeling judged when SENCOs commented on feeling they 'should' sound 'more positive'. This was addressed by reassuring them of the researcher's neutrality and of confidentiality and anonymity of the data they provided.

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis was the method chosen for data analysis, due to the nature of it being a flexible qualitative analysis tool that can be used across different paradigms, theoretical perspectives, and epistemological approaches and thus being appropriate for a critical realist evaluation. It did provide a rich and detailed analysis of qualitative data and enabled the researcher to organise a large, complex set of data into themes or patterns, making it more accessible and easy to communicate to others (Boyatzis, 1998).

A critical realist stance assumes that ‘real’ processes can be identified and described by the researcher, with a level of skill and active interpretation on the researcher’s part (Robson, 2011, p.39). Therefore, it has been important not to simply take the data at face value, as the participants may not have had an awareness of some of the underlying factors which drives their thinking or behaviour, but to work to interpret the data to uncover and understand such factors (Willig, 2013). This by its very nature creates potential for some interpretation bias. Constant reflection and revisiting of the transcripts, exploring the data as a whole before exploring specific research questions and taking account of questions that had/ had not been asked when interpreting the responses of participants were all useful for reducing interpreter bias and ensuring that potentially useful data was not missed.

By its very nature, organising data into themes has the potential to lose some of its richness, especially given that some of the elements of PCP are difficult to capture in the first instance (e.g. the ‘mindful engagement’ described by Holburn et al. (2002, p.258)). Defining themes required a complex, reflective process. As Braun and Clarke (2006) illustrate, some debate occurs around what constitutes a theme, with regard to how much prevalence something has across the data set. More instances of the theme do not necessarily mean that the theme is any more or any less relevant or crucial. It is therefore up to the researcher to judge what constitutes a theme, in terms of whether it captures something important. In this data, the key themes identified were those which were both prevalent and meaningful in terms of both the research question and previous theory, for example, the theme of ‘a clear picture of the child’ was identified by the majority of participants within the groups being analysed and was also mentioned or implied several times within individual data sets (parents and staff respectively). Where themes were very common, this is referred to within the narrative of the results section. Other themes, such as ‘better knowledge and understanding of parents’ views’ was only mentioned by one participant, although it was selected due to its relevance to the question ‘What was the Impact on School staff?’ and implied meaning. It is possible that this view may also be shared with other members of school staff, even though it was not spoken about by other participants.

As Brantlinger et al. (2005) suggests, there was a need to analyse evidence which appears to disconfirm or contradict a theme. In situations where evidence appeared to contradict a theme, these have been discussed with regard to the context and either

created as a new theme or subtheme or used to explain and understand contexts in which something does or does not apply. For example, where many participants commented on the relaxed nature of the meeting, some noted discomfort around the props. Rather than change the theme 'meeting feeling relaxed', to which many factors contributed and was salient for many participants, a new subtheme 'some discomfort around props' was created to highlight an additional factor for some participants. In the case where a school SENCo did not feel that she had a very clear picture of the child following the meeting, reasons for this were examined and detailed in the report. The SENCo in this case had attended other PATH and PCP meetings and felt that this particular case was an exception and that she usually found that such meetings provided a clear picture of the child. Exploration of the circumstances of that meeting, from the point of view of the school SENCo and the preschool worker, revealed that the lack of a clear picture had been contributed to by there not being enough people present who were able to fully articulate the nature of the child's need. This, together with additional information from other participants in different contexts, contributed towards creation of a new theme around the 'Quality of information brought to the meeting' and helped the researcher to better understand important contributing factors to the context of a meeting.

One particular challenge which arose during data analysis was deciphering between factors describing the impact of the meeting and factors which influenced its success. This bears similarity to the challenge described by Holburn et al. (2002) of defining 'process' and 'outcome' factors. There was overlap between the two areas, for example, parents feeling 'listened to' is described in some previous research as an outcome (e.g.

Bristow, 2013), but in this study is reflected on as something which influenced how parents felt. This study has not differentiated between ‘process and outcome’ factors, and links between what people perceived was helpful for them and the impact that it had are made explicit where possible. However, it is acknowledged that the nature of organising the data to answer questions about the impact of the meeting and what participants perceived influenced this required some differentiation between the two things.

4.5 Reflections on the ‘trustworthiness’ and quality of this research

In order to ensure rigour in research, researchers often refer to the ‘trustworthiness’ of a piece of work. Guba (1987) suggests four criteria which researchers should seek to satisfy and this research is considered in line with these, in order to reflect on its trustworthiness and quality. Credibility refers to whether or not the data measures what it actually intends to measure (internal validity). Transferability refers to whether or not the findings can be applied to another setting, with readers having sufficient knowledge and understanding of the context in order to understand whether and how it may apply elsewhere (generalisability). Dependability refers to whether or not a future researcher may find similar results (reliability) and confirmability refers to whether or not the findings derive directly from the data, rather than from their own predispositions (objectivity). These are considered individually below.

Credibility

To ensure credibility, Shenton (2004) suggests tactics, such as developing an early familiarity with the culture of participating organisations, triangulation of data, tactics to ensure honesty in participants, frequent debriefing sessions with superiors and allowing for peer scrutiny, checking for understanding with participants, examining similarities with previous research findings and detailed description of the analysed data. Ways in which credibility was ensured in this study are detailed throughout the Method section of the empirical paper and Reflections on the Design/ Method section of this appraisal. For example, data triangulation, talking to participants about the need to be honest, ways to clarify meaning behind what participants were saying and regular discussion with peers, are described. As is evident in the Personal Standpoint/ Reflexivity section, the researcher was familiar with each participating organisation to some extent, through work as an EP with parents and schools. Understanding and knowledge of the school system and personal experience of being a parent and ways in which this helped the process (e.g. enabling open discussion with focus groups), any potential biases (e.g. potential to focus on the positive) and how these were addressed (e.g. consistently re-referring to the raw data) is detailed.

As is presented in the Results and Discussion sections, detailed description of the data is provided, and findings are compared and contrasted to previous research findings in different contexts.

Transferability

As Merriam (2009) suggests, generalising findings to other situations can be very difficult to do when the findings of a qualitative project are specific to a small sample of individuals in specific environments. Despite previous research coming from different contexts, many of the findings were similar to those from previous studies. Bassey (1981) highlights the importance of context and states that if practitioners know enough about the situation or context of the research, they can decide for themselves whether or not they believe their situation to be similar and thus how confident they could be about whether the findings might apply. Guba (1987) thus recommends a full description of all of the contextual factors which apply, such as information about organisations, participants and data collection. Care was taken in this research to ensure transparency of contextual factors wherever possible, whilst balancing the rights of the participants to be non-identifiable with the need to describe the context. Evidence of this is presented throughout the empirical paper and critical review. Details of participants, their situations, data collection and data analysis are provided, along with analysis of contextual factors contributing towards the impact of the adapted PATH meetings in the analysis itself and discussion around it.

Dependability

Again, Shenton (2004) suggests that in order to address this, a level of detail in reporting the study is required, which should at least allow another researcher to repeat the same work, even if the results are different. He notes that there are close ties between

dependability and credibility and suggests that to an extent, if research has credibility, this should go some way to also ensuring dependability. He highlights the need for researchers to report on research design, data collection and reflection after the project. Again, care was taken to ensure transparency of detail throughout the written report.

Confirmability

Real objectivity can be very difficult to maintain, as the intrusion of biases from the researcher are inevitable. Therefore, Shenton (2004) suggests that researchers should reduce the effect of researcher bias, through strategies such as triangulating the data, as well as the researcher acknowledging their potential biases, whilst consistently reflecting on this throughout the process. Transparency in reporting how conclusions were formed from the data is also useful here. Again, detail is outlined throughout the empirical paper and critical appraisal and evidence of how conclusions were drawn are presented in the Results and Discussion sections. Efforts were made to triangulate data from different groups, as detailed above and limitations of the study and potential researcher biases are discussed in the 'Personal Standpoint/ Reflexivity' section, reflections throughout the review and in the Discussion.

4.6. Final Reflections on the Impact and Implications of the Research

The implications of this study, its contribution to research and direction for future research have been previously discussed (see Discussion). In summary, it adds to the

literature about what parents of SEN children worry about with regard to their child's transition from preschool into school and highlights PCP as a potential method for addressing some of these concerns. It adds to the literature on transition and to the PCP literature, by providing a strong argument for the use of PCP at this stage of transition, through exploration of the impact of the meeting on parents and staff. It also adds to our understanding of contextual factors which influence the success of such a process and thus provides insight into what we might need to consider when planning for future transitions. Whilst this study did not aim to provide a comparison of PCP meetings with more traditional transition meetings, an understanding of contextual factors contributing to the success of the meeting (and links made to the impact of the meeting) also helps to highlight what is unique and different about this type of meeting. Finally, the findings also provide insight into the participation of children at this stage of their development and both motivation and direction for further exploring how this might be done.

In the author's own authority, the intention is now to share findings with colleagues to ensure that when preparing for using PCP for transition meetings, EPs and schools are able to use the checklists to ensure that preparation for the meetings is better and that factors identified as important for the meetings are considered. It will be important to discuss with colleagues how to communicate to schools and other professionals the potential impact of using such meetings for children coming into school and ways to ensure its wider use. There is potential for EPs to have a better evidence base from which to initiate discussion about why and when this type of meeting might be appropriate and to support schools and preschools to be able to do the same. Given the

concerns raised by parents around the transition and around attending meetings with professionals generally, as well as previous research around the impact of parental concern on families and children, perhaps as a profession, we need to concern ourselves more with supporting parents of preschool children with SEN. Many authorities now lack funding for EP involvement with preschool children, other than through statutory assessment. Despite such constraints, perhaps raising awareness within the local authority and also as part of initial EP training might raise empathy for and understanding around the importance of the parental perspective and thus influence the focus of EP work with this population.

5. References

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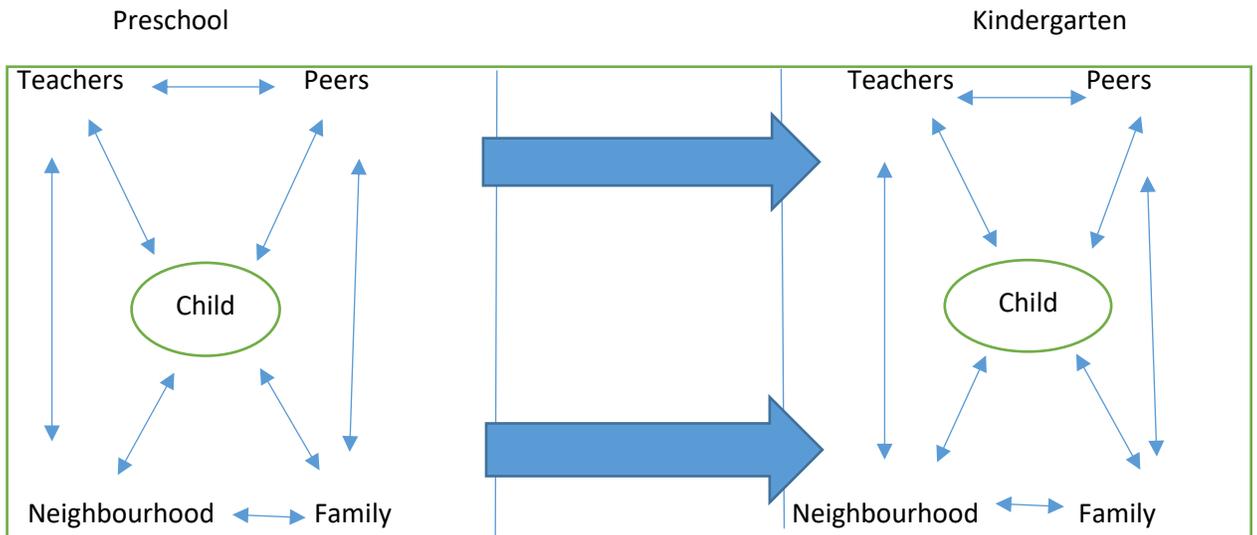
6. Appendices

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Appendix 1

Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (EDMT) (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000)



This model emphasises the development of relationships over time. It highlights that the transition to school takes place in an environment defined by changing interactions among the child, school, classroom, family, and community factors over time. The interactions form patterns and relationships that can be described not only as influences on children's development, but also as outcomes in their own right. It is the quality of these relationships which play an important role in sustaining the child throughout the period of transition. The authors suggest that if these relationships are characterised by frequent contact, agreed-on goals, and a focus on supporting the child and the child's development of skills, that they contribute to positive transition outcomes and if not, they pose a risk to their success.

Appendix 2

Information on how children's views have been gathered in previous literature

White and Rae (2016) identified 'child-friendly' strategies that participants reported finding useful, including a relaxed and informal atmosphere, the opportunity for children to contribute on paper (as some found speaking in front of adults daunting), using child-friendly language and moving around the room. They warn us that some parents felt their children were less engaged when a higher level of discussion took place, particularly towards the end of the meeting.

Making a meeting 'visual' is also suggested as important for promoting the meaningful participation of pupils. In a case study of a child in Year 6 with moderate learning difficulties, Hayes (2004) carried out a 'visual annual review'. She identifies using visual strategies such as pictures, symbols and Makaton signs as useful for reducing the need for children to decode and write words and providing 'another channel by which to understand what is being said or written' (p176). She also advocates helping the child prepare their answers before the review and asking children from the class to draw around the child's body on a piece of paper and writing comments within the outline. While this research is clearly limited in terms of how it can be generalised from one case study, it does add to suggestions for involving participants other than simply through discussion.

However, very little research has involved gaining the views of preschool children. In 2001, Clark and Moss designed the 'Mosaic Approach' for 'listening' to three and four year olds. The approach was designed by multi-agency members of the Coram Family (formerly the Tomas Coram Foundation)- a charity in Camden which brings a range of services which offer support, education, care and other facilities to young children and their families living in a deprived and multi-ethnic area of London. Their 'framework for

listening' is described as multi-method, participatory, reflective, adaptable, embedded into practice and focused on children's lived experiences. They identify a range of strategies, such as; observation, child conferencing (short interviews), using cameras for children to photograph important things in the setting (either to be used as a discussion point or for older children to document the lives of younger children), tours of the setting (child records the tour as per their preference using a range of resources such as cameras, dictaphones, and paper for drawings or making maps) and role play. The idea is for professionals and parents to collate together parts of the 'Mosaic' and look at themes which come up frequently. While this presents us with some useful strategies for gathering the views of younger children, many of which are frequently used in practice by EPs, the literature search did not highlight any research evaluating its effectiveness.

Appendix 3

Summary of Tools used for PCP

<p>One page profiles (Murray & Sanderson, 2007)</p>	<p>A One Page Profile captures all the important information about a person on a single sheet of paper under three simple headings: what people appreciate about me, what's important to me and how best to support me.</p>
<p>Making Action Plans (MAPS) (Forest & Lusthaus, 1990)</p>	<p>Through a series of questions, individuals and organisations using MAPS help the focus person construct a personal history or life story based on personal milestones. After getting to know the focus person better and exploring his or her dreams for the future, the team begins to build a plan to move in the direction of the individual's dreams.</p>
<p>Essential Lifestyle Planning (Smull & Harrison, 1992)</p>	<p>ELP is a guided process designed to help an individual discover and attain what matters most to them and identify what supports might be needed. Discussions related to health and safety are an integral part of this process. The discoveries made during this guided process are described so that they are understood by all participants including the focus person and his or her family.</p>
<p>Personal Futures Planning (Mount & Zwernik, 1988)</p>	<p>PFP employs an on-going process in which planning teams replace system-centred methods with person-centred methods. This process is meant to encourage the focus person and those working with them to become aware of the potential for the focus person to become an integral, contributing member of the community.</p>
<p>Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) (Pearpoint et al., 1993).</p>	<p>PATH is a planning tool that has team members start by imagining and then detailing the future that the focus person aspires to. The team then works backward to what they consider should be the first steps towards achieving the future envisioned.</p>

Appendix 4

Holburn (2000) Process and Outcome Measures for a PCP Meeting (p. 410)

Process Index

Presence of strategic roles
Relationship with focus person
Desire for change
Creation of a personalised vision
Commitment to planning and Follow-Up
Flexible funding/ resources

Outcome Index

Autonomy and Choice making
Home
Work/day activities
Health
Relationships
Community places
Respect
Competence
Satisfaction

Holburn (2002)'s Core Elements of PCP

Placing individuals at the centre of planning and decision-making
Creating a shared vision for the future
Identifying strengths and support needs
Building relationships and community connections
Developing action plans (with a set review date)
Establishing accountability and follow-up.

Appendix 5

Description of Critical Appraisal of Articles for Review

In order to evaluate the extent to which articles contributed to answering the review question: What are the perceptions and experiences of those involved in person-centred planning for young people within the school system?, each article was considered using Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence framework. Articles were considered separately with regard to their methodological quality and relevance to the review question. Specific details of studies are summarised in Table 3 on p.44-46

Weight of Evidence A- Methodological quality

As Gough (2007) suggests, this requires judgement about the quality, coherence and integrity of each study compared to other studies of its type. Studies were judged individually with regard to their quality and their limitations are discussed in the Methodological Limitations section (p.55-57). Brantlinger et al.'s (2005) 'Quality and credibility Indicators for Qualitative Research' checklists were used to support judgment of methodological quality, as each of the studies contained data of a qualitative nature. The criteria selected most relevant to judging the quality of this type of research are detailed in the table on p.224. Studies given a high WoE (A) included, for example, an in-depth analysis of qualitative data and detail about how this was done and a detailed description of the participants and their circumstances. They analysed data from several different stakeholder groups and across different PCP meetings in different settings. Studies given lower ratings had smaller sample sizes, for example, and explored the views of only one group of people, from only one perspective, or provided little information about the context within which the study took place (Hayes, 2004; Partington, 2016; Taylor-Brown, 2012- CYP views only

Table to show criteria for ratings for WoE (A)

	Measures included open interview questions and specific exploration of constructs with a theoretical basis in the literature.	Meetings were carried out by different facilitators: not by the researcher.	Data was collected from several sources for triangulation (e.g. parents, CYP, staff)	Sample included participants from more than three PCP meetings	In-depth, thematic analyses of qualitative data were carried out. Results coded in systematic and meaningful way	Evidence inconsistent with main themes was extracted and discussed and rationale provided as to what was provided in the report.	Detailed description of data and its contexts which enabled judgment about transferability to current study provided	Connections were made with related research	WoE (A) rating
Bristow (2013)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	High (2.5)
Childre & Chambers (2005)	/			/	/	/	/	/	Medium (1.8)
Corrigan (2014)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	High (2.5)
Hayes (2004)		/	/		/	/	/	/	Medium (1.8)
Partington (2016)	/	/		/	/	/	/	/	Medium (2)
Taylor-Brown (2012)	/	/		/	/	/	/	/	Medium (2)
White & Rae (2016)	/		/	/	/	/	/	/	Medium (2.2)

Weight of Evidence B- Methodological Relevance

This requires judging the appropriateness of the design of the study for answering the review question. All studies included measures designed to qualitatively explore perspectives and experiences of participants who had taken part in a PCP intervention of some nature, within an educational setting. Criteria for judging methodological relevance of the literature to this review, were created with reference to what Pawson and Tilley (1994) identify as important for high quality evaluations (p.305). Studies given a higher WoE used in depth, semi-structured interviews including open questions to gather general impact as well as more specific questions based on the theoretical literature, to elicit more in-depth or specific information (e.g. Corrigan, 2014; White & Rae, 2016). Questions were also designed to elicit what may have contributed towards perceived outcomes for participants (e.g. making links between how they perceived it and what contributed to this). Multiple perspectives were sought. Studies with a lower WoE used fewer in-depth methods, such as questionnaires (Hayes, 2004) or semi-structured interview for one group of people (e.g. young people) only (Taylor-Brown, 2012)), providing less opportunity for data triangulation which could have added to the richness and the trustworthiness of the data.

Table to show criteria for ratings for WoE (B)

	In-depth, semi-structured interviews used	Questions included open questions to elicit general perspectives about PCP (what else came from the meeting?)	Included specific questions/measures linked to theoretical constructs to elicit information about specific aspects of PCP	Different perspectives measured (more than 1 group of participants for triangulation)	Sufficient details were provided about the context within which meetings were held	Efforts made to understand links between aspects of the meeting and change for participants	Contribution to the literature and areas for future research identified	Research took place in UK	WoE (B) rating
Bristow (2013)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	High (2.5)
Childre & Chambers (2005)	/	/				/	/		Medium (1.8)
Corrigan (2014)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	High (2.5)
Hayes (2004)		/	/	/	/	/	/	/	Medium (2)
Partington (2016)	/	/	/		/	/	/	/	Medium (2)
Taylor-Brown (2012)	/	/	/		/	/	/	/	Medium (2)
White & Rae (2016)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	High (2.5)

Weight of Evidence C- Relevance of topic to review question

This requires judgement about the relevance of the focus of the study to the specific review question. All were based in a school environment and used PCP techniques. Studies given a high WoE also involved planning for a transition of some nature and followed the principles of the PCP approach closely. Outcomes of the meeting were discussed from the perspectives of different participants, as well as a focus on aspects of the meeting which were valued. Perspectives included views about the meeting itself, as well as views on how the meeting may have affected the young person. Studies given lower ratings focused primarily on the views of young people, for whom the age of the CYP is less comparable to the children in the current study (Partington, 2016; Taylor-Brown, 2012) and not on other participants. The PCP methods used also did not relate as closely to as many of the principles of PCP meetings as others, for example, the school decided who to invite, or the meeting did not follow a clear structure (e.g. Hayes, 2004).

Table to show criteria for ratings for WoE (C)

	Study included views of parents or/ and staff.	Study included perspectives on the meeting itself	Study included perspectives on the presence of children at the meeting	Study included use of PCP for transition into a new school environment	Study included use of PCP within the UK school system	PCP principles adhered to closely during the meeting	WoE (C) rating
Bristow (2013)	/	/	/	/	/	/	High (2.5)
Childre & Chambers (2005)	/	/	/	/		/	Medium (2.3)
Corrigan (2014)	/	/	/	/	/	/	High (2.5)
Hayes (2004)	/	/	/	/	/		Medium(2)
Partington (2016)		/	/	/	/	/	Medium (2)
Taylor-Brown (2012)		/	/		/	/	Medium (1.8)
White & Rae (2016)	/	/	/		/	/	Medium (2)

Appendix 6

Table to show examples of how themes were extracted from findings of studies

Theme identified in this review	Studies identified	Examples of theme description in findings of studies
The process is collaborative	All	<p>Theme identified by author: ‘The process was collaborative’. Subthemes (identified by author) for this include: ‘Parents felt involved and equal to professionals in the meeting’ and ‘It is useful to have lots of different perspectives together at the meeting’. (White & Rae, 2016, p.43).</p> <p>‘Respondents made links between PATH and multi-agency working, describing PATH as ‘useful in collaborative working,’ ‘bringing people together’ and ‘building a team around the pupil (Bristow, 2013, p.91)</p> <p>‘All stakeholder groups referred to the benefits of focusing on ‘what works’, creating a positive climate that promotes co-operation and collaboration with the young person at the centre’. Subthemes (identified by author) include ‘Joint working and valuing everyone’s contribution in action planning’ (Corrigan, 2014, p. 276).</p>
A full and holistic picture is formed	Bristow (2013); Childre & Chambers (2005); Corrigan (2014); Taylor-Brown (2012); White & Rae (2016).	<p>Theme identified by author ‘Information was shared in the review’. Subthemes (identified by author) included ‘new school were given a rich picture of the child which was seen as important’ (White & Rae, 2016, p.46).</p> <p>‘A second purpose of the (PCP) meeting identified was developing a holistic view of the student. Five of the families discussed how the process revealed more extensive information in the areas of home and school than in prior meetings, which provided a broader picture of student’ (Childre & Chambers, 2005, p. 226).</p>

<p>The child is at the centre</p>	<p>All</p>	<p>Theme identified by author, 'Child-centred process' with subthemes (identified by author) 'Young person at the centre of process' and 'Young person being listened to and understood' (Corrigan, 2014, p. 276).</p> <p>'Emily shared how it felt to be at the centre of the planning process: Emily: It felt like I was special and erm, that everybody cared about me.' (Partington, 2016, p.51).</p>
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Appendix 7 Thematic map of themes and subthemes identified in review

Participants felt equal/ reduction of power imbalance focused

Different perspectives useful

Process is collaborative

Shared understanding reached

Good way to involve parents

People feel listened to

Previous relationships important

Broader view

Wider needs can be considered and met

A full, holistic picture is formed

Informative and useful

Clear, open, honest discussion

Establishing aims early gives direction

Solution-

Focus on strengths

Process is goal orientated and positive

Empowering

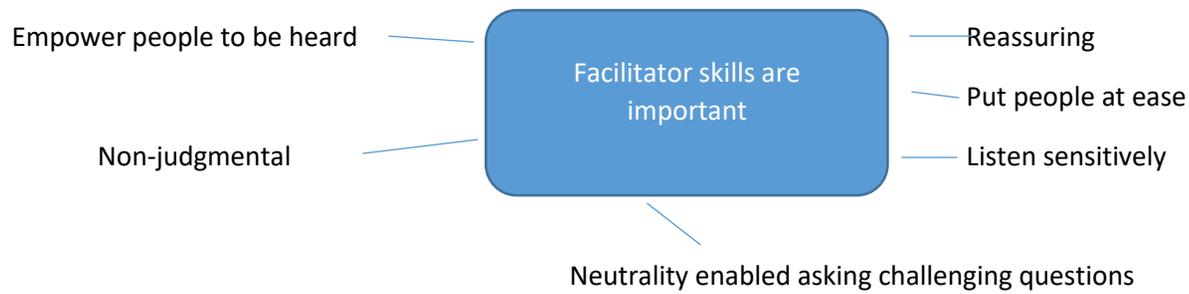
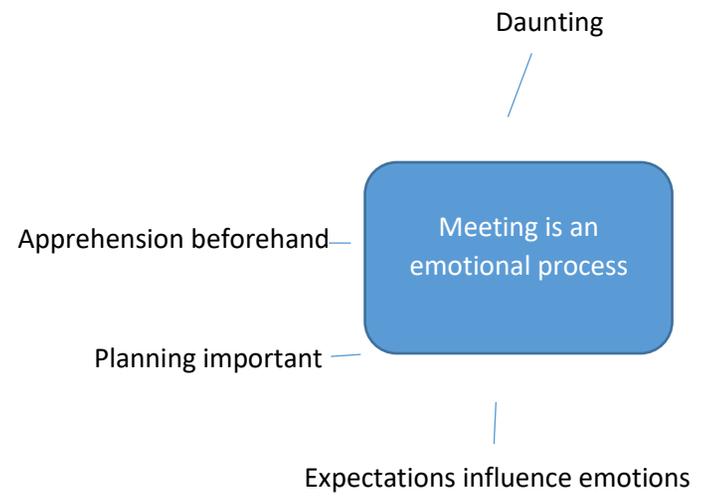
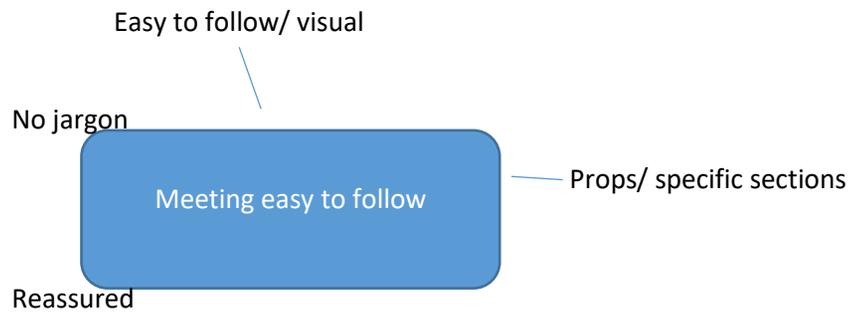
Not all understood by CYP

CYP value being asked

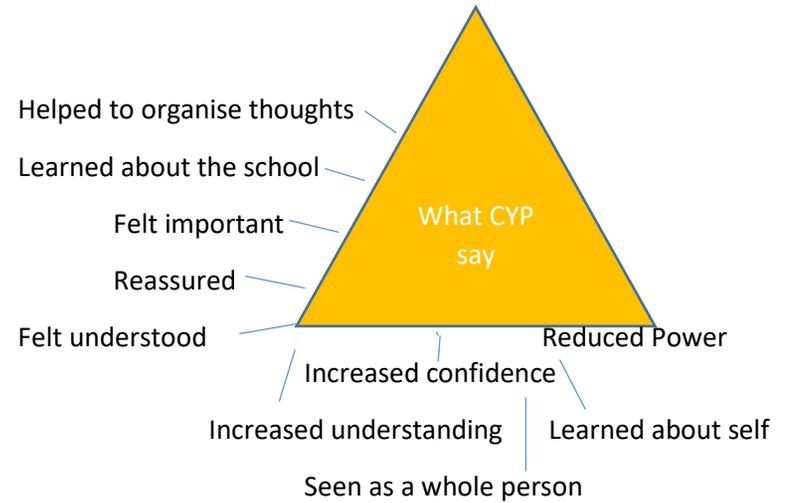
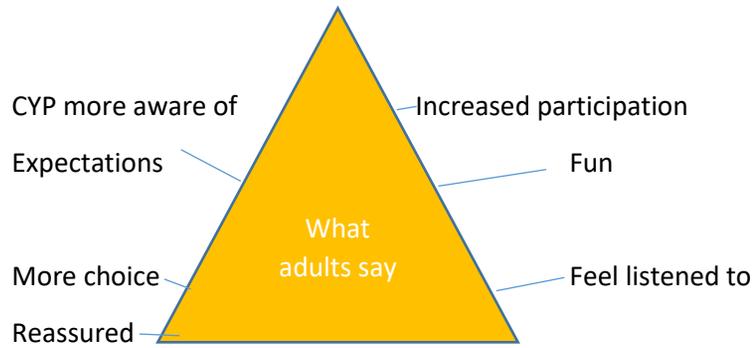
Child is at the centre

Goes at pace of CYP

CYP is present



Impact on CYP



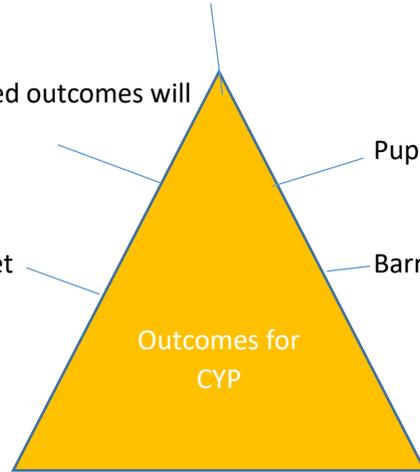
No change to LOC or positivity towards school

Others reassured outcomes will happen

TME targets met

Pupils thinking differently

Barriers/supports following the meeting



Appendix 8

Table to show themes identified within the reviewed studies by study

Study/ Theme	Process is collaborative	Process is goal orientated/ positive	Full and holistic picture is formed	Meeting is an emotional process	Child is at centre	Meeting is easy to follow	Facilitator skills are important	Weight of Evidence Rating
Bristow (2013)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	High (2.5)
Childre & Chambers (2005)	/	/	/		/	/		Medium (2.3)
Corrigan (2014)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	High (2.5)
Hayes (2004)			/		/	/		Medium (1.5)
Partington (2016)				/	/	/		Medium (1.9)
Taylor-Brown (2012)			/	/	/	/		Medium (1.9)
White & Rae (2016)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	High (2.5)

you to talk about the facts and figures of the now. It is a conversation about where the group is starting from.

The remaining steps are now focused on the different kinds of actions needed to bring the positive future closer...

- Enrol: this step asks the group, ‘who will we need with us on the journey?’ towards the positive future. It is an opportunity for the pathfinder to invite those present to enrol in his or her future as well as committing themselves to that future. The facilitators will also ask the group if there is anyone who is not present who should be invited to join the group in the future and any names given are recorded for future invitations.
- Staying strong: this step asks the group to identify and talk about what they will need to do (and not do) to keep focused on the path ahead – naming what skills and capacities they already have and can put to work as well as the relationships knowledge and skills they will need to develop.
- Actions: this final step gets the group to identify bold next steps – both big and small that can be named now. The focus will move between things that can be done tomorrow and things that can be achieved in a week or a month’s time. The facilitators will push for specifics – the who, what, where and when of actions to be taken. Agreement will also be made on when progress will be reviewed

The PATH process ends with a round of words and reflections from the group on the work they have just done together and the completed PATH is photographed, taken down from the wall, rolled up and presented to the pathfinder.

Description of the Adapted PATH Process

There are 6 steps in the adapted PATH process. A typical adapted PATH usually involves a group of 5-10 individuals made up of the child and their family (should the parents wish to bring their child), friends and other professionals and support workers who know the child well. An adapted PATH lasts for up to 90 minutes, and regular breaks are encouraged. Parents are asked to bring toys and snacks for their children and encouraged to support the child to feel relaxed. Participants are asked to constantly consider the needs of the child and not to become concerned about interrupting or pausing the process at any time. Facilitators are encouraged to involve the child as appropriate and to ask parents and other participants to engage with the child and ask them to contribute as they feel appropriate. Each step in the adapted PATH process has its own particular conversation associated with it.

The steps are as follows:

- The child's strengths: what do we love/ like about this child and what does the child do well?
- The Vision: Asking the family to think about what a good life for the child would look like, what matters most to them as they think about their future? Others in the group will be asked to build on the vision and say what kind of future they would love to see for the child. This is the longest step and sets the direction for the rest of the adapted PATH. Participants are asked to contribute any views they have collected from the child beforehand and to check in with the child whether there is anything they would like to say/ whether they are happy with what has been they said as appropriate
- Sensing the goal: 'Positive and Possible'. In this step the facilitators ask the group to imagine that a year has passed since they created the vision. The conversation in step 2 is about looking back on the 'past year' and remembering what has been achieved in this time towards the vision. This is a more grounded and realistic step – we are not dreaming anymore. – All the stories and memories heard in this step need to be possible (they could actually have happened) and positive (we are only remembering the good times). Step 2 aims to give the group a better sense of what it could look like if they really were on track towards the dream.
- The Now: this step aims to create a tension between the vision of a positive possible future and where the child is now in relation to this future. The facilitators will ask you to talk about the facts and figures of the now. It is a conversation about where the group is starting from.

The remaining steps are now focused on the different kinds of actions needed to bring the positive future closer...

- Enrol: this step asks the group, 'who will we need with us on the journey?' towards the positive future. It is an opportunity for the pathfinder to invite those present to enrol in his or her future as well as committing themselves to that future. The facilitators will also ask the group if there is anyone who is not present who should be invited to join the group in the future and any names given are recorded for future invitations.
- Actions: this final step gets the group to identify bold next steps – both big and small that can be named now. The focus will move between things that can be done tomorrow and things that can be achieved in a week or a month's time. The facilitators will push for specifics – the who, what, where and when of actions to be taken. Agreement will also be made on when progress will be reviewed

The adapted PATH process ends with a round of words and reflections from the group on the work they have just done together and the completed adapted PATH is photographed, taken down from the wall, rolled up and presented to the family.

Appendix 10

Information for parents about the research (provided with adapted PATH leaflet) (also adapted for school staff/ preschool staff/ other professionals)

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS/CARERS

UCL DIVISION OF PSYCHOLOGY
AND LANGUAGE SCIENCES



An exploration of the use of an adapted PATH process for supporting transition of preschool children into school

Title of Project:

This study has been approved by the
Research Department of Clinical, Educational
and Health Psychology's Ethics Chair

Project ID Number: CEHP2016552

Name, Address and Contact Details of Investigators:

(Deleted for data protection reasons, but were included for participants)

We would like to invite you to participate in this research project being undertaken as part of doctoral studies being completed at UCL and thank you for considering this. Here in Hampshire, we are currently carrying out a new type of meeting for supporting preschool children who are moving up to school, based on a process called 'PATH' (planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope- please see separate leaflet for information about what this is). These meetings relate to new government objectives, in which planning for children aims to be more family-focused. As this has not been done with this age group in this area before, we would like to evaluate these meetings, to find out what parents, school staff and preschool staff think about them and to discover ways in which

they might be improved. As you have agreed to take part in an adapted PATH meeting for your child, we would like to ask you if you would be happy to take part in the evaluation research.

You should only take part if you are happy to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to read the information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if there is anything that you would like more information about.

If you are happy to participate in the research, this would involve taking part in a discussion with Nikki Bouvier (Educational Psychologist) in the week after the meeting, either face to face or on the telephone, as you prefer. You would then be contacted again by telephone for a discussion during your child's first term at school, to gather your views on the process. We would also contact a member of staff from preschool and from the receiving school to gather their impressions of the meeting. These discussions should take approximately 30 minutes and will be recorded.

All data will be collected and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

The recordings would be written out afterwards and kept in a locked cupboard until this is completed. They would then be destroyed. The written records would be accessed only by the researchers and made anonymous as soon as possible. Once the research has been completed, we would aim to make our key findings from our work with several families and settings available to you (anonymised) for your information. No specific information that you give us would be passed on to others (e.g your Educational Psychologist/ school/ preschool), unless there are issues raised around safety. Any personal information you provide will be used for the purposes of this study only.

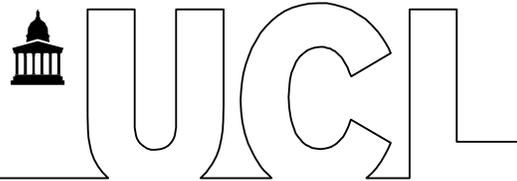
If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. We will also ask you to fill in a brief checklist about your family if you are happy to do so. Even after agreeing to take part, you can still withdraw at any time and without giving a reason and can request that your data is destroyed until such a time that this is no longer possible i.e. after it has been mixed in with data from other families and settings

We are extremely grateful for your participation in what we hope will be some really useful research. Should you have any queries or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us by e-mail or phone.

Appendix 11

Informed consent form for participants

UCL DIVISION OF PSYCHOLOGY
AND LANGUAGE SCIENCES



Informed Consent Form for Participants in Research Studies (parents/carers and staff)

(This form is to be completed independently by the participant after reading the Information Sheet and/or having listened to an explanation about the research.)

Title of Project: An exploration of the use of an adapted PATH process for supporting transition of preschool children into school

This study has been approved by the Research Department of Clinical, Educational and Health Psychology's Ethics Chair

[Project ID No]: CEHP2016552

Participant's Statement

I

agree that I have

- read the information sheet;
- had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study;
- received satisfactory answers to all my questions or have been advised of an individual to contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research and my rights as a participant.
- I understand that the views I have shared will be analysed and published as part of a report and I will be sent a summary copy. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained, and it will not be possible to identify me from any publications.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study without penalty if I so wish. I understand that I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this study only. I understand that any such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Signed:

Date:

Investigator's Statement

I

confirm that I have carefully explained the purpose of the study to the participant and outlined any reasonably foreseeable risks or benefits (where applicable).

Signed:

Date:

Appendix 12

Description of a more ‘traditional’ transition meeting

This outline of a more ‘traditional’ type of transition meeting is based upon a discussion held between 5 SENCOs and 2 EPs (including the researcher) from the same local authority, who have all held range of such meetings for children going into school. It is meant for descriptive purposes only.

- Meeting is always held at the receiving school
- Meeting arrangement is usually initiated by preschool staff or external professionals (e.g. Portage or TOP workers)
- Meeting is usually arranged between preschool and school staff and parents are usually invited by preschool staff
- Other professionals are sometimes invited by staff (e.g. Educational Psychologist, Speech and Language Therapist). Other family members are not usually invited, although occasionally other family members may attend at the family’s request.
- Child does not attend the meeting
- Meeting usually lasts around one hour
- Meeting is chaired by the school and the style is usually formal
- Focus of the meeting is usually the child’s needs and how they can best be met/ what support they are likely to require
- The child’s strengths are sometimes asked for but not always
- The child’s views are not usually requested
- School staff take notes

Appendix 13

Guidance for EPs for facilitating the adapted PATH meeting

Prior to the process

- Provide family, school preschool with all information about process, research process etc. Give them the information pack.
- Who to be present? Discuss with parents/ carers and child (as appropriate)
 - Who loves this child?
 - Who cares deeply about them?
 - Who are their friends?
 - Who are key stake holders in their life?
- Arrange who will invite who
- Consider where to hold the meeting- where does the child feel most relaxed, convenience etc
- Agree with key member of staff and parents/ carers how they will elicit the child's views. Provide them with information leaflet and guidance as necessary. They may wish to do this together.
- Discuss with the parents/ carers whether they are happy for the child to be present.
- Discuss with parents/ carers and child any favourite toys, music and snacks they might wish to bring.
- Discuss with parents/ carers and child (as appropriate) questions they may be asked.
- Answer any questions or queries they might have and provide further opportunities for them to ask questions as they arise

Setting up the process

- Open space – remove chairs, move around the room as appropriate
- Have the child's toys, snacks, anything that they have brought with them out
- Prepare the graphic first- have it up with any photos the child has taken/ visual representation of the child's views on display
- Have some paper and drawing equipment available for the child to use
- Name labels for people
- Prepare child –show an interest in what they have brought, help them feel safe
- Those who say the most should be those who spend most time with the child
- Always address the family first, attempt to engage the child when appropriate, even if they do not respond. Always simplify language, use visuals and prompts to support the

child to engage wherever possible and appropriate. Ask the family to talk to the child and engage them as appropriate or to inform facilitators if there is something the child might be able to contribute to.

- Ensure that the process involves lots of breaks for the child
- Should the child wish to play/ disengage/ have some time out/ leave the room, allow them to do so where necessary

Explanation when people arrive

- Explain that we are all here to plan for the child and think about their future. Highlight informal structure and the need for breaks etc.
- Demonstrate props – choose three people from the room to come up. As you talk through them, write up on the board. Explain that these are the things which limit us and hold us back.
 - CHAINS OF THE PAST – anything holding the child and others back, stopping them from thinking about the future. Ask them to ‘feel the weight of them in your hands. On the count of three throw them away and shout ‘lose those chains!’
 - TURKEY – jargon buster – say to the child that if anyone says something they don’t understand, they can point at whoever is holding the turkey to squeak it
 - JUDGE – wig – ask people how does it feel to be judged? Ask a few people in the audience, and finish with the child. (This helps to normalise things for the child and hear that others can empathise). Ask people to grip their pretend judge’s wig, take it off and put it under their chair.
- This makes it a safe process and involves everyone from the start
- Ask participants that if they feel there is a time when the child would be able to be involved (either through them or directly) to please involve them/ let us know.

The Start

- Begin with asking the child/ family to say what they love about the child and what they feel the child is good at/ their strengths are. Record this around the visual.
- Go over any visual representation of the child’s views that may have been prepared. Ask the child to present these to the group/ with support/ or to ‘help’ if they wish, otherwise check whether they are happy for you to show them/ if there is anyone they would like to do it for them.

The Dream

- This is the only part of the graphic without a physical boundary. Explain to the child that you are all going to think about them and what they would like to happen to them. Explain to all that you want to dream up their perfect dream future together.
 - ‘Close your eyes, uncross your legs and arms. Get really comfy, take deep breaths in and out, and get into a relaxed zone. I am going to use my voice to suggest a visualisation. If you don’t like it, you could take notes about the child instead, or do your own meditation... So, [Child’s name]... in the future... where are they? Who is with them? What activities are they doing? What is their school like? What do they do for fun or for play? What does that look like? We are trying to imagine the future just as you would love it to be. No boundaries’.
 - ‘What would you hear yourself/ the child saying?’
 - ‘What would others say?’
 - ‘How would you/ the child be feeling?’
 - ‘How do others hope you would be feeling?’
- In pairs or small groups talk about the dream to each other before feeding back. Start with the child/ the adult working with the child if appropriate.
- Invite others to share their dreams for the child, starting with parents/ carers.
- Don’t explore or interpret, don’t ask further probing questions, just expand on the dream. This is not a time for problem-solving or assessment, just to capture the conversations
- If dreams appear completely unrealistic, don’t challenge this, but do ask what that would bring them? E.g., living in a big mansion might bring respect, marrying Cheryl Cole might bring them love!
- If adults says something unhelpful or negative, remind them ‘sorry, this is the child’s dream, so I can’t put that down’

Core values

- The dream should take up half the page on the wall
- Throughout this the scribe starts to note down core values/ foundations coming through – what is really important to the child. The child’s views are key here.
- They also write down key phrases used to describe the future of the child
- Take time at this point to take a break, check in with the child and with the room, how are they finding this? How are they feeling? Does the child need a snack, a play etc?

One year from now

- Ask people to project forward to the same day in a year's time.
- Imagine what they would like to happen this year. These should only be POSITIVE and POSSIBLE.
- Mix up the groups and get people to talk in groups– ensure the key child is included in a group as appropriate
- Come up with an idea of what they would like to happen this year, based on The DREAM
- It might be opening up a possibility not mentioned yet though.
- Ask them to tell you what would have happened over the year if we were looking back from one year's time to today.
- Encourage them to expand on each description – ‘So she/he is at a new school? What does the school look like?’
- This should now look like some achievable goals. Ask the child/ family ‘How would that make you feel, if all these things had happened?’ Write these feelings underneath the circle ‘One Year From Now’

The Now

- Ask them to share what they know about the child, as they are now. Consider factors which help support the child and factors which hinder support.
- After this, if appropriate, ask child ‘How are you feeling?’ and ask others ‘How are you feeling for the child?’ or ‘What do you think the child might be feeling?’

Signing up to the dream

- Invite the child up to write or draw on the graphic if they are happy with what has been said about their dream/ what they like (e.g. are these the things that you like? Can you draw here to say yes?)
- Then ask him / her to invite others one by one to come up and sign the dream. This forms a team of people committing to the outcome → it makes those people feel *responsible* for the child's outcomes.
- If some people think this is a bit uncomfortable then name it! Make a joke of it, but emphasise how the commitment is important.
- Some people might not want to sign up – if so, do they need some persuasion? What would it take for them to sign up?
- Add others not in the room who could be useful too.

Actions for the team

- This is the time to think about making an action plan to work towards the dream.
- Emphasise that this should be ACTIONS not INTENTIONS
- Also, choose what each person should do themselves, not what someone else should do. For the child this can be more than one thing.
- Scribe writes up ‘Good intentions’ with a cross through it, then ‘Good idea for someone else’ with a cross through it.
- When getting feedback ask for specifics ‘How will you contact them? By when? Who will take the photo?’

Final reflection

- Go round the room and get everyone to say how the process was for them in a word or two
- Finish with a big round of applause.
- Ensure that everyone has access to photograph/ acquire a copy of the written record should they wish, with parental agreement.

(Adapted from <http://inclusive-solutions.com>)

Appendix 14

Leaflet for participants about the adapted PATH

Information about PATHs

(Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope)

What is a PATH?

A PATH is a type of person centred planning tool. It is a positive and inclusive approach to supporting children and young people that aims to plan *with* the individual and their family, rather than *for* them. It is based around what the child and their family want the child to achieve and focusses on their strengths.

The key outcomes of a PATH are:

- To create a shared vision of the future for the child amongst the group;
- To foster a commitment for all members to invest in moving towards that future;
- To develop a sense of how to move towards that future.

Instead of focussing on what has gone before, a PATH session is a six step process that looks to the child's dream future, gets a sense of what this would look like in a year's time, then compares this to how things are now. From this, the group works out what needs to change and the actions needed to make this happen.

By the end of a PATH session, the group will have a clear idea of the child's, and their family's, dream and their individual agreed actions to begin making this a reality.

Who is involved?

The child, along with all the people who are most important to them. This can include family, friends, nursery & school staff and outside professionals, but it is important that the child is happy for them to be there.

The PATH is led by two trained facilitators – a process facilitator who guides the group through the different stages and a graphic facilitator who creates a large, visual record of the process as it goes along.

Where does it take place?

The most important thing is that the child feels comfortable and confident to take part in the session. So a PATH can take place anywhere, including at home, nursery, school or a local community centre. There just needs to be enough space for the group to sit comfortably around

a large piece of paper used for the graphic. The space will also need to have anything that helps the child to feel comfortable, such as their favourite toys.

What will I be asked to do?

When you are part of a PATH, you will be asked to think about and share your ideas related to the child's strengths, interests, dreams and wishes and to think together about ways that you can support them to achieve their goals.

How long does a PATH meeting take?

Usually, a PATH lasts for around 90minutes, but the length of time can vary depending on the child and their needs.



What to expect

The session has an informal feel, and the child is free to move around the room. Regular breaks are encouraged. The facilitators will guide you through the session. How much the child is able to join in with the session will naturally depend on the age and abilities of the child. However, the facilitators will aim to help them to take part where possible, if they are happy to do so. Parents also have the option to opt out of bringing their child to the meeting, should they wish to.

How to prepare for the meeting

Parents

Please think about and discuss with your child (and preschool staff if you wish) who they would like to attend the meeting. You should think about who loves the child, cares deeply about them and are key stakeholders in their lives. This may include family members, friends, neighbours and key members of staff. You may also wish to include members of staff from the school the child is due to attend next year. There can be as many or as few people as you wish, within reasonable boundaries.

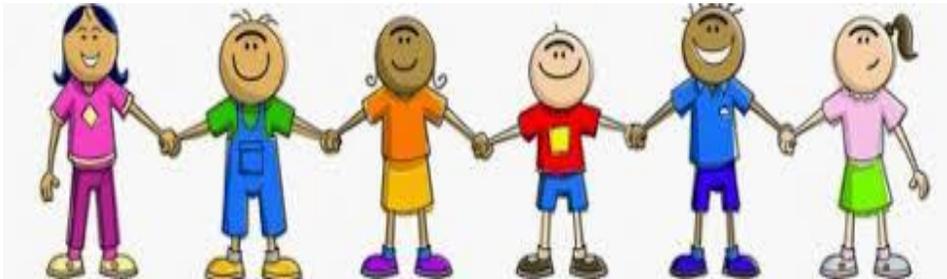
Once you have decided who to invite, please support your child to invite them along. You may also wish to show them this leaflet, to help them to know what to expect.

Prior to the meeting, please fill out the 'what is important to me?' sheet. The preschool also have this to do, so you may wish to do it together.

In order to help your child feel relaxed, you may want to help your child choose some snacks, music and toys to bring along to the meeting. You may also wish to bring along some favourite toys, books, pictures or photos to help others to understand your child's likes and dislikes.

Preschool staff

Please choose a member of staff that the child knows well to elicit their views and to bring these to the meeting, using the guidance provided. The parents/ carers also have a copy so you may wish to do this together. You may also wish to support parents with their preparation where appropriate, for example to consider who to invite, where to hold the meeting and what to bring. You may also need be responsible for inviting appropriate members of both preschool and school staff.



Should you have any questions or queries at all, please contact your educational psychologist who will be happy to answer them.

Appendix 15

Format provided to practitioners/ parents for collecting children's views prior to meeting

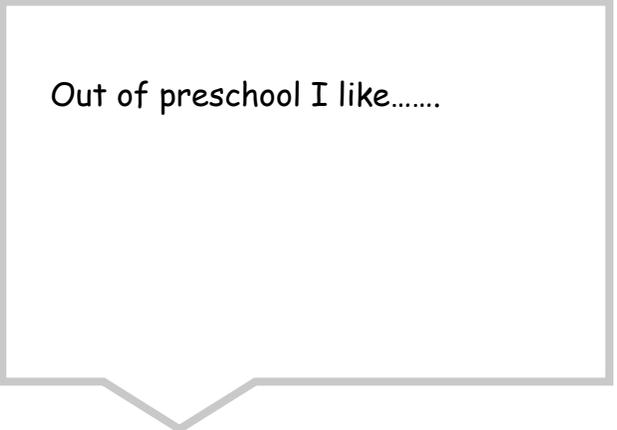
What is Important to me?



I am good at.....



In preschool I like.....



Out of preschool I like.....



A good day for me is when.....



What helps me.....

Appendix 16

Guidance for collecting children's views

Ideas for Gathering a Child's Views before a PATH meeting

These ideas are to be used as guidance for gathering children's views. Your assistance in this will provide us with really valuable information for the child's transition. Not every method will work for each child and the methods you chose will need to take the child's age and abilities into account. You do not need to do all of these. Please use these ideas in conjunction with any previous knowledge you have/ records you have made, as well as discussion with other staff and with parents as appropriate. Please bring along some representation of what you have found out to the meeting (e.g. photos, pictures, written observations, answers to questions etc). You could also use the 'What's Important to me?' Sheet to represent the child's views.

Photos

- Helping the child to take pictures of things that they like- areas of the preschool, favourite toys/ activities, favourite people.
- Taking photos of the child doing the things they enjoy doing most.

Pictures

- Asking the child to draw what they like doing/ their favourite toys/people etc.
- Could they draw a map of the preschool and show you where their favourite things are?

Talking to the Child

- This will depend of the age and level of need the child has: this may be done verbally, or with visual aids. You may also have to think about the language you use. They could be asked directly, or could be asked to choose an answer from a few specific choices (given verbally/ through pictures/ being shown).
- Questions might include:
what do you like best?
what don't you like?
who are your favourite people?

who don't you like?
How do grown-ups help you at preschool?
where is your favourite place in the preschool?
Is there an area you don't like?
what are you good at?
what do you find difficult?
what is the food like?
what has been your best day?

Observation

- Closely observing the child during play, carpet time, different activities, meal or snack times, interaction with peers and adults, making choices etc.
- Note their use of inside space, use of outside space (e.g. how long do they spend on different activities? which ones? How often do they chose that? etc)
- Listen to their body language, different cries/ noises/ language used, facial expressions, movements etc.
- If appropriate, ask them what they are doing/ if they are having fun etc.

Thank you very much for your help!

Many of these ideas are based on the Mosaic Approach, designed by multi-agency members of the Coram Family (formerly the Tomas Coram Foundation), a charity in Camden (Clark & Moss, 2001).

Appendix 17

Departmental ethics approval e-mail

From: King, John
Sent: 04 May 2016 15:04
To: Bettle, Susan; AcadServ.Ethics
Subject: Ethics Approved Birch CEHP2016552

Dear Susan,

I am writing to let you know that we have approved your recent ethics application, "An exploration of the use of an adapted PATH process for supporting transition of preschool children into school."

The approval reference number is CEHP/2016/552. I have attached a copy of your application form.

I will keep the approved forms on file, and a copy has been lodged with the UCL Research Ethics Committee. Please notify us of any amendments, in line with guidance on the PaLS Intranet.

Best Wishes,

John King
Chair of Ethics, CEHP

--

Dr John King
Senior Lecturer, Research Department of Clinical, Educational and Health Psychology
Division of Psychology and Language Sciences
University College London

Appendix 18

Example of a transcript (Excerpt from a Parent interview)

Interviewer: Can we just have a think about before the meeting...before it all happened, how were you feeling about the whole thing?

Parent: I was feeling quite apprehensive actually, I didn't really know what to expect if you know what I mean.

Interviewer: Ok

Parent: Yeah, yeah. Nervous, apprehensive, because obviously it's all new isn't it, the whole diagnosis and everything. Even though in the back of my mind, I knew what he's got, but until someone actually tells you. And then when you have all these meetings it's like well what's going to happen?

Interviewer: Ok, so trying to process everything while you are still trying to process the diagnosis...?

Parent: Yeah, exactly.

Interviewer: Did you have any idea of what was going to happen? Did you know what to expect?

Parent: Well yeah, I mean (EP) had said that we'd all have a meeting together and that we'd all have ideas of what we want to do and where we want to go and that kind of thing. But obviously being mum, I think of everything worst case scenario do you know? But actually when we had the meeting it was all really positive.

Interviewer: Ok. And what did you want to get out of it? What were you hoping for?

Parent: I think it's just the reassurance really that there are other people around that are going to help us, you know and we're not completely on our own which is what we initially first thought.

Interviewer: ...that's how you felt at first, that you were on your own?

Parent: Yes, you know you start thinking 'oh what are we going to do now and how best are we going to help him have a normal life?' and that kind of this. You know, doing lots of research on line, all the autistic societies and things that are local as well. As well as what you guys are doing with the transition to school.

Interviewer: Ok. So, then you had the meeting on Wednesday....how did you feel about the meeting. What were your initial thoughts?

Parent: Er, well obviously at first it was kind of like, I don't really know what to expect kind of thing, but actually (EPs) were both so friendly they made us feel really comfortable straight away. Even though the questions they were asking- we were all looking quite blankly at first, cos it was just like, asking questions about what you do on a day to day basis and making it as if that's not the norm. So it was like 'what do you do?' and it was like, 'well I just do normal things', but once we'd got into it, we were able to explain exactly what we meant. At first, we were a bit like, 'ooh not sure what to say', you know. But yeah, no it was good.

Appendix 19

Interview schedule for parents, school and preschool staff (individual interviews)

Questions in bold asked as an introduction. Questions in lighter type below to be used for prompting as appropriate.

Before we start- have you filled in the consent forms? Did you read the information sheet? Are you happy with everything? Did you have any questions? I am only interested in your views, the information won't be passed on to school or EP so feel free to speak as openly as you wish.

Before the meeting- what did you want to get out of the meeting?

How did you feel about it?

What did you expect/ hope would happen?

Now- What are your initial thoughts about the meeting?

How did you feel afterwards?

Did you feel comfortable during the meeting? What helped with this/ did not help?

What worked well?

Is there anything you thought could be improved?

Parents only- Have you had any previous experiences of children going into school?

How do you think this compared?

School and preschool staff only- How do you think this compared to other transition meetings you have attended?

Where did you have the meeting?

How was that?

Who attended? What relation are they to the child?

Do you have any thoughts about them being there? (how this impacted on the process)

How do you feel they helped/ will help in the future?

Did you say everything you wanted to say during the meeting?

What influenced this?

Did you feel that you were listened to/ taken seriously?

Do you feel that your views were understood?

Were they taken in a positive way?

What helped with this? Did not help?

Did anything prevent you from saying something?

Did you find the meeting easy to follow?

Do you have any particular comments about any particular part/ section of the meeting? (e.g. dream/ one year from now/ actions etc)

Was there a part that you particularly valued?

Was there a part you liked less?

How positive do you feel about the school/ transition now?

Do you feel confident to approach the school/ parents in future about any concerns you have?

What has made you feel this way?

Parents and preschool staff only- What were your specific concerns about your/ the child's transition beforehand?

Anything else?

Were they addressed?

Why/ how? What helped with this? What hindered this?

Do you have a clear plan for your/the child now?

Do you feel that you have a good understanding of what the school will do to support your child?

Did you bring your child to the meeting/ did the child attend?

How do you feel about this decision now?

Advantages/ disadvantages?

If they did attend- what did they do during the meeting?

How were they involved?

What did you think about this?

Were their views referred to? How?

Do you think they felt comfortable?

What helped/ did not help with this?

If they did not attend- were the child's views referred to?

How did you feel about this?

Any other comments?

Would you attend another meeting like this again?

Appendix 20

Interview Schedules for Focus Groups

Interview Structure for EP focus group

Please do not refer to any families by name or discuss specific cases, but express your views in general terms.

Having facilitated an adapted PATH meeting/ several adapted PATH meetings now, what are your general thoughts/ feelings about them?

What have you found worked well? Why?

What did not work so well? Why?

How do these meetings compare to more traditional transition meetings?

Which bits did you find easier to facilitate? Why

Which bits did you find harder to facilitate? Why?

OR What are your thoughts on how it was to graphic the process?

Did you use props? Which ones? Why/ why not?

Did you think everyone was able to say what they wanted during the meeting? What influenced this?

What do you think EPs bring to this type of meeting?

Did the child attend? What were the advantages and disadvantages to this?

How were they involved? What did you think about this?

Were the child's views referred to? (whether they attended or not). How?

If the child did attend....How do you think did having the child in the room impact on the adults?

What about the impact on the child?

Is there anything you thought could be improved?

What would that look like?

Any other comments?

Thank you so much for all of your help and support

Interview structure for TOP Workers/ Portage Workers

Please do not refer to any families by name or discuss specific cases, but express your views in general terms

Having attended an adapted PATH meeting/ several PATH meetings now, what are your general thoughts/ feelings about them?

What have you found worked well? Why?

What did not work so well? Why?

How do these meetings compare to more traditional transition meetings?

In general terms (without referring to families by name), what kind of feedback have you had from some of the families or settings you are working with?

Do you have any comments on particular sections of the process? Was there a part that you valued more/less?

Did you think everyone was able to say what they wanted during the meeting? What influenced this?

What do you think EPs bring to this type of meeting?

Did the child attend? What were the advantages and disadvantages to this?

How were they involved? What did you think about this?

If the child did attend....How do you think did having the child in the room impact on the adults?

What about the impact on the child?

Is there anything you thought could be improved?

What would that look like?

Any other comments?

Thank you so much for all of your help and support

Appendix 21

Table to show data analysis for random samples of extracts from transcriptions

Quote from Transcribed Text	Initial Codes Identified	Related Themes/ Subthemes
<p><i>'I'm worried that she won't be able to do what these kids do, like these kids can count to ten and she could maybe only count to three. Cos she has been called stupid by some people. By some of her friends. Because she couldn't do some of the stuff that other people could do. So I don't want her to go there and say that she hates it or that she's not included'</i>(Parent)</p>	<p>Concern about child's level of skill</p> <p>Concern that level of skill is lower than that of peers</p> <p>Concern that child will not belong/ feel included</p>	<p>Concerns around the Peer Group knowing, understanding and accepting the child (key theme-what do parents worry about?)</p>
<p><i>'... his communication skills are very bad, his language is very bad. And that affects all areas; socializing. It's very difficult to make friends if you don't talk'</i>(Parent)</p>	<p>Concern about child's level of skill</p> <p>Concern that level of skill is lower than that of peers</p> <p>Concern about child's communication</p> <p>Concern about child making friends</p> <p>Concern that child will not belong/ feel included</p>	<p>Concerns around the Peer Group knowing, understanding and accepting the child (key theme-what do parents worry about?)</p>
<p><i>'...at first it was quite daunting because they're all sort of professionals and I'm just on my own being mum, you know, ...But, it was fine'</i></p> <p>Followed by...</p> <p><i>'We were all really pleased with the way that it went and we've all got something to try</i></p>	<p>Parent feeling daunted initially</p> <p>Parent initially feeling inferior to professionals</p> <p>Parent did not feel intimidated by professionals after the meeting</p>	<p>Collaborative nature of the meeting (key theme- What were the perceived factors influencing change?)</p> <p>All playing an important part (Subtheme- What were the perceived factors influencing change?)</p>

<p><i>and progress him on now'</i> (Parent)</p>	<p>Meeting was a positive experience</p> <p>Feeling of working together as a team</p> <p>Suggestion of reduction of power dynamic/ feeling equal with others</p>	<p>Feeling of working as a team (Subtheme- What were the perceived factors influencing change?)</p> <p>Parental concerns about meeting itself (Theme- What do parents perceive that they need from a transition meeting?)</p>
<p><i>'They ask me how is she at home, what she do and that and that make me happier because they ask everything she do and that, what she can do and then they can help developmental skill isn't it?'</i>(Parent)</p>	<p>Parent feeling listened to</p> <p>Parent feeling involved/ playing an active role</p> <p>Parent felt she gave a full picture of her child</p> <p>Confidence that the information about the child will help to support the child</p>	<p>Collaborative nature of the meeting (key theme- What were the perceived factors influencing change?)</p> <p>All playing an important part (Subtheme- What were the perceived factors influencing change?)</p> <p>Confidence that the school have a clear picture of the child (key theme- Impact on parents)</p> <p>Full discussion was held and (Theme- What were the perceived factors influencing change?)</p> <p>Quality of Information brought to the meeting (Subtheme- What were the perceived factors influencing change?)</p>
<p><i>'They was really relaxed with the kids around. That's what I really liked. No one was like 'go away' with them everyone was nice and just like 'come and play!'</i>(Parent)</p>	<p>Parents felt the children were accepted</p> <p>Warm response to children by staff</p>	<p>Positive relationships were built (Key theme- Impact on parents)</p> <p>Feeling accepted by the school (Theme- Impact on parents)</p>

		Positive response from school (Subtheme- What were the perceived factors influencing change?)
<i>'...with the PATH, you've got a list of actions, because you're going back, referring back to the 'what helps' 'what hinders'. So, the actions are obviously mapped onto those, so you might say ok change helps, or 'sudden changes hinder', that's when I'd say to a parent 'ok, photo album, extra visits', so you get specific actions.'</i> (School SENCo)	<p>Action points link to reasons why</p> <p>Staff able to offer action points based on increased understanding of the child</p> <p>Action points are specific</p>	<p>Better understanding of the child (Key theme- Impact on staff)</p> <p>Clear plan was made (Theme- Impact on staff)</p> <p>Structure of the meeting (Sub theme- What were the perceived factors influencing change?)</p>
<i>'I understand that they are part of it and that is the point, at some point they definitely should be part of it, you know I'm not saying they shouldn't be involved..... I don't want to put a ceiling on what they're capable of doing'</i> (School SENCo)	<p>Child should be part of the meeting</p> <p>Desire not to exclude the child</p> <p>Desire not to limit level of involvement a child may be capable of</p>	<p>Impact of the meeting on the child (Key theme- what were multiple perspectives on the child being present at the meeting?)</p> <p>Child should be given the opportunity to be part of the meeting (Theme- what were multiple perspectives on the child being present at the meeting?)</p> <p>Questions around genuine participation of the child (Theme- what were multiple perspectives on the child being present at the meeting?)</p>
<i>'I feel that it's done more neutrally, no one is in charge of that meeting, and that's really stood out for me through all of it. I think some of the usual transition</i>	<p>Family is at the centre of the meeting</p> <p>Child's needs as the focus rather than school's needs</p>	Positive impact on the relationship with the school (key theme- Impact on parents)

<p><i>meeting sat around the table...it's about meeting the school's needs rather than the child's needs or who will do what. And I think every single one, without doubt has been about the parents, with the parents and the child at the centre rather than the school and not been about the school's needs and whether they can be met or not. That's eliminated that as far as I can see' (Portage worker)</i></p>	<p>Feeling of working together as a team</p> <p>Suggestion of reduction of power dynamic/ feeling equal with others</p> <p>Meeting is different from other transition meetings</p>	<p>Collaborative nature of the meeting (key theme- What were the perceived factors influencing change?)</p> <p>All playing an important part (Subtheme- What were the perceived factors influencing change?)</p> <p>Feeling of working as a team (Subtheme- What were the perceived factors influencing change?)</p> <p>Positive nature of the meeting (child is the focus) (subtheme- What were the perceived factors influencing change?)</p>
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Appendix 22

Checklist created for considerations for future adapted PATH meetings

Child is present for some of the meeting

Parents have been consulted about whether their child attends and feel that this is appropriate

Parents have an element of choice about whether their child attends

Parents are given clear guidelines as to what this might involve

Parents are reassured that they and their child will not be judged and that professionals will adapt to the child's response to the meeting (if something goes wrong, not to worry)

Efforts are made to make the child comfortable, e.g. toys, food, breaks. Parents/ those who know the child well could be consulted on what they would respond best to

Child is given the option to leave the meeting at any time should they wish and have somewhere to go (e.g. back to preschool/ upstairs with an adult)

Opportunities are given for participants to speak without the child present should participants so wish

Child is encouraged and supported but not pressured to express views

Child is supported to have their views represented visually, these being prepared before the meeting

Child is given opportunities to feel included, such as holding props, drawing on visual, choosing where to sit

Familiar adults present who can support the child when others are speaking as appropriate

Staff are able to observe the child whilst aware of the context

Staff and other participants are given opportunities to interact positively with the child as appropriate

Good quality information is shared

Participants with different perspectives who know the child well are present and input is encouraged from all. All contribute towards the plan.

Consideration is given to who might bring different and useful perspectives. Consider who to invite with regard to who will be involved in future, e.g. class teacher.

Participants listen and are seen to listen to each other, are willing to engage, open to new possibilities, honest.

There is a focus on different aspects of the child, including outside of school

Staff bring positive experiences from previous knowledge (tried and tested strategies), listen carefully, address specific parental concerns, provide reassurance, ask questions and pick up on parts of the discussion.

A clear structure is followed

Start with the positives and the strengths. The barriers come later.

Clear guidelines are provided for the dream (when are we referring to) both before and during the meeting. The focus is on those who know the child well.

A visual is present, with key points made clear

Clear links are made between each section of the meeting, particularly aiming to see clear links between family goals in dream and action plans

Understandable language is used, no jargon

Facilitators keep discussion focussed and use skills such as summarising, clarifying and asking probing questions

The emphasis is on problem solving

Participants know what to expect

Appropriateness of this type of meeting discussed with staff and parents prior to set-up

Parents and/or preschool staff are supported to collect the child's views visually and that they understand why this is important

Rationale and aims of the meeting shared beforehand

Format is shared with all adult participants beforehand with potential questions to consider (in particular, awareness of the dream section and awareness that the here and now will also be discussed later in the process)

Three 'rules' represented on posters shared beforehand and displayed throughout: lack of judgement, chains of the past and that it should be easy to follow

If appropriate, potential questions are shared with the child for them to consider before and during the meeting

Participants given opportunities to discuss any concerns about the meeting beforehand

Attempts are made to ensure everyone is relaxed and working together

Environmental aspects are considered, such as seating, props and refreshments. Facilitators are friendly.

All are treated equally, encouraged to contribute, asked the same questions and asked to contribute to the plan. People are not 'put on the spot' but gently encouraged.

People that are familiar and trusted by the family are present

Focus remains on the family

Attempts are made to encourage not judging others or worrying too much about anything negative that may have happened in the past

Attempts are made to reassure participants that they can talk openly, but the situation is managed by facilitators if discussions become inappropriate

Additional pointers for School staff (positive reactions):

Parents value the following

Active listening- showing you have heard what has been said.

Directly reassuring parents of the commitment to supporting their child

Using experience and knowledge of successes with other children

Responding in a positive way to descriptions of need

Addressing specific concerns and proactively making suggestions for supporting the child