AN INTERPRETATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN WITH BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES IN SCHOOL.

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of Doctorate in Educational Psychology.

2015

TRACY LAVERICK

SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENT EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT
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<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEBD</td>
<td>Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DfE</td>
<td>Department for Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCPC</td>
<td>Health and Care Professions Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ofsted</td>
<td>Office for Standards in Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BESD</td>
<td>Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEMH</td>
<td>Social Emotional and Mental Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EYFS</td>
<td>Early Years Foundation Stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EP</td>
<td>Educational Psychologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SENCo</td>
<td>Special Educational Needs Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEN</td>
<td>Special Educational Needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

The University of Manchester
Tracy Laverick
Doctorate in Educational Psychology
An interpretative analysis of the experiences of mothers of young children with behavioural difficulties in school.
2015

Current government statistics show that the fastest growing ages for exclusion in English schools is in children between five and seven years old (DfE, 2013). This trend of young children being excluded for behaviour difficulties can have long term consequences for the children and their families, and has costs to society (Castle & Parsons, 1997). It has also been found that children with challenging behaviour can attract less sympathy than other areas of difficulty (Ofsted, 2010). There is limited research regarding parents’ experiences of engaging with school staff when issues are raised about their child’s behaviour, particularly when the children are being referred to external agencies.

In the present study, three mothers of young children, whose child had been referred to the Educational Psychology Service for challenging behaviour, were interviewed. The method used to examine the interview data is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as it aims to explore the experiences of the mothers from their interpretation of the situation. Although the mothers had diverse experiences of working with school staff and external professionals with regard to their child’s challenging behaviour they provided evidence for five key superordinate themes, which are: development of shared understanding; the child as an individual; the role of being a parent; finding solutions; and social perceptions of behaviour.

Implications for theory are discussed in order to further develop a model of working with parents which challenges some the inherent disempowerment and difficulties of managing within the compulsory education system. Implications for practice are explored to consider how school staff and professionals need to develop their communication strategies to enable parents to have access to information, to actively listen to the views of parents, and for parents to be actively involved and work collaboratively in the child’s best interests.

Further research to identify the relative influence of themes in the present findings would enable targeting of resources to improve the outcomes for young children with challenging behaviour in school.

Keywords: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, challenging behaviour, young children, mother’s views, educational psychology
Declaration

It is declared that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.
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Acknowledgements

Thanks go to my husband and children for their support over the past few years whilst completing this doctorate and their patience. I could not have completed this without their support.

I would like to acknowledge the support from Professor Peter Farrell with whom this research started and Professor Kevin Woods with whom it has finished. Their support throughout my research and their confidence in me to get it finished has ensured that despite all other challenges this research is complete.

Thanks, finally, to all the children that I have taught and worked with, and their parents, as without them I would not have been inspired to complete this research or have the continued desire to work with families to realise the best outcomes for those children who find school a challenge.

The Author

Tracy Laverick has been a practising Educational Psychologist since completing her Masters Degree in 2006. Prior to this Tracy was a teacher in West Yorkshire having achieved a Geography and Primary Education degree from Leeds University in 1997. Due to the interest in moving towards the Educational Psychology route Tracy completed units of an Open University Psychology degree to meet criteria to enter the Master of Education Degree in Educational Psychology at Manchester University. These were completed whilst still teaching children in the 6 to 14 years age range. In her final teaching position before moving to take on an assistant EP role, Tracy was the SENCo for a small rural school where she believed that her greatest achievement was working with a young boy with
behavioural difficulties to learn to manage within the school environment and achieve without the need for additional support. The work with him and his parents laid down the interest in working with young people with challenging behaviour and their families.
Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Thesis rationale

This thesis is being completed towards the Professional Doctorate in Educational Psychology. As a practising psychologist this thesis allows further depth and exploration of an area that impacts significantly upon the daily work with children, families and schools.

As an EP the role is often to assess the situation from all viewpoints and to try to work alongside all parties towards solutions within the constraints of the system. Burnham (2013) in his research with educational psychologists describes how they see their approaches, ‘A highly flexible epistemological orientation, in which deference to the ontological assumptions of conventional scientific approaches is optional, serves above all to facilitate solutions to practical problems of answers specific questions’ (Burnham, 2013, p. 26).

In 2001 the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) set out categories of special needs and included social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). When this thesis was set up a review of SEN by the government was in place. Therefore all the parents and professionals in this thesis were working with the categories set by the 2001 code of practice. A new code of practice was subsequently published during the write up of this thesis in January 2015 (DfE, 2015d). This thesis therefore aims to reflect the system within which these children were given the label of SEBD but also review the new system and implications for this group of children.

In the 2001 code of practice (DfES, 2001), children with behavioural difficulties were referred to external services for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Schools were expected to have put interventions into place following a graduated approach. Once a
child was known to external support services, such as the EP, they moved from the school action category of SEN to the school action plus category of SEN. This category indicated that schools required additional support from external agencies to manage the child’s behaviour difficulties. A request could also lead to other agency involvement such as the behaviour support service.

The current changes to the special educational needs and disability (SEND) code of practice (DfE, 2015d) alters the previous focus upon generic behaviour difficulties as identified by the school. Behaviour is not named as a category of SEN but is replaced by Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs where medical labels such as Opposition Defiance Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder are named (DfE, 2015d, p. 98). Local authorities around the country are looking to examine this change and what it might mean to the services provided and how resources are delegated as well as categorising ‘need’.

The new code of practice also places much greater emphasis on the views of the parents and the pupils, with parents having a greater role in the identification of provision and, through personal budgets, how resources are spent. Parent views were sought as part of the Ofsted (2010) review of special educational needs and disability. However, there appears to be a lack of in-depth research regarding what the views of parents are, specifically if their child is identified by the school as having behaviour difficulties.

Current exclusion data shows that the number of infant pupils (children under 7 years) who are permanently excluded in England was up to 150 pupils for the academic year 2011/2012 from 130 pupils in the academic year 2009/2010. With another 110 children being excluded at age 7 in the academic year 2011/2012.
Within the local authority in which this research was conducted the number of incidences of fixed term exclusion for pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 has doubled within a two year period from 61 in the 2010/11 academic year to 121 in the 2012/13 academic year.

Due to this rise in exclusions, regular requests to the educational psychology teams and Early Years support teams to advise around behaviour difficulties, and the impact upon teachers and other pupils, means understanding more about these families’ experiences is invaluable in reviewing what can be done to support these young children and their support networks.

1.2 Researcher perspective

Over the past few years of practising as an EP it has been my perception that schools are referring children at a younger age for Social, Emotional and Behavioural difficulties. I am aware that, within the two local authorities in which I have worked, there is increasing demand for central provision to be set up for children who are in Key Stage 1, taking them away from their local school and their peer group. In my work with families who are experiencing these difficulties they receive differing levels of support and empathy from the school staff working with them.

From a personal perspective my young son began to hurt other children when he could not make himself understood. The emotional effect that this had on me as a parent could not be underestimated. Even though he was very young, and such behaviour is not unusual, the incongruence of him hurting others and the loving child that I knew was difficult to assimilate. It transpired that my son had a profound hearing loss and once he
used Makaton and had grommets fitted all negative behaviours stopped as he was able to communicate effectively. However, the emotional memory of this experience, the sense of powerlessness as a parent to improve the situation when I was not with him all day, my desire to avoid hearing about what he had done, feeling the need to apologise to all the other parents for any hurt that he may have caused and to explain that this is not who my child is. These are all very vivid. Even the process of uncovering the hearing loss led to feelings of powerlessness and a mistrust of professionals.

The above personal experiences and the increase in referrals of young children led me to examine how I would feel as a parent of a young child referred to ‘external agencies’ for behaviour difficulties. My personal assumption throughout this research is also that the overwhelming majority of parents love their children and want the best for them. From this premise it raises the questions as to how we can support parents to feel listened to, to help them to maintain a positive and caring relationship with their child, to feel empowered within the education system and to therefore lead to positive changes for the child in school. It may be that such practice is found in schools and they are successful in supporting young children within their maintained setting. It is hoped that through this research I will be able to capture some of the positive experiences for parents as well as some of the more difficult situations that parents have experienced.

There is never a ‘one size fits all’ solution to such complex issues however, it is hoped that through identifying elements of good practice and which practices to avoid, if possible, that schools can engage parents of young children in a way that will make them partners in education throughout their child’s education career.
1.3 Aims of the research

The aim of this piece of research is to gain the views of the parents. Much has been written about the views of schools and the difficulties that they perceive in working with children who show challenging behaviour (Armstrong & Hallett, 2012; Westling, 2009). However, research regarding the experiences of parents and how they have viewed the interactions between school and themselves, regarding young children with challenging behaviour, has not been explored.

It is the aim of this research to explore the experiences of parents when their children are within the first few years of interacting with the educational system and the children have been identified as having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties to the extent where the school is requesting educational psychology advice and support.

1.4 Research questions

In order to address the research aims, the following research question is proposed:

What are the parents’ experiences of school regarding their child’s challenging behaviour and referral to the educational psychology service?

1.5 Terminology

The term ‘young children’ will be used throughout this thesis to describe children who are four to seven years old and are within the infant stage of education in England (Reception to Year 2). As young children are still developing their social and emotional skills the term to describe the behaviour difficulties within this thesis will be ‘challenging
behaviour’. This term will be used to describe children who are recorded as having Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) on the educational psychology service request form.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review has been compiled over an extended period of time. The initial searches were to elicit the literature already available in the area of young children with challenging behaviour and how schools have worked with these families. The chosen methodology for this research was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Within Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis themes are not predefined therefore further reviews of the literature were conducted in response to the analysis and the subordinate themes identified to inform further in-depth analysis of the data.

2.11 Structure of the literature review

This literature review is structured as to show the development of thinking from the initial phenomenon through each stage of investigation to consider possible contributing factors and possible solutions that are currently present within the literature. It will try to address the following questions:

1. What are behaviour problems for young children in schools?
   - What is the extent of behaviour problems in young children?
   - What are the risk factors for young children with behaviour difficulties?

2. How are behaviour problems addressed in young children?
   - How do teachers address behaviour difficulties?
   - How do parents address behaviour difficulties?
2.12 Search strategy

To examine the research into this area I started by listing the following possible search terms:

Challenging behaviour
Young children
Key Stage 1
Parent’s views
Behaviour referrals
Involving parents
Parent’s experiences

I used Psychinfo and a full library search (including all available databases including ERIC, ASSIA, SOSIG, ZETOC, BEI and books) to review articles that were available in full text version and were in the English language. I initially limited the search to articles from the year 2000 but this was extended for key pieces of research into this area, identified through the references.

When reflecting on my own experiences I added the search terms:

Education professionals
Parents
Power

Some searches were completed on Google scholar and led to a citation searches within Elsevier. This has led to number of American articles.

The articles retrieved through these searches fall into broad categories. These are:
Home/school relationships
Initial teacher training and parent involvement
Teachers views of SEBD (all ages)
Young children and behaviour difficulties
Theoretical models of home/school relationships

Research articles not being used:

Parent versus professional views of glue ear
Comparing parents of children with and without ADHD
Parent’s and pupils causal attributions for difficult classroom behaviour
Work and lifestyle: social representations among young fathers

Subsequent searches were conducted into the areas of:

Mentalization
Mind-Mindedness
Reflective function
Parents and evolutionary psychology

2.2 What are behaviour problems for young children in schools?

The Ofsted SEN review in 2010 (Ofsted, 2010) found that certain groups of children were disadvantaged by the current SEN system ‘especially children from families who were less able to advocate for their child and those who had behavioural, emotional and social difficulties’ (Ofsted, 2010, p. 68). Ofsted (2010) went on to state that children with BESD found it difficult to get suitable external support and that they attracted less sympathy than
other areas of special educational needs. However, they noted that a cooperative approach by professionals for children under the age of five gained the confidence of parents.

There is a substantial body of research into the long term effects of BESD on future outcomes for pupils including the impact of exclusion and the costs to society (Castle & Parsons, 1997; Jull, 2008) and that for the majority of children who are permanently excluded this marks the end of any formal education. Research has often focussed on the views of teachers supporting children with BESD (Armstrong & Hallett, 2012; Westling, 2009) and suggested that there can be a reluctance for teachers to discuss and share strategies for working with these children, but that such discussions can be useful to support class teachers to be more reflective about the causes of challenging behaviour (Jones, Monsen, & Franey, 2013). “Hemphill and Hargreaves (2009) showed that students who were suspended from school were 50 percent more likely to engage in antisocial behaviour and 70 percent more likely to engage in violent behaviour, at least within the subsequent 12 month period”. (Michail, 2011, p. 159)

There is very little agreement amongst schools, professionals and parents as to what can constitute a behaviour problem. Behaviours that may be acceptable within one environment are not acceptable within another. Dynamics within one classroom may determine whether a child's behaviour is viewed as acceptable or not (Dinnebeil et al., 2013). Social norms and developmental milestones have been laid out by government through the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2014b) requirements and by child development texts and then by the range of professionals that may be working with the child and family.
“Traditionally, challenging behaviours were seen as actions that put the school community at risk and involved physical violence, rendering students dangerous and warranting exclusion. However, they now encompass those behaviours that are not aggressive but are perceived to produce psychological and developmental harm, like bullying and verbal abuse”. (Michail, 2011, p. 158)

Below are some of the definitions that are commonly used within schools and are part of the legislative frameworks.

One definition of challenging behaviour is:

“culturally abnormal behaviour of such an intensity, frequency or duration that the physical safety of the person or others is likely to be placed in serious jeopardy, or behaviour which is likely to seriously limit use of, or result in the person being denied access to, ordinary community facilities” (Emerson, 1995, p. 7)

The definition in the SEN Code of Practice (2001) of behaviour, emotional and social needs was for school age children:

Children and young people who demonstrate features of emotional and behavioural difficulties, who are withdrawn or isolated, disruptive and disturbing, hyperactive and lack concentration; those with immature social skills; and those presenting challenging behaviours arising from other complex special needs (DfES, 2001, p. 87)

The above definition has changed with the new SEN Code of Practice implemented in September 2014, with the final code of practice in January 2015 (DfE, 2015d). Within
the new document there is no area of behaviour as a label of SEN and they have placed the following definition:

Social, emotional and mental health difficulties

Children and young people may experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in several ways. These may include becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. These behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety, depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained. Other children and young people may have disorders such as attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or attachment disorder. (DfE, 2015d, p. 98)

For the purposes of this research the definition of challenging behaviour will be that employed by the local authority and under which the children in this research have been referred to the Educational Psychology Service from the 2001 SEN code of practice.

Children who are struggling to meet the behaviour expectations within school can be asked to leave the school on a short term or permanent basis. Their incidences are recorded as either fixed term or permanent exclusions.

Within the English education system the terms used to describe a pupil being formally asked to leave the school for a fixed period of time is either fixed period or fixed term exclusion. Pupils can have up to 45 days fixed term exclusion before a permanent exclusion is initiated. Permanent exclusions can also be for one off events. There are no
other categories of exclusion and ‘informal exclusions’ even with parental permission are illegal.

2.3 What are the extent of behaviour problems for young children?

The Department for Education publishes a report outlining the trends and figures for exclusion after each academic year. These reports break down the information into age, year group, gender and type of school. Using the information on year group we can see the increasing trend in both permanent and fixed term exclusions within the target population of children 7 years and under. The statistical first release (DfE, 2013b) summary states that:

Permanent exclusions rose marginally, going from 5,080 in 2010/11 to 5,170 in 2011/12. The rate of permanent exclusion remained at 0.07 per cent of the school population, or in other words is equivalent to 7 pupils in every 10,000. This follows a steady decline in the permanent exclusion numbers and rate over recent years. Permanent exclusions in primary schools remain low but this is where most of the rise is seen, with numbers going from 610 to 690, a rise of 13.9 per cent. (DfE, 2013b, p. 1)

Table 2 shows this rising trend from 2008 to the latest figures in 2012 for pupils aged between 4 and 7 years. Each local authority has to produce individual reports. The trend of fixed term exclusions for 4-7 year olds is even more dramatic within the local context within Key Stage 1 and is shown in Table 3.
Table 2: Permanent and fixed term exclusion figures for England 2008 to 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of child</th>
<th>Permanent exclusions</th>
<th>Fixed Term exclusions</th>
<th>Permanent exclusions</th>
<th>Fixed Term exclusions</th>
<th>Permanent exclusions</th>
<th>Fixed Term exclusions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 years old</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1240</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1210</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years old</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2840</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3020</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 years old</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3580</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3770</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>4030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 years old</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>5110</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5060</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>12770</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>13060</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>13950</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3: Fixed Term Exclusions by Age and Gender for Key Stage 1 (All schools & number of incidents) 2010/2011, 2011/2012 and 2012/13 in the local authority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR GROUP</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>11/12</td>
<td>12/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the above statistical data would indicate that there is a rising trend for children to be excluded within the first few years of their schools career. This would support this age group as being a target for specific research.

Official exclusions are included in the data but the accuracy of the figures could be questioned as some schools engage in unofficial and therefore unreported exclusions of
young people. “The Office of the Children’s Commissioner (2012) and Stirling (1992) identified a range of ‘hidden’ practices such as unofficial exclusions (where the exclusion is not recorded), parents agreeing to withdraw the pupil and some pupils are prompted to take absences from school.” (Hatton, 2013, p. 156)

Behaviour problems as identified through the use of exclusion still remain rare in the under seven years old age group but is the fastest rising category in the exclusion statistics. This indicates a current upward trend in exclusions as a proxy measure of behaviour difficulties in young children. Given the concerning outcomes for children who have been excluded both with fixed term and permanent exclusions this trend should not be ignored. This highlights the requirement for this age group to be specifically targeted in research to explore the risk factors and alternative approaches.

2.4 What are the risks factors for young children with behaviour difficulties?

Since the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for children 0-5 in 2008 and revised in 2014 there has been a high emphasis upon the cognitive development of children. Such documents set out statements that children should be achieving at each stage of development. The statutory introduction of the EYFS for all childcare settings has placed greater demand upon staff to balance child led activities and the need to move through the developmental stages. Staff cannot focus solely upon supporting play and social development as they also need to focus upon maths and literacy pre skills (House, 2011). The government agenda has also provided child care for children from age two years. This was initially for the poorest 20% of households but has now been extended to the poorest 40% (DfE, 2015a).
Schools in the UK and beyond continue to experience the damaging effects of ‘top down, ‘one size fits all’ ‘outcome based’ educational reforms. Educators struggle to meet the duel demands of a punishing performativity- and accountability-driven regime alongside the personal, social, emotional and learning needs of their pupils, especially those whose challenging behaviour reflects an inability to cope with the relentless demands of testing and with the perceived lack of meaning or relevance of disembodied knowledge for their lives. (B. Harris, 2008, p. 367)

Prior to 2008 nursery children did not have to follow any form of curriculum and practitioners were able to respond to the needs of the child and place a high emphasis on social skills. Social skills are still represented in the EYFS but these are alongside nine other areas of learning.

When looking at social skills in young children it is important to acknowledge that “Young children learn to process information from interpersonal exchanges within the context of their own emotional experiences, expression, knowledge and regulation.” (Denham, Way, Kalb, Warren-Khot, & Bassett, 2013, p. 182) . However, “The preschool/kindergarten classroom is a very social place, and social competence goes hand in hand with such positive learning behaviours.” (Denham et al., 2013, p. 183)

Therefore time and opportunity has to be given to the development of interpersonal exchanges whilst acknowledging that this will be unique to each individual as to how much time they require, given their personal circumstances.
The coalition government’s (2010-2015) policy for this 4-7 age group places a high emphasis on phonics skills and further progression through the EYFS and then through the new National Curriculum. (DfE, 2014c) All statements within the new national curriculum are academically based and there is no mention made of other skills that children may need to acquire to become well rounded individuals, this is an opportunity missed as previous revisions of the national curriculum, which were dismissed, placed a greater emphasis on the development of the whole child. The coalition government is also introducing baseline assessments for children in Reception from September 2016 (DfE, 2015b).

Once a child moves into Year 1 of education (age 5-6), the curriculum is formal and children are assessed on their phonics skills. This is then repeated in Year 2 if they do not pass the test. In Year 2 children complete the end of Key Stage 1 assessments, which although not statutorily requiring formal assessment procedures, many school staff still assess the children using past assessment papers. Some school leaders find it difficult to move away from this and “…school leaders and teacher leaders express a sense of powerlessness to manage the demands of accountability and performativity alongside the increasingly challenging and even violent behaviours of some children and young people in school.” (B. Harris, 2008, p. 367)

These pressures upon both the staff, as all assessments are reported, and on the children to achieve, have meant that staff can find it difficult to support children who have less developed social skills and who may be causing disruption to the formal learning environment. Children with poor social skills may find it difficult to access the high level of academic content at a young age and therefore are required to complete additional tests which can instil an early sense of failure.
Assessments are also based upon the academic year group to which a child belongs and does not take into account the 11 month and 364 day range of ages present in any one year group. This, in part, accounts for the increasing levels of Special Educational Needs for each month of the academic year (Squires, Humphrey, Barlow, & Wigelsworth, 2012). A recent revision of guidance for parents of summer born children does allow parents to be able to request to delay when their child starts formal education (DfE, 2014a).

Risk factors for challenging behaviour are often attributed to social, economic and family factors. Pepe and Addimando (2014) reviewed with schools their perceptions of uncooperative parents. They were split into four categories of parent. They found that two parent families were more likely to be involved in their child’s education than one parent families and that the lower their level of education the more uncooperative or uninvolved the parents were.

It may also be that the parents have themselves had very negative experiences of school and therefore do not feel that they are able to establish positive relationships with school staff or even feel comfortable in entering school premises. These ‘hard to reach’ parents may require school staff to be proactive in their approaches to overcome such barriers (Crozier & Davies, 2007).

A common intervention to support families with children who are at risk of behaviour difficulties or show challenging behaviour is to attend a parenting program, and these can be effective in supporting parents with a range of skills. Research by McGilloway et al. (2012) concluded that the parenting intervention had a positive impact on child conduct problems, hyperactive behaviours and social skills. They also found that there
were significant improvements for the parent’s psychosocial functioning and decreased critical parenting.

Other approaches to parent-child interaction is the role of mind-mindedness and reflective functioning. Mind-mindedness and reflective functioning are both constructs developed from attachment theory (Walker, Wheatcroft, & Camic, 2011) exploring how young children learn and are supported in their social skill development, and the transfer of these skills between generations. Walker et al. (2011) describes mind-mindedness as: “Therefore mind-mindedness relates to parents’ capacity to be sensitive to what is in their children’s minds, rather than just their physical or behavioural needs.” (Walker et al., 2011, p. 2)

This ability to be sensitive to what is in their child’s mind and then to be able to support the interpretation of this can aid attachment and by the child being treated with a mind of their own can support them to see events from other points of view. It can be suggested that when this is lacking children can find it difficult to see events from another viewpoint and therefore not be sensitive to how others may see them.

Slade (2005) describes that it is the mother’s ability to be able to understand and reflect the child’s mental states that leads to reflective functioning which enables ‘her to create both a physical and psychological experience of safety and comfort for her child’ (Slade, 2005, p. 284). Katznelson (2014) conducted a review of the research into reflective functioning and highlighted that reflective functioning can provide a buffer to child development in the face of adversity.

Both Walker et al. (2011) and Slade, Grienenerger, Bernbach, Levy, and Locker (2005) propose that interventions with parents whose children have behaviour difficulties
have mainly focussed on parenting programmes but that by also looking at mind-mindedness or reflective functioning could help to improve outcomes and think about behaviour rather than just change behaviour (Slade et al. 2005). Taubner and Curth (2013) reviewed the link between mentalalization, as a function of reflective attachment, and levels of aggression in adolescents who had early traumatic experiences. They concluded that reflective abilities may interrupt the development of aggressive behaviour and also advocate the exploration of reflective function and mentalization within interventions. However, Katznelsnol (2014) concludes that ‘with regard to how this concretely translates into behavioural changes, results are more inconclusive’ (p115).

Meins, Centifanti, Fernyhough, and Fishburn (2013) conducted research into the link between mind-mindedness and children’s behaviour difficulties. Meins et al. (2013) reviewed both externalising and internalising difficulties as measured by the strengths and difficulties questionnaire (Goodman, 1997). They found that externalising behaviours at 44 months predicted externalising behaviours at 61 months however both internalising and externalising behaviours significantly predicted internalising behaviours at 61 months. This suggests that possible peer rejection and social failures lead to internalised symptoms such as sadness and anxiety. Meins et al. (2013) found a negative link between mind-mindedness and externalising behaviours and therefore concluded that ‘…the promotion of social competence in children from low SES (social economic status) families may be especially important for adapting to school and avoiding conflict with peers’ (Meins et al., 2013, p. 551).

Within society there are social norms and conventions which help to guide individuals to what behaviours should and ought to be followed. The impact of ‘social
acceptance can have serious negative consequences on one’s psychological and physical health’ (Rossano, 2012, p. 531). Rossano (2012) delineated between social conventions which should be followed and norms which ought to be followed. Within education settings these social norms and conventions are explicit. “Because of their greater moral weight, norm violations usually result in more severe social sanctions. Convention violators fail to coordinate with others. Norm violators displease others to the point where their good character and personal reputations are at risk.” (Rossano, 2012, p. 530)

Rossano (2012) argues that this development of social norms and conventions is related to the human need to belong and that social ostracism, particularly in the past, was a ‘virtual death sentence’ (p530) and therefore it was critically important to acquire these skills as children. This development of rituals and routines within the family home initially gives rise to correlational evidence that ‘a greater frequency of and commitment to family rituals predict more socially competent, confident and successful children’ (Rossano, 2012 p. 542). Fiese (2006) goes on to state that these family traditions then support the transition into the social demands of the educational environment, and that daily routines can be a predictor of interest and participation in pre-school (Keltner, 1990)

2.5 How are behaviour problems addressed in young children?

This section aims to address the range of ways in which school staff can access additional support to provide strategies for children who show challenging behaviours. It reviews the role of external agencies, specifically the EP. It also aims to review the legislation regarding how parents and schools are expected to work together to achieve the best outcomes for children.
2.5.1 How do teachers and schools address behaviour difficulties?

When a school is concerned about a pupil’s behaviour there are a number of approaches they can choose to take. Although services differ between local authorities, schools can look to seek additional support if they feel the approaches they have tried have been ineffective.

Under the 2014 Children and Families Act (HMG 2014) schools must make reasonable adjustments for any pupil having difficulty in accessing the curriculum due to special educational needs. As part of this Act the category of Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties was altered to Social, Emotional and Mental Health. The 2014 Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfE, 2015d) acknowledges that behaviour difficulties often have a root cause be this learning needs or emotional difficulties.

Schools are able to refer pupils to a range of support services however there is varying acceptance of children with Social Emotional and Mental Health difficulties by the teaching population. “The inclusion of children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) has consistently been reported as particularly problematic for teachers, and is accompanied by negative teaching attitudes” (MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013, p. 46).

This range of staff attitudes to children with behaviour difficulties can lead to a wide range of responses to behavioural incidents. Challenging behaviour in one school may prompt referrals to a range of support agencies and support is delivered in the setting. Within another school the same behaviour may lead to the use of exclusion and an emphasis on within child, static, difficulties. “School responses to students’ challenging behaviour within the learning environment is varied but often involves excluding the
student from their learning in some way. Mechanisms can include suspension, expulsion or other forms of exclusionary practice” (Michail, 2011, p. 156).

Michail (2011) categorises responses to unacceptable behaviour into four broad areas. These are: punitive measures which do not take into account any individual factors such as personal, educational, developmental, social or other circumstances; academic approaches which aim to assess for any underlying learning in order to reduce difficult behaviour; therapeutic approaches which aim to identify conflicts or external motivations for the student to maintain the challenging behaviour and finally; tailored approaches which aim to provide consistent approaches across the home and school environments, they also provide support for learning and environmental factors that may be affecting behaviour. Michail (2011) states that these tailored approaches are the most adept at reducing challenging behaviours.

Relationships with school staff can improve outcomes for children with challenging behaviour as they continue to be valued members of the school community and develop resiliency factors to help manage their emotional and behavioural responses or they can lead to children feeling ostracised by their community and therefore leading to further risk factors. (Vo, Sutherland, & Conroy, 2012, )

2.5.1.1 Role of the educational psychologist

The role of the EP in assessing and supporting children with challenging behaviour can be very varied and may include work with parents, consultation with staff, observations, individual work with the child and group work (Rees, Farrell, & Rees, 2003).
All parents in this study will have met an EP upon the referral of their child to the Educational Psychology Service. If the child was of nursery age this may have then involved a further referral to the Pre-5 Service for additional support. For older children the EP may have referred on to the Behaviour Support Service for additional, more frequent support. The support from the behaviour support workers can include weekly sessions in school and the possibility of off-site provision for both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 pupils. The EP maintains an overview and provides additional input and assessment as required in order to identify and address the child’s needs.

The EP through their consultation with school staff, will try to address the range of school based environmental factors that could be impacting upon the child’s behaviour and will work with the school staff on other strategies that could improve the outcomes for the child. The educational psychologist will also take account of the influence of other environmental factors within the home that could also be impacting upon the child within school.

Through this process educational psychologists can also attempt to reframe the perceptions of a child in order that school staff feel more able to support change and put interventions and actions in place. Greene (2011) encourages the move away from diagnosis and greater emphasis on the identification of a child’s ‘lagging skills’ (Greene, 2011, p. 26).

Rather than simply stating that a student has ‘oppositional defiant disorder’ for example, adults can now consider, discuss, and identify the ‘lagging skills’ that contributed to the behaviours (refusing to do as he’s told, throwing tantrums, and defying adult rules and requests) that
comprise the disorder. … lagging skills provides a far more informative, compassionate, productive set of lenses than do diagnoses. (Greene, 2011 p. 26)

2.5.1.2 Home School Relationships

Since 2004 there have been several initiatives for school to develop greater home school relationships. Lewis, Kim, and Ashby Bey (2011) explored teachers’ approaches to supporting parents’ involvement. They found that teachers who were most successful used a wide range of strategies to reach out to parents but that teachers were not prepared for this aspect within their teacher training. Teachers developed the use of phone calls home; parent volunteers; sessions in school and keeping parents informed so that they became more motivated to support their children’s learning in school.

Porumbu and Necșoi (2013) conducted a thorough literature review on the relationship between parental involvement and children’s school achievements. They concluded that parental involvement has to be viewed as a process rather than a one off event. School staff should review their policies for involving parents and provide a range of activities and opportunities for interaction. Parents and teachers should view educational outcomes as a mutual responsibility.

McNeal (2001) looked more specifically at the impact of parental involvement on children’s behaviour. In this American study he found that the impact was not evenly distributed among all members of society. Children from poorer backgrounds and minority groups are less involved within school activities and are more prone to negative behaviours.
In his research he identified that a key factor to improved behaviour was parent-child discussion and that this should be fostered and developed. It was unclear however, as to how this may be best supported by schools. Michail (2011) also found that

Collaboration is often about relationships between teachers and parents who can each play a role in preventing suspensions. Where parents and the community are seen as partners not problems then it is possible to forge sturdy connections on which to base open and constructive communication. This is one of the key solutions to addressing student behaviour. Facilitating positive relationships between parents and their child’s school can be difficult because of the inherent power imbalance, particularly where this has been intensified because a child has been suspended or is at risk of suspension. (Michail, 2011, p. 168)

2.5.2 How do parents address behaviour difficulties?

The consultation on special educational needs (DfE, 2011) highlighted the role of parents in Section 2 entitled Giving Parents Control. However, children with BESD were not directly referred to and therefore it is unclear how each of the proposals initially contained in the Green Paper would apply to children identified as having behaviour difficulties. Through the new SEN Code of Practice (2015) it is hoped that the 'local offer' may help parents to be able to identify possible areas of support and to increase their access to these.

Within the literature there are several papers that emphasise the role of the power balance/imbalance between parent and school (Crozier, 1998, 1999; Crozier & Davies,
2007; Todd & Higgins, 1998) and how this can impact on outcomes for children. Dale (2008) used the terms 'expert model' and 'transplant model' to describe the ways in which schools try and engage with parents. The Expert Model maintains the professional as ‘The Expert’ and who holds the knowledge and uses their position to make decisions about educational matters. Within the ‘Transplant Model’ professionals try to transplant their skills and knowledge to the parent in order that they are able to contribute to the decisions around their child. However, both models still assume that the balance of power lies with the education professionals but may allow the parents to support the schools decisions.

A further area of research which compliments the understanding of parents’ interactions with school is that of the effects on stress levels and maternal depression of parenting a child with behaviour difficulties. Both Nicholson, Fox, and Johnson (2005) and Trapolini, McMahon, and Ungerer (2007) concluded that children who are exposed to maternal depression or low optimism are more likely to be rated more highly on externalising behaviours. However, Nicholson et al. (2005) also found that these children still experienced appropriate levels of positive nurturing behaviours and developmental expectations. These factors may impact upon the parent’s ability to engage with school staff.

Very few published papers have emphasised the parents’ perspective on education. Many comment upon the role of parents in improving outcomes for young people (Castle & Parsons, 1997; Lupton & Thrupp, 2013) but have continued to view the role of parents from the expert model and approached the area from the perspective of school staff. Crozier and Todd would appear to be the most prolific writers in the area of eliciting parents’ views and have made substantial attempts to embrace the parents’ perspective on how they can
engage with the education system and what the barriers are to this (Crozier, 1998; Crozier, 1999; Crozier & Davies, 2007; Todd, 2007).

In relation to kindergarten children who are anxious Hiebert-Murphy, Trute, and Wright (2011) describe the importance of listening to parents and building upon the strengths of the parents in order to achieve better outcomes for the children, rather than just trying to change the behaviour of the parents. This change of focus is further explored by McNaughton (2010) who found that parents wanted to know if their contributions about their child’s education were listened to and valued. The Achievement For All programme in the UK has also highlighted the imbalance in traditional meetings (Day, 2013) between teachers and parents and has developed a structured conversations approach to guide such discussions to be more collaborative and to value the parent’s opinions.

Within medical research there is a greater emphasis on medics listening to the concerns of the parents and showing that this has supported early intervention and been a more cost effective approach to assessing children’s needs (S. R. Harris, 2009; Hiebert-Murphy et al., 2011; McNaughton, 2010). However, within education the priorities of the parents and the teachers may differ.

For teachers, working in a group and demonstrating specific group work behaviours that included sharing, cooperating and contributing was an important marker of success… For parents, joining in, being happy, enjoyment being accepted and belonging were perceived as critical to successful participation in work at school. (Lowe & Chapparo, 2009, p. 253)
Such differences could be mediated by increased communication and acceptance of the range of views and interventions put in place to take account of the range of expectations. Ayala, Howe, Dumser, Buzby, and Murphy (2014) suggested that when parents worked with professionals it was most effective when the professionals were sensitive to their unique experiences as a family and were able to tailor interventions to their needs. Wood, Ferro, Umbreit, and Liaupsin (2010) used Systemic Function-Based interventions, which were planned around the individual, to improve behaviour. “Interventions effectively increased on-task behaviour and decreased the disruptive behaviour of three children younger than age 5 who received special education services in inclusive preschool settings” (Wood et al., 2010, p. 228).

Parents of pre-school children are able to show significant insight as to their child’s readiness for entering school. Parents are able to reflect on whether they may require support for the expectations that school will place on them as parents. This social and emotional readiness for school is especially important for children facing challenging school environments (McAllister, Wilson, Green, & Baldwin, 2005, p. 623).

### 2.6 Summary of the literature review

This literature review has examined a wide range of issues affecting young children who may exhibit challenging behaviour in school. This is an area of growing concern as the statistics show that the fastest growing population being excluded are under seven years old, although these are currently still in small numbers (DfE, 2013b).

The risk factors for children developing challenging behaviours are varied and include suggested factors such as low socio-economic status, parent’s experiences of
school, low levels of mind-mindedness and reflective functioning and the partnership, or lack of partnership with schools leading to hard to reach parents (Crozier, 1998; Pepe & Addimando, 2014).

School staff have a range of resources that they are able to utilise when children show challenging behaviour including referrals to the educational psychology service and in some areas, behaviour support services (Rees et al., 2003). These services can support the school system but may lead to anxieties for parents as they encounter a greater number of professionals. The literature highlights the need to actively listen to parents and to value their views and knowledge of their children to ensure that interventions are tailored to the individual child and family (Hiebert-Murphy et al., 2011; McNaughton & Vestal, 2010).

It has reviewed that many risk factors can be mediated through appropriate support that is tailored to individual families, working collaboratively with families and listening to and accepting their knowledge of their child (Harris, 2009). Parenting programmes and interventions to look at the role of mind-mindedness, reflective functioning and the development of home routines, can also support children to develop social confidence which will aid their transition and success in school (Walker et al., 2011; Slade et al., 2005).

**2.7 Aims of the research and expected contribution to knowledge**

Within this initial review of the literature there have not been any studies that review this specific area and age group, of challenging behaviour in the four to seven year olds. The purpose of being so specific is to elicit what further can be done to support the relationships between school staff and parents to be able to affect positive outcomes for
young children with challenging behaviour and therefore reduce the current upward trend of formal exclusions in this age range.

Research regarding parents’ experiences has been focused around children with medical needs (Ayala et al., 2014; S. R. Harris, 2009; Hiebert-Murphy et al., 2011) or gaining the views of secondary age children’s parents. This study aims to gain the views of parents at the beginning of the process of identification and referral to external services, specifically educational psychologists, for challenging behaviour.

This study aims to review the process from a parent’s perspective and how the actions and attitudes of the school affects the parents’ early experiences of the statutory obligation of education. This study stems from an interest in a greater demand for educational psychology consultation for children between the ages of four and seven who have Social, Emotional and Behavioural difficulties (challenging behaviour) and the corresponding increase in exclusions for this age group of children (DfE, 2013b).

Through my experiences as a practising EP, I have witnessed schools in areas of high deprivation, which work well with parents to address their child’s behavioural needs and, in contrast I have experienced other schools who have laid all the problems of the child firmly at the feet of the parents and have used blame language towards the parent. This group of parents have sometimes been labelled as ‘Hard to Reach’ (Crozier & Davies, 2007), and about whom school staff can regard negatively with phrases such as ‘What can we do, given the home situation?’ in response to consultation with the EP.

Educational psychologists are in a prime position to be able to support this interaction and relationship between home and school as well as specific interventions and advice. Through the research, good practice could be identified which will further support
the work of the EP and schools and aims to improve the outcomes for children with challenging behaviour.

2.8 Research question

As this study uses Interpretative Phenomological Analysis as its methodological foundation, there is one prime research question, however it is acknowledged that there will have been significant events such as the referral process and discussions with educational psychologists which form part of the parents’ experiences. Therefore the research question is:

What are the parents’ experiences of school regarding their child’s challenging behaviour and referral to the educational psychology service?
Chapter 3 Method

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to outline the methodological approaches used throughout the research with sufficient detail that it is clear as to the process that was followed and how all conclusions were arrived at to ensure validity of the findings. A hand written notebook was also maintained throughout the research for thoughts, preconceptions and discussions with others and information from which will be incorporated within the discussion.

Once the participants had taken part in the research it was evident that all the parents interviewed were mothers of sons. To ensure clarity in the title of this research and to acknowledge that there is a distinct role of fathers, the research question and the title of this research was changed from parents to mothers.

3.2 Aims and research questions

This research aims to explore these mothers’ experiences and the lessons that can be learnt as to how professionals can work together effectively so as to avoid the negative labelling of children as having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, at a time when they are still developing and learning to be positive members of society. Therefore this study aims to gather data regarding mothers’ experiences of their child’s school if he has been referred to the Educational Psychology Service because of his Social, Emotional and Behavioural difficulties (SEBD).
3.2.1 Research question

What are mothers’ experiences of school regarding their child’s challenging behaviour and referral to the educational psychology service?

3.3 Overview of the research methodology

This research uses a single methodological approach to gather the data. This is the use of semi-structured interviews with the audio being transcribed verbatim. This transcript data can then be analysed both with and without the accompanying audio using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis techniques. (Smith et al., 2009)

Table 4 Table of the research questions and research type.

<table>
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<th>Research question.</th>
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<td>What are the mothers’ experiences of school regarding their child’s challenging behaviour and referral to the educational psychology service?</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
<td>IPA</td>
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3.4 Philosophical considerations

This aims to outline the philosophical considerations of ontology, epistemology and axiology that the researcher has taken into account when completing this research. These considerations have also informed the methodology employed.
3.4.1 Ontology

Ontology is concerned with how knowledge exists. The ontological approach that is adopted throughout this research is phenomenology. This is that knowledge exists through the participants lived experiences. The aim of the research is therefore to interpret the lived experiences of the participants. Through exploring the mothers’ views and their phenomenological experiences it is hoped to gain an insight into how schools and professionals can work with mothers more effectively. It is not possible to fully understand the lived experience of another but by the thorough analysis of the text it is an attempt to represent the individual’s sense making and meaning of the events. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis also recognises the impact of a double hermeneutic cycle, that is, the researchers attempt to make sense of an experience which the person themselves has tried to make sense of. It does not attempt to establish ‘truth’ but to understand the experience from the perspective of the participant.

3.4.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy concerned with the theory of knowledge and to answer the question of how we know. Carter and Little (2007) describe the intimate links between epistemology, methodology and method within the qualitative research process and present three questions to consider when developing qualitative research. The first is the identification of an epistemological position (Carter & Little., 2007) this decision then informs choices of methodology.

The epistemological approach that has been used throughout this research is both interpretative and qualitative. A critical realist approach has been applied to this research. It is acknowledged that the data from the participants is constructed through the semi-
structured interviews to discuss a socially constructed phenomenon. However, it is accepted that this provides the mothers’ realist perspective which may or may not be shared by others. The purpose of this approach is to be able to identify how by exploring the experiences of mothers, misinterpretations, misunderstandings or lack of information would be highlighted given my knowledge of a range of realist perspectives, such as those from teaching staff and educational psychologists. The multiple analysis of the interview data provides all of the evidence for conclusions made. Through such rigorous analysis and following the guidance as set out by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) this research aims to address the questions of credibility, trustworthiness and transferability.

Smith et al. (2009) used the criteria offered by Yardley (2000) to audit IPA as being a robust method that is able to demonstrate its findings and for them to stand up to scrutiny.

3.4.3 Axiology

Axiology is concerned with the values and views of the researcher and how these may then impact upon the research. Within this research I am a double outsider. I am a professional working within the field but not involved in supporting these families and I am a parent with my own values and phenomenology. These are explicitly shared in my researcher’s perspective. Both of these roles have intrinsic values and these will undoubtedly impact upon my interpretation of the data. I value education and feel that schools are there to provide a stimulating education and to meet the needs of their community. I have high expectations of school staff to use their skills to be able to provide such an education as I believe that the interactions that children encounter in schools can impact upon their engagement and enjoyment in learning.
Using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach I aim to highlight where my views have come forward and to ‘bracket’ these and put them to one side. However, it is challenging to completely be able to put aside ones core values and beliefs. Although every attempt is made, through reflective logs and supervision, to identify such thoughts, not all beliefs and values are conscious to the individual themselves. The regular use of supervision aids the uncovering of the effects of core beliefs on the interpretation of the data.

3.5 Principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA is a qualitative approach that emphasises the lived experiences of the participants (Smith et al., 2009). IPA data is usually collected through semi-structured interviews. The participants are homogenous in that they have a shared lived experience.

The process has been described by Smith et al. (2009) as where the data is systematically analysed through absorption in the interview data, through transcription and re-reading so that the researcher aims to reflect the individual’s understanding of their lived experiences. It is acknowledged that this is a hermeneutic cycle i.e. the individual is trying to understand their experience and convey this. It is then a double hermeneutic cycle as the interviewer is then trying to make sense of the meaning that the participant is trying to convey. It is therefore accepted then that there is no aim to gain a ‘truth’ but to elicit how the participant had made sense of their experience. The rigorous analysis of the transcript ensures that there is strong and plausible evidence for the assumption and interpretation made by the researcher. Each superordinate theme developed is therefore supported by
evidence from the transcript, including both the words themselves and some of the other linguistic components which may alter the meaning, for example sarcasm.

Due to the in-depth analysis of the text IPA only requires a small number of participants with the aim of representing each of the participants’ lived experiences. There is then a stage of looking at the similarities and differences between each case and from then develop some more general assumptions. To be able to do this, the sample needs to be relatively homogenous in order to be able to identify convergence and divergence in detail.

### 3.5.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is based upon the philosophical writings of Husserl (2012) and Merleau-Ponty and Smith (1996). In phenomenological research the object of study is on the participants perceptions, feelings and lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

Phenomenology aims to describe lived experiences without the development of hypotheses, theories and explanations and to investigate ‘what is experienced and how it is experienced’. (Wertz, 2011, p. 125).

Husserl (1936) described the process of epoché or abstention, this is a distinguishing characteristic between other qualitative methods and Phenomenology. This abstention from the investigation of the natural sciences such as: developing models, hypothesis and using prior research and the abstention from the natural attitudes such as: focussing upon the objects as separate from the experience, enables the researcher to be able to ‘describe that which appears as such’ (Husserl, 2012, p. 186) and provides a reflective approach based in experience and not in checking facts. Husserl (2012) describes
the term bracketing to acknowledge this abstention from prior knowledge and to attend to the life world.

Husserl (2012) described the approach of intentional analysis by which researchers describe the ‘how and what’ of experiences and that this implies that the participant has a consciousness of the experience. This links to the concept of eidetic analysis, whereby we continually experiences essences (things). For example, the essence of knowing a cat and what its invariant characteristics are and the virtually limitless multiplicity of possible exemplifications. Eidetic reduction is the generalisation of such essences and phenomena. “Human mental life entails many levels and kinds of eidetic generality that research can clarify and elaborate.” (Wertz, 2011, p. 127)

Merleau-Ponty and Smith (1996) characterised Phenomenology as a manner or style of thinking and therefore this approach may be readily accessible and embraced by researchers with various styles and interests. It addresses questions of a common experience. It requires genuine and adequate access to varied life world examples as the data reflects on conceptual fidelity to phenomenological processes and meaning. It aims to clarify the essence of the phenomena including themes in their holistic, structural relationship with each other, it requires concrete evidence and some level of generality can be achieved.

Giorgi (1997) developed a systematic approach to the analysis of phenomenological data. These were four steps. Firstly gaining a sense of the whole, secondly developing this into units of meaning which range in size, thirdly assigning psychological significance to each unit and finally using examples to clarify the psychological structures of the phenomenon.
A range of methods can be used to research phenomenology such as thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006). However, this approach was not thought appropriate for this research as it does not allow for the high level of interpretation required to meaningfully draw out and explore the ranging aspects of the themes. Therefore a more Interpretative approach was available in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Objects within our life world do not come to us independently of all else, we interact with them and attend to them in different ways. This concept of Intentionality is described by Lawthom & Tindall (2011) as dependent upon the perceiver’s location, context, angle, and mental orientation such as desires, wishes, judgements, emotions, aims and purposes. Therefore the same event of ‘object’ will be viewed differently by each person interacting with it in their ‘life world’.

Although such life worlds are inherently unique to the individual Ashworth (2003) outlines some common features of all life worlds. These are: embodiment, spatiality, intersubjectivity and temporarily. Embodiment is that all lived experiences are done so through our bodies and our senses. Spatiality is that all spaces include other people, natural and cultural objects and institutions. Intersubjectivity is the connection that we have with others and through whom we develop an understanding of the social world. Finally temporarily is the finiteness of life, of lived time and of time left to live. Each of these aspects and our reflection of these will impact upon our Intentionality and how we perceive an ‘object’ within our life world.

Therefore phenomenological approaches such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) fall between the two methodologies of being ‘realist’ and gaining direct access to reality and ‘relativist’ where all knowledge is constructed. This therefore places
IPA within a critical realist (Willig, 1999) methodology as it acknowledges that knowledge is created through interaction with others but that each person will have their own realist perspective.

### 3.5.2 Hermeneutics

The word hermeneutics comes from the Greek ‘to interpret’ or ‘to understand’. Crotty (1998) describes hermeneutics as “Interpreters may end up with an explicit awareness of meanings, and especially assumptions, that the authors themselves would have been unable to articulate” (Crotty, 1998, p. 91).

That is, that through the process of interpretation the ‘interpreter’ becomes aware of meanings that the person speaking or writing, the author, may not have been explicitly aware of when they shared the information. This understanding comes through the hermeneutics cycle. “Understanding the whole through grouping its parts and comprehending the meaning of parts through dividing the whole” (Crotty, 1998, p. 91).

Such processes are not always consciously done, as individuals may attribute greater or lesser meaning to aspects of a conversation than others. Therefore when interviewing participants about their experiences they have already interpreted their conversations and experiences and when they recall these the researcher is then adding another layer of interpretation. This is a double hermeneutic cycle.

### 3.5.3 Rationale for IPA

IPA was used for this research as its focus is upon the lived experiences of its participants. IPA unlike most of traditional psychology, offers the psychologist the chance
to engage with a particular research question at an ideographic (particular) level (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). As the focus of the research was to examine parents’ experiences explicitly, IPA was well suited to explore the research questions. “The aim of IPA is to understand and make sense of another person’s sense-making activities, with regard to a given phenomenon, in a given context.” (Palmer, Larkin, de Visser, & Fadden, 2010, p. 99)

I was aware that this topic was likely to be sensitive to the participants and following the structures within IPA this would help to ensure an ethical representation of their views. The use of semi-structured interviews also enabled the participants to lead the direction of the discussion and for them to feel heard.

In addition the structure represented within the IPA literature was one that, as a new qualitative researcher, gave enough guidance but also provided opportunity not be restricted by other methods where the phenomenological meaning can be lost in the deconstruction of the data. This approach also supports the representation of the researcher’s interpretation of the phenomena and how their personal experiences and roles can impact upon this. Due to my personal interest in the role of parents from my experiences as a parent and as a professional working frequently with parents I thought that this was important.

3.6 Research participants, ethics and researcher role

3.6.1 Researcher role

Within the IPA approach the researcher has to be aware of their role within the research and how their values and beliefs may also be impacting upon the interpretation.

Therefore I:
• requested that initial information and letters were sent out by the admin team,
• made all of the follow up phone calls and arranged the interview dates,
• Conducted each of the semi-structured interviews,
• Transcribed the audio recordings,
• Analysed the text following procedures set out in Smith et al. (2009).

A reflective log and notes from tutorials and discussions with others was also made to ensure that all thinking and assumptions are transparent to the reader.

3.6.2 Research participants

The research participants were chosen as a purposive sample. The principle inclusion criteria were: having a child, between the ages of four and seven; who has been referred to the Educational Psychology Service for Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD). The purpose of asking parents of children who were so young is to identify how parents can be supported when their children are initially identified as having SEBD.

Parents of children over seven years of age were excluded. Over seven years of age is three years after children have entered school and therefore does not represent the early school experiences.

Families working with myself were also excluded.
3.6.3 Selection procedure:

1. A presentation was made to the Educational Psychology Service regarding the nature of the research and the criteria for participants. Individual educational psychologists then shared the names of families that they were working with that met the criteria.

2. Where possible the case-holding educational psychologist had a conversation with the parents prior to information being sent out to ascertain whether they would be happy to participate.

3. Information was then sent out to the proposed families and follow up phone calls made a week later.

A total of seven families were contacted by post with the information sheet and contact details (see appendix 11). This was completed by the service admin team so the researcher did not require access to the individual addresses. All families received phone call follow up and messages were left but five of the families did not respond. One of the selected families used the contact information and made the initial phone call to participate in the research.

4. During the phone call, arrangements were made for the date of the interview to suit the participant and where they would like the interview to be held.

5. I attended each interview at the location and time set.
6. Once at the interview I introduced myself and reiterated the information that they had received in the information sheet. We then discussed the consent form and participants were asked to read through and sign the consent form if they were still happy to complete the interview.

7. Once the consent form was signed I set up the voice recorder and commenced the interview.

8. After the interview was concluded I thanked the participants for their time in taking part in the research and explained that once the research was completed I will contact them regarding any outcomes or if they would like to have a summary of the research.

9. A copy of the interview recording was made on the encrypted laptop and deleted from the voice recorder.

10. The interviews were transcribed immediately after they had taken place and the transcriptions were held on the encrypted laptop and did not include any names.

The benefits of the research to the participants are that they will be able to see that their views are taken into account when considering the best way of supporting families and young children with SEBD. In addition they will have contributed to a research summary
which should help to inform schools of the experiences of parents that have been most helpful. Finally, it is hoped that an overview of recommendations from the research will be made into a leaflet for parents and schools to be able to use to apply best practice when supporting children with SEBD.

Once all of the interviews had been conducted it was evident that there was no representation from fathers and their experiences of engaging with education. Therefore the research question was adapted to change from parent’s experiences to mother’s experiences to reflect the demographic of the participants.

3.6.4 Analysis of data

- The data was analysed using the procedure outlined in Smith et al. (2009).
- The interviews were transcribed and the transcription placed in the centre column of the document.
- The transcripts were then revised as the interview was listened to for any errors. This allowed for repeated listening to the interview, with its nuances and colloquialisms identified.
- Comments on the transcript were made in the right hand column. The comments were to identify 3 different aspects of the transcript. Comments where the participant described events or situations; comments to show linguistic elements of the text adding depth; and conceptual comments where the researcher is interpreting what the participant is trying to say as a wider concept.
- Further comments were made on the transcript whilst listening to the interview.
• The transcript was read with and without the interview audio and commenting was repeated four times.

• The comments were then categorised as either descriptive, linguistic or conceptual and identified through a coding convention: descriptive were plain, linguistic had a wavy underline and conceptual were underlined.

• Themes were then identified as being representative of a number of comments or of a concept and written in the left hand column.

• These themes were placed on small pieces of paper and then moved around to make groups of related themes. This is the process of abstraction.

• Each of the themes in a group were recorded in a list with a heading developed that was representative of the themes. This heading is the subordinate theme.

• Each of the themes were then re-sorted into pairs of groups using polar sorting i.e. identifying opposites within the themes.

• The pairs of groups were recorded and a heading developed that was representative of the pair of opposites to develop further subordinate themes.

• All of the subordinate themes from both processes were written as a list and any duplicates removed.

• The list of subordinate themes was analysed to identify overarching themes that were representative of groups of subordinate themes. These were the superordinate themes.

• Evidence from the transcripts was identified to support each of the superordinate themes.

• The process was repeated for each interview.
• The subordinate themes from interviews 2 and 3 were analysed to see if they were appropriately reflected by the superordinate themes developed for interview 1.

• Further superordinate themes would be identified if required from interviews 2 and 3.

3.6.4.1 Transcription

I decided to transcribe the interviews myself so that I could ensure that there was limited time between conducting the interview and completing the transcription. This ensured that all of the nuances within the interview could still be recalled and reflected upon. Any data that appeared ambiguous could also be remembered for when and how it occurred within the interview.

Following the IPA approach suggested by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2007) it is important to transcribe the interview as the researcher so that you can make sure that you are gaining meaning directly from what the participants have said and that the researcher is immersed in the data.

With the aim of being phenomenological and representing the experiences from the view of each participant, the transcriptions are verbatim. This does mean that there may be some local colloquialisms and speech patterns however; it was believed that the participant’s use of language would be decipherable to most. Grammatical conventions have been added for ease of reading and these have been done to try and show the patterns of speech used. However, as data “they are inescapably dependent on textual conventions that are in turn implicative of writers’ and readers’ interpretations” (Atkinson, 1992)
3.7 IPA Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most effective method of data collection for an Interpretative Phenomenological Approach. This is due to the ability to be able to ask open ended questions so that participants share as fully as possible their lived experiences.

I worked from the research question to develop questions for the semi-structured interview that should illuminate the research question (See appendix 12). Due to the nature of IPA being able to be reflexive to the situation, there was also a list of prompts to promote further dialogue from the participant. It was also recognised that it may not be possible to only ask the questions set, as further questions may arise from the interview itself and in response to how the participant expanded. “It is generally assumed, however, that the interview will in part be led by the participants’ concerns, and that the interviewer will follow up matters arising, even if they are not on the schedule, so long as they might be relevant to the research question” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 58).

In each of the interviews additional questions were asked to ensure that participants considered that all of their views had been listened to and that they did not have further information to add. Additional questions were also used for clarification of the participant’s individual circumstances or if the researcher was unsure of the information being shared.

Yin (1994) describes the benefits of interviews as being targeted – focusing directly on the topic and insightful – providing perceived causal inferences. Yin (1994) goes on to describe the weaknesses of interviews as a data gathering method as bias due to: poorly constructed questions; response bias; inaccuracies due to poor recall; and reflexivity where the interviewee gives what they think that the interviewer wishes to hear.
When constructing semi-structured interviews the questions were reviewed for leading questions and bias (Bell, 2005). To reduce the impact of any bias that may occur I was mindful of any preconceptions regarding the potential outcomes of the research and just focussed upon the participants each individual experiences.

When the semi-structured interview questions were developed from the research question they were piloted by a parent not involved with the research and reviewed by an EP. Through this process the questions were refined not only to eliminate leading questions and bias but also for their ‘openness’ and to ensure that those outside of education were able to understand what the questions meant. Minor amendments were then made.

To account for possible reflexivity in the interview I reiterated that within this research it was the participant’s own personal and unique experiences that were the focus of the research and as part of that the number of questions was small with just some additional prompts. The aim was for the interviews to be guided by the questions but not led by them. “The aim of developing a schedule is to facilitate a comfortable interaction with the participant which will, in turn, enable them to provide a detailed account of the experience under investigation” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 59).

For the level of analysis required for an IPA approach digital recordings were made, with the participants’ permission, so that the interviews could be accurately recorded and transcribed.

3.7.1 Reflections on the semi-structured interviews.

This section contains notes from the research journal regarding how each of the interviews was conducted and any other aspects that may influence what was said in the
interviews. It aims to ensure that reasons as to why I modified the interview schedule in response to the interviewee are explicit.

3.7.1.1 Reflections on interview 1

I was not sure how long the interview would last as discussions through ethics has indicated that it could take up to an hour. The interview finished quite naturally after approximately 30 minutes and I did not feel that there would have been any benefit in prolonging the interview further.

I added in an additional question based upon a comment that the participant made in the first section, this was not in the semi-structured interview schedule and was probably more indicative of my usual way of working. However, the participant did not appear overly distracted by my interjection and although it was referred to initially she used this to go through a thorough history of her child’s difficulties.

I learnt from this as soon as I had asked the question and then ensured that I did not try and interpret what she was saying as she was saying it. I used frequent nods and smiles to indicate listening but without interrupting her speech.

3.7.1.2 Reflections on interview 2

The participant contacted me after receiving the information on the research in the post. The interview was set up for the following week. On arrival at the family home there was both herself and her two year old son. The participant commented that her husband had also hoped to take part in the interview but was unable to get the time to do so.

It was discussed that the participant should address her son as required and that the interview would work around this.
The participant required minimal prompting and responded to the questions in the semi-structured interview. This parent found it difficult to reflect on the child’s difficulties and therefore additional questions were added to elicit the issues that she has been discussing with the school staff. I found that I needed a situational assessment and asked some further questions to attempt to understand the situation from all perspectives.

This parent was very clear throughout that these difficulties were school based and that she does not see these difficulties within the home. This raises the question as to why this parent was so motivated to take part in this research and whether she thought that she needed to comply with the research request as she has done with other school requests.

3.7.1.2 Reflections on interview 3

I contacted this parent by phone after a positive response in a meeting with their EP. I sent the information out to her and arranged a date to visit the home. This parent was only able to meet in a morning as she worked afternoons.

On my first visit to the house there was nobody in. I rang the parent to see if they were still meeting with me but the parent had forgotten about the meeting. I asked if she was still happy to meet with me which she stated she was and organised another meeting for the following week.

On this second occasion the parent was in the home. She appeared very nervous and she was a young parent. She was happy for the interview to commence and wanted to 'help'. The parent curled up on the sofa and was initially reluctant to turn off the television. I engaged her in some general conversation in order to support her to feel more relaxed prior to starting the interview formally.
Throughout the interview the parent kept checking with me as to what I was meaning by each of the questions and did answer more literally than has been expected at times.

The participant answered some questions with a single word answer and it was difficult in getting further elaboration on her answers. I began to further scaffold the questions in order to allow her to be clearer with regard to the meaning of my question and therefore to how she might respond. I changed the language that I used and mirrored some of her language, for example, bad stuff.

I was initially concerned about the length of the interview as I was in and out of the family home within fifteen minutes and the responses from the participant had been more difficult to elicit and more monotone.

The parent was unsure as to what meetings were called and I was concerned that at times she was embarrassed by this lack of knowledge as she went quiet. At one point the parent thought that she has not been listened to and she spoke more strongly and stated that she was right and it would have helped if school staff had listened to her.

As I reached the last question I thought that she had more to say and so I repeated the final question several times. The parent answered that she did not know in response to several questions, I interpreted this as a lack of confidence particularly as her tone of voice at these times was questioning.

I became aware during the interview that the parent reflected on her own strategies but there was little about her relationship with her child. After the interview I was unclear as to any strong feelings. The participant used negative language about herself – ‘nought I
can do, I'm no good at these questions’ and therefore required greater reassurance during the interview that her information was valuable in order for her to continue.

This was a young mother working with a range of professionals. I wondered if this parent struggles to be metacognitive about the situation as she is dealing with it each day and with situations as they arise and follows what she has been instructed by others?

3.7.2 Reflections on the transcription and analysis of the interviews

This section contains information from the research journal regarding reflections on the transcription and analysis of the interviews. This therefore makes explicit any differences in the analysis of each of the transcripts.

3.7.2.1 Reflections on the transcription of interview 1

Directly after the interview the process of transcribing the interview took place. This was completed by the researcher and was completed over a week. The format of the transcription was in line with that described by Smith et al. (2009).

The process of transcribing the interview was helpful as it allowed me to become very familiar with the participants speech patterns. This was useful as it highlighted when the participant was showing emphasis and when they were not.

3.7.2.2 Reflections on the analysis of interview 1

Initial analysis was done by listening and reading the transcript simultaneously. This indicated some inaccuracies in the transcription as well as aiding interpretation. Tutorials were attended after each analysis of the transcript which led to further reading and this then informed the next reading of the transcript.
As I read through the transcript I added descriptive comments, linguistic comments and conceptual comments. Often a linguistic comment would lead to the development of a more conceptual comment and these are indicated by dashes. Initially I did not clearly distinguish between the comments. I put brackets around questioning my own practice i.e. in asking the additional question.

The first two versions of the analysis were pencil and paper methods. The third analysis was then when the comments were being typed up. This was without the audio. On this third analysis of the text a few further comments were slightly adapted or added.

Frequent but small chunks of time have been taken to complete this analysis however the constant visiting and re visiting has allowed for analysing and reviewing the text at a range of levels. In the initial analysis of the text it is not always easy to distinguish between the descriptive, the conceptual and the linguistic. The immediate thought and response was recorded and not, at that time, which category of comment this was. This enabled the responses to flow as they were not impeded by the designation to a category each time. If a key thought based upon my own experiences occurred I placed this within a square bracket to be reviewed later.

I completed the interpretation for initial comments several times, both with and without listening to the recording. Each time I listened to the recording or read through I was able to develop new comments, this was in part due to trying only to focus upon what I have not focused on before.

As I read through the range of initial comments I developed the emergent themes with what I had thought that the participant was saying and how the comments clustered.
This was then noted in the left column on the transcription grid. I completed this process twice to be thorough in the interpretation.

I used abstraction as the initial method of analysis, placing emergent themes onto pieces of paper to sort into groups. Each piece of paper was placed on the floor to see which emergent themes related to each other as a subordinate theme.

The number of cards in each subordinate theme and how they were grouped was then recorded. There was also identified subsumption of smaller but related themes into the larger groups of emergent themes as these contributed to the wider subordinate theme.

I decided to complete further analysis using polarisation to look at differences instead of similarity following the procedure laid out in Smith et al. (2009). This produced a deeper level of analysis and more coherent and representative subordinate themes. When I went back to the transcript I believed these polarised themes most accurately reflected the phenomenological experiences of the participant.

I have then looked at both types of analysis to be able to create a final list of superordinate themes.

3.7.2.3 Reflections on the transcription of interview 2

The interview was transcribed as soon as it has been completed. The transcription highlighted the number of additional questions raised. It was also thought at the end that the parent continued to wish to comment and so the concluding question was asked more than once. Initial thoughts also emerged which require bracketing having completed two of the interviews.
3.7.2.4 Reflections on the analysis of interview 2

I followed the same process of analysis for interview 2 as for interview 1. The interview was listened to alongside the transcript whilst comments were made in the right hand column. I still found it useful to write what I was thinking and not assign comments to a category in the first instance. I then went back through the comments and added information as to whether the comment was descriptive, linguistic or conceptual.

Due to time constraints the analysis was done over a few weeks. This supported the re-reading and consolidation of the comments as they needed to be re-read as the analysis was approached afresh each time.

I analysed the initial comments which were identified as descriptive, linguistic or conceptual. From these I looked for emergent themes and wrote these on the left side of the text. I was aware that through interview 2 there were repetitions of themes with those identified in the analysis of interview 1.

When I began to sort the emergent themes using abstraction I was aware that clusters of themes were very large and I did not feel that my approach was sufficiently detailed. I was unavoidably taken away from the first set I was developing and therefore had to sort them again. This second attempt at the interpretation, I thought was more successful and although some groups were still larger they were more proportionally spread and the interpretation was more representative of the participants’ experiences.

I then analysed the data using polar sorting. I found again the same difficulty of having some very large groups where although the themes were all related there were not the clear polar opposites that had been apparent in my analysis of interview 1.
For interview 2 the subordinate themes developed through abstraction appear to be most representative of the phenomenology of the participant. I then viewed the superordinate themes from interview 1 and found that each of the subordinate themes from interview 2 could be placed under the same superordinate headings as interview 1.

3.7.2.5 Reflections on the transcription of interview 3

The interview was transcribed straight after it had been completed. I transcribed all the interviews prior to completing the analysis on the first interview. I was in partial completion of analysis of interview 1 whilst transcribing interview 3.

3.7.2.6 Reflections on the analysis of interview 3

Interview 3 was analysed sometime after the transcription. The process of analysis was the same as the other interviews in that it followed the procedure set out by Smith et al. (2009). The interview was transcribed directly after the interview was completed. Due to the time lapse between the recording and the analysis the interview was listened to several times before the initial comments were made. Comments were not coded in the first instance but once the transcript had been reviewed twice I went back and coded the comments as descriptive, conceptual or linguistic. This approach allows fluidity of thought without the requirement to categorise.

The analysis of interview 3 was challenging due to the more limited data set. Initially answers were very brief and questions required rephrasing and prompting with order to elicit more extended responses. Later in the interview, Mary did give more extended answers and therefore more data. It was interesting to note the information that Mary did not give in contrast to the other mothers and this in itself added further information to be considered. As in the other interviews this interview was listened to four
times whilst competing the initial comments. This gave rise to interesting linguistic elements that had not been present in the other interviews such as periods of laughter where they may not have been expected.

The comments were then reviewed and themes developed on the right of the transcript. This proved more challenging than the other transcripts due to the limited amount of extended speech made by Mary.

Once all the themes were identified these were written on to pieces of paper and sorted using abstraction. An attempt was made to polar sort the themes but due to the limited number this did not prove useful in the development of the subordinate themes. The subordinate themes developed through abstraction were then organised within the superordinate themes developed with the other two interviews. It was decided that due to the lower number of comments there was not enough evidence for all five of the superordinate themes but that Mary’s experiences would be effectively represented, and provide a contrasting experience, in four of the superordinate themes.

3.8 Methodological issues

As this research uses an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach it does not require a large number of participants. The participants involved in this research were homogenous in that they each met the criteria for involvement however there were several differences in their backgrounds and experiences with school staff, and two of the three participants had additional educational needs identified that may impact on their behaviour. This diversity has been illuminating within the research analysis but could also be viewed
as a limitation as the superordinate themes were not developed on a truly homogenous group where challenging behaviour as a difficulty has been isolated.

The researcher has tried to ensure the validity of the analysis by remaining close to the transcripts of the interviews. In addition there has been regular support from a supervising tutor to discuss the assumptions and conclusions. It is however acknowledged that other researchers and readers of the transcripts may come to their own theories and conclusions based upon their own double hermeneutic perspective and that there is not a single ‘truth’ but that there may be several.

The use of IPA within this research does not allow for going back to the participants and checking if the researcher view was a correct interpretation of the participants meaning. By doing so would create another hermeneutic cycle as the participant reviewed the researcher interpretation. The assumptions made within this research are likely to be subconscious for the participant as they manage the phenomenological experience and to highlight such thoughts as conscious could be distressing to the participants.

3.8.1 Ethics

The initial ethics form was competed in draft in February 2013 and submitted in March 2013. Due to the potential distress that talking about difficult events may have for the participants it was decided that this would constitute a high risk piece of research and the full University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) form was completed. Ethical approval was then given by the UREC panel on the 19th February 2014, see approval letter in appendix 13

The ethical issues in this research are regarding the emotive experiences that parents may have had and their potential views on the education system and their individual
schools. There is therefore a possible risk to the individual’s psychological wellbeing. These risks are reduced through my having adequate training as a Practitioner Psychologist and regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council, on supporting vulnerable individuals and through access to supervision. Through my daily working practices I regularly engage with parents and professionals who may be showing levels of distress or anger. I am skilled in de-escalation and mediating in situations between parties with opposing or challenging views.

All participants were asked to give written consent and will have the right to withdraw at any time. Should there have been any indication that they were experiencing distress the interviews would have been brought to a close and withdrawn from the research project. Parents were given a debriefing after the interview and if requested, will be given access to the research findings.

There was also a risk that participants could lose their anonymity. This risk is reduced by not using the participants’ names in the field notes, documents or transcripts. The location will not be given and a regional location will be used. Details about the participants will be kept locked in a secure area. All information will be stored on an encrypted laptop and will be destroyed after 5 years. Should parents wish for their information to be withdrawn this can be done at any time. Participants were made aware that the general findings will be shared with the Educational Psychology Service and may be used for further publication.

Should anything have been disclosed through the interview that presented a safeguarding risk the interview would have been ended and not entered into the research
project. I followed safeguarding procedures and would report information to the appropriate professionals.

Participants agreed to the semi-structured interview and that they will be able to withdraw from the process at any time or to withdraw their data at a later date. Finally, participants were informed that all responses and interview data will be anonymised.

Ongoing supervision from the university tutor and training through university courses on methodology have supported my sensitivity to the possibility of distress and then to act accordingly in the best interest of the participant.

No addresses were held as they are centrally stored. Once each semi-structured interview had taken place, each parent’s information was anonymised and given a coding. Once the recommendations from the research are collated these will then be sent out to parents and then any personal data will be destroyed.

All audio recordings will be deleted after 5 years and will be stored on an encrypted memory stick. Transcriptions will be held for 5 years after the initial piece of research and be held on an encrypted laptop.

Participants may feel that being approached by an EP for research may in some way be compliant with demands from other professionals. Participants could then be under the misconception that talking to the researcher may in some way impact upon the support for their child. They may also have given consent due to responding to other requests for external agencies and therefore not seeing this as a discrete piece of research. The researcher explained when arranging the interview the nature and purpose of the research and clarified that participating in the research is not related to the current services that they are receiving.
Participants were asked where they would like the semi-structured interview to be held in order that they were most comfortable. One participant chose to have the interview at their work place and the other two participants chose to have the interview at the family home. If the participant wanted to meet at home they gave their home address.

In order for participants to be comfortable I was flexible in my approach giving the participants the option of withdrawing from the research of rearranging it for another occasion. I was careful to try to ensure that the participants were able to withdraw should they so wish. One participant was running late but the interview was held once she had arrived, one participant had their younger child with them in the family home and the third participant was not at home for the appointment. For the participant that was not at home, I contacted her by phone to see if she was wishing to withdraw from the interview. She commented that she was happy to be interviewed but had forgotten about the appointment. The interview was rearranged for the following week and the participant was at home on the second visit.

Participants could assume that information regarding their interview will be shared with other professionals and therefore they may not have given completely open accounts of their experiences. They may have thought that their participation in the research will impact upon how their child is treated within the school and therefore alter their accounts. I explained both at the time of arranging the interview and before the interview commenced that information would not be shared with professionals or school staff. As contact was initiated directly with the parent, through their EP, the school staff may not have been aware that the participant was taking part in any research.
Within this research meaning is assigned to the participant’s responses. Within the approach of IPA and the hermeneutics, making explicit what the participant may have meant, may be distressing for the participant to read in full. The participants may interpret the analysis as either placing them in a negative or positive light. This in turn could alter their perception of the situation and how they perceive their role. Therefore participants would be offered a brief summary of the research rather than its entirety. Due to such considerations it is not possible to re-interview participants as this could alter their view of the situation as they try and interpret the researcher’s interpretations. Thereby creating a further hermeneutic cycle.
Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

As the aim of this research is to interpret mothers’ experiences of having a child in school with challenging behaviour, analysis of the situation from any other viewpoints was not sought. All information regarding the difficulty that the child and parents are experiencing are from the mother’s perception and their phenomenological position. It is the mother’s understanding of the complex education system; the support systems for children within schools, and how the view of their child’s needs supports positive outcomes.

All of the assumptions made within these findings are based upon what the participants said during their interviews. All comments interpreted on behalf of the mothers are with the knowledge that such opinions were suggested within the interview. An extract from the transcript of interview 1 can be found in appendix 1.

Through this interpretative phenomenological analysis of each of the participant’s comments it was possible to identify a number subordinate themes which were then analysed further and grouped into five superordinate themes. Even though each theme has been examined and explored individually they are all interrelated and do not exist in isolation. By examining each of the superordinate themes independently we are able to see how each distinct aspect of the participant’s experiences have influenced their views of having a child in school with behaviour difficulties. This process has been completed discretely for each of the participants and then elements of commonality and differences between the participants are then explored in the discussion.
Through using the IPA approach all of the analysis is an interpretation of the participants lived experiences. At times, therefore, these may be presented as factual. However it is acknowledged that this is only factual in so far as this is the perceived reality of the participant. There has been no attempt made to corroborate the information given by the participants. As the aim of this research is to gain a clear understanding from the parent’s perspective we only need to acknowledge that this is their reality, whether or not this reality would be agreed with by all other parties supporting the pupil.

The range of evidence for each superordinate theme is explored, which includes discussion of each of the subordinate themes. However, each subordinate theme is not identified individually as the evidence described may be for more than one subordinate theme within the superordinate themes, due to their interrelatedness.

All the names of the participants and their children have been changed and pseudonyms have been used for the reader.

4.2 Case 1

4.2.1 Interview 1 contextual information

The interview took place at the participant’s place of work, which is within a school. This was held at the end of the school day. The participant confirmed that she was willing to complete the interview and signed the consent form prior to the interview. The interview lasted for approximately 30 minutes. Sandy was a teacher who worked with children with special needs, therefore it may have been deemed that she was more able to work alongside school in meeting her own child's needs.
4.2.2 Case 1 findings

Figure 1 shows the five superordinate themes that were developed from the grouping of the subordinate themes. These in turn had been developed from the comments initially made in response to the interview transcript.

Figure 1: Superordinate themes and subordinate themes from interview 1
4.2.3 Exploration of superordinate themes: Interview 1

4.2.3.1 Superordinate theme - Development of shared understanding

Throughout the interview it became evident that this parent, Sandy, wanted other people around her child to see her child as she saw him and therefore develop shared understandings of his needs and strengths. This theme encompasses both barriers to shared understanding and some ways in which the parent and the school were able to establish shared understanding of the child.

Sandy reported that there were a number of barriers to effective communication and that she met different responses from different staff members within the school.

...We've come to school for this that and the other and it's been quite negative but like I've said there's also quite a lot of particular members of staff within the school that are fabulous... (Lines 9-10)

Sandy shared her perception of this barrier using metaphor when she used the phrase

...a lot of things have been quite a big, sort of, very brick wall... (Line 7)

Later in the interview Sandy talked more explicitly about the difficulties she has experienced in getting communication from school. She talked of being pro-active in requesting information but that there was still some difficulty in this being forthcoming.
This would indicate a perceived lack of two way communication between the family and the school with the frequency and content of the information being led by the school.

...The lack of information on a special needs front, that that parents can get for example things like targets and IEP's and knowing exactly what school are working on so that we can support it at home and vice versa... (Lines 381-384)

Sandy shared that the communication that was had with school was often about the negative elements of Corey's behaviour but that she would like a more balanced view.

...I'm the one that's going on a morning and saying you know... how's this how's that and the only things we do tend to get from school tend to be the negative bits rather than the positives... (Lines 238-241)

In addition Sandy believed that this lack of two way communication led to delays in identifying Corey's needs with the Paediatrician.

...we needed input from school for reports and things like that and again I had to ask for it... erm...but and I and I think the medical side of things with school for for Corey school slowed a lot of that down... (Lines 398-401)

As mentioned above Sandy perceived difficulties in maintaining two way communication with the school staff, particularly with management within the school.
Sandy went on to describe the impact of this negative communication on her well-being and her relationship with the school staff. Communication was described by Sandy as ‘them telling us’.

...The issues that we have are more discussions now where as when it started it was more them telling us that he's done this and this is because he is a violent young child...
(Lines 61-64)

In my interpretation this phrasing from Sandy suggests that she experiences a power imbalance between the school and herself. Such powerlessness, particularly within well-known environments such as a school, may cause difficult feelings for Sandy as she is likely to have had such conversations with the parents of those pupils that she teaches and by virtue of her role of teacher will have been the individual with the authority. The tone of communication in which Sandy was spoken to about her child was distressing to her as his parent.

... It was all very much how we were told that information if you like and I think that because of what I do I am a little more... resilient I suppose to being spoken to like that cos I get why they are speaking like that because of what I do but I think there are a lot of parents who I think that if they were spoken to like that and they had Corey as their son they would be absolutely devastated you know of all the ... I don't know what the word is really... accusations?...well not accusations.. it’s more labelling, you know, them deciding
what Corey's difficulties, whose fault it is and what they are and what we should be be
doing.... (Lines 71-81)

The above quote also suggests that Sandy is distinguishing between her different roles and it could be suggested that Sandy is describing how she actually feels about the situation as ‘absolutely devastated’. She distances herself from this to take an external view to talk about ’a lot of parents’ but it could be suggested that Sandy is doing this in order to distance herself to cope with the negative labels and her sense of powerlessness in the situation. Sandy reported that she understood and supported that parents needed to be told about the issues that their child was having in school. Sandy reinforces the importance of how you are spoken to and that this has a significant impact when she commented that:

...I’d want to know but it’s how you’re told isn’t it. Really. (Lines262-263)

When sharing the above comment Sandy’s tone changed and her voice went quiet, suggesting that this is something that has been difficult for her to deal with. Sandy reflected that sharing information may be more difficult for some than others and looked for reasons as to why this might be. This appears to be a further mechanism of coping with the personal content of the information and its potential impact by attributing the difficulty to the head teacher not having, what she would consider, adequate people skills.
She’s just very. (Sigh) I, I, I think it’s a lack of people skills is probably what I would put it at…. But I think it’s more the way that parents are spoken to is the issue. (Lines 286-293)

She continued to examine her difficulties in communicating with the head teacher and the impact that this may have on how the whole school communicates with its parents. Sandy goes on to comment about how such conversations may impact upon the leadership and ethos of the school. Sandy’s experiences within education settings may support her to draw such wide impacting conclusions built upon her personal interactions with the head teacher.

Which is a shame cos in a school that’s the person at the helm isn’t it… and needs to be the one saying, no this is how we speak to parents and any other people that come into school. (Lines 295-299)

Such frequent negative interactions with school staff led to an impact upon the Sandy’s emotional well-being.

How did it make me feel? I used to go home and cry quite regularly…. (Lines 108-109)

Sandy reported that decisions made about Corey’s behaviour impacted negatively on the family and she reported that working with the head teacher was like ‘bashing your
head’ (Line 376). Sandy’s experience of exclusion approaches for her son, particularly with regard to after school provision, led to conflicts.

> It’ll end up being a far harsher thing that happens or that parents think is inappropriate, obviously the head thinks it’s not, she obviously thinks it’s the right thing to do so... that’s whoever’s judgement I s’pose’. (Lines 373-377)

In order to address some of the conflicting approaches Sandy took a proactive approach to requesting more collaborative working.

Through her work Sandy had an awareness of the support that schools are able to access and the process for requesting this. Sandy used this information to prompt support for Corey.

> It was more I would have said prompted by, by what I wanted ‘cos I was concerned about what was happening at school rather than school asking. (Lines 219-221)

This attempt at collaboration led to further conflicts as Sandy tried to gain shared understanding with the head teacher who had a different view of her son.

> (sigh) My experience now is that we have a lot of battles with the head teacher. Erm.. I don’t I, I, actually my view, obviously it’s only my view is she doesn’t get Corey, she doesn’t get who he is, however the staff within the school, the relationships are very positive.... (Lines 219-223)
At this point Sandy showed some negative body language along with the sigh indicating that this situation, which has been pervasive for many years has become wearying. Sandy starts by asserting her view before then putting in the caveat ‘it’s only my view’ when giving an explanation as to why the head teacher does not ‘get who he is’. This suggests that this is the head teacher’s difficulty as she is not able to see the range of qualities that Corey holds. Sandy uses the metaphor of ‘battles’ in the above quote and has previously used ‘brick walls (line 8)’ this suggests that Sandy is struggling to find a communicative approach that allows for her to accept the head teacher’s concerns as well as her need to feel heard by the head teacher. We could assume from this that given Sandy’s professional role, and her views usually being heard, that this difficulty may be particularly frustrating. I feel that there could be a professional conflict here as, based upon my professional work in schools, parents tend not to have frequent contact with the head teacher but there is no indication within the interview as to by whom the discussions are initiated.

It is stated within the SEND Code of Practice (2015) that special educational needs should be managed through a special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) and not through the head teacher. By having a hierarchy of support parents and teachers have a further tier to work with and should only go to the head teacher if these issues are not resolved at the lower level. Sandy reports frequent contact with the head teacher but does not report any meetings with the SENCO thereby raising the question as to whether the head teacher holds dual roles.
Sandy reinforces her view of the difficulties of collaborative working when she states that:

…but again it’s all very much [pause] (tut) quite a lot of the time we feel as though it’s it’s me going in and saying, could we do this? Of could we try this? Rather than it being the other way around and I do think as a parent really it should be school coming to us more. Well it should be both shouldn’t it really but. It’s mostly us going and prompt, well me, that’s going cos I’m the one that’s going on a morning really. (Lines 232-238)

The above quote would suggest that Sandy does not feel supported or listened to in the way in which she views that she should be. There are a range of possibilities as to why this may be. It could suggest that the staff with whom Sandy is communicating with may not share the same concerns as her and are therefore not giving her concerns their full attention; or they may feel that she making more of the situation than they may feel it warrants; or they may feel that they have already listened to and acted upon her views.

As the interview continued Sandy then reflected on how she was feeling about this relationship with school staff and whether the relationship with the head teacher, and the frustrations she held with trying to work collaboratively with her was impacting at all on Corey.

…I think Corey will be Corey whatever but you know I’m hoping he’s not aware of the relationship issues with the parent and school bit. I’d be quite upset actually I think if I
thought that he was aware of that cos you know we obviously you try hard don’t you, not to.
(Lines 302-306)

Sandy shares that she is trying hard to maintain the relationships with school staff however does not allude to her motivation for doing so. This may be due to her feeling that she needs to provide a role model for her son and his relationships with staff; that she does not wish to undermine staff and therefore staff strategies may be less effective; or to protect her son from any awareness that there are difficulties with the head teacher which may make him vulnerable to additional criticism. Regardless of her motivation it is apparent that Sandy places a significant emphasis on maintaining relationships with members of staff, even those with whom she has had great difficulty working with, in her son’s best interests.

The communication difficulties and the perceived barriers to working collaboratively contributed to a continued lack of shared understanding about Corey’s needs and therefore to conflicting approaches to Corey’s behaviour.

Throughout the interview Sandy commented upon her attempts to share the strategies that she and her husband had used to support Corey. However school approaches led by the head teacher, were perceived by Sandy to punish them and reward Corey’s negative behaviour.

Response from staff would have been, no don’t do that, dealing with it but the heads reaction was he [Corey] was excluded from after school club for the rest of the week... well, Corey’s not bothered about that cos it actually rewarded Corey because Corey was quite
happy to come home earlier all it did was make it a nightmare for me and my husband.... (Lines 342-350)

Sandy was able to describe the consequences to Corey’s behaviour that she thought were appropriate to address his behaviour but her view was that school responses, led by the head teacher, were too extreme.

The intermediate bits that you can do in those situations it’s almost as if they’re not on her radar its like if you’ve got that behaviour that’s it you go. (Lines 357-359)

Sandy’s description of the head teacher’s response suggest a very black and white approach, which lacks in empathy for her son as an individual and potentially highlights Sandy’s concern that this will be the dominant approach in dealing with Corey’s behaviour. This only serves to punish her and effectively reward Corey. This description of the head teacher’s response would suggest that the head teacher does not see the school as part of the ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) around the child and therefore is not promoting his inclusion within it. Through regular communication with staff in the classroom Sandy believed that she worked well with other staff to meet Corey’s needs. She was able to share occasions where she thought that working with staff in school, who worked with Corey regularly, were successful in avoiding behaviour difficulties. This suggests that Sandy knowing the staff and having a positive relationship with them, possibly a more equal relationship with them, means that they are able to respond collaboratively.
...or I’ll say to them you really need to watch him because he might just be too bouncy... and they are very receptive of that you know which is brill but it’s more. The staff on that level you know the ones that run the breakfast club the ones you know. (Lines 226-231)

As mentioned earlier Sandy prompted school to request external agencies to get involved due to the difficulties she believed they were having in meeting Corey’s needs. This was Sandy’s clear attempt to establish shared understanding as mediated through a third party, such as an external agency.

Corey was referred to the Early Years Team and then to the Educational Psychology Service to support school in identifying and then putting interventions in place to meet Corey’s needs. At this point Sandy had received regular communication from school labelling her child in very negative terms.

Sandy reported that the initial agency that came into school said that there were not really any problems with Corey at school. This was a significant contrast to the labels being used by school but this did not move the situation forward. The EP then became involved and from Sandy’s view this was the beginning of some changes in the situation.

Natasha [the Educational Psychologist] ... came in and that was a little bit of a turning point for school because she sort of very much. Outlined what Corey’s issues were.... (Lines 85-87)
Sandy expressed that due to this external viewpoint on Corey’s behaviour the school were then supported with strategies and targets for an individual education plan (IEP). This was then the first time that Sandy considered that there were more positive messages about her son.

...the school were given a lot of advice at that point about IEP targets and what sort of things would be good to do with Corey. They weren’t necessarily all done. But I think. There were a few more positive messages because someone else, a professional was saying. Erm well actually maybe it is because of this and this…. (Lines 94-100)

From the involvement of the EP the school were supported in using a wide range of strategies to support Corey as well as developing a greater understanding of Corey’s needs. It suggests that this direction from an external ‘professional’ gave validation to Sandy’s concerns. The fact that she highlights that the support was from an external person supports the assumption that there was a power imbalance and that the support on their side added weight to the messages that she was trying to convey about Corey. As Sandy had been instrumental in getting the EP involved through her professional knowledge this may also have been her attempt to take control of the situation and to support the development of a non-judgemental identity for Corey based on need and ‘not it’s just ‘cos he’s naughty’ (line 111).

Sandy also found that individual members of staff were more able to meet Corey’s needs than others due to their general approach and their use of the outdoors which Sandy reports that Corey really enjoys.
...he [student on teaching practice] was really really good with Corey actually and actually a lot of steps forward happened in that time. Erm.... And this teacher was a a a young bloke who actually liked being outside with the kids so Corey fitted him perfectly if you like.... (Lines 246-253)

There are linguistic components in the quote above that illustrate the strength of feeling towards this positive approach for Corey, the repetition of the word ‘really’ to emphasise how good he was and the phrase ‘fitted him perfectly’ to emphasise the potential ease with how Corey and the teacher got on. This relaxed language and perceived collaboration may in part be due to the relative position of the trainee teacher who was potentially more open to accepting Sandy’s views and adjusting teaching strategies because of this. Such approaches would then be reinforced by Sandy as they followed the strategies that she herself discussed employing in managing Corey’s behaviour. This would then give a greater reflection of Corey’s home and family situation.

Using the outside has worked really well with him and I think that’s something that they’ve done quite well with him but actually in foundation it is a lot easier to do isn’t it because they’ve got, they can go out and out, out, a lot of the day is outside isn’t it. (Lines 320-323)

It could also be suggested that Sandy’s view of this time is quite idealistic and provides her evidence that different approaches lead to greater acceptance of Corey and
conversely that it is the curriculum constraints as Corey has got older that have led to greater difficulties. Therefore the issue is environmentally compounded and not only a problem of the individual.

4.2.3.1.1 Summary: Development of shared understanding

Sandy’s perceived experiences were that the difficulties in the effective communication between the school and herself led to a significant barrier in being able to develop shared understanding of Corey’s needs. With this range of conflicting approaches and inconsistencies with different members of staff, these are likely to have led to Corey being unclear as to which response he was likely to receive. The use of exclusion approaches also only served to punish the parents and did not give Corey learning opportunities within the environment where he was having difficulty.

Sandy reported frequent attempts to work collaboratively with the staff in school towards shared understanding but that these were hindered by the lack of two way communication. Sandy reported that this also led to impacts upon the emotional wellbeing of the wider family having to process very negative information about their child but not given the opportunity to work proactively with all staff in the school. The emotions coming through the text are those of frustration and distress for the mother.

These emotions are then contrasted by the linguistic emphasis of when Sandy thought that individual members of staff had worked well with her child and who, she believed really understood her child. This was then supported by the role of a third party in developing shared understanding of Corey. There is a sense of relief from Sandy that the
situation is mediated and that the EP was able to provide an external, objective view of the Corey’s needs.

This initial superordinate theme emphasises the importance of creating shared understanding of a child’s needs. This then enables the school, the parents and the child to work together so that the child’s time at school can be successful.

4.2.3.2 Superordinate theme: The child as an individual.

This superordinate theme links to the first as Sandy was striving for shared understanding of her child’s individual characteristics and for his needs to be met. Sandy reported meeting a clear and initially quite fixed view of her child and this then contributed to conflict with some members of school staff.

Throughout the interview it became evident that the family had received a lot of negative information about Corey. Sandy initially shares that although there have been some positives she has also experienced:

...Quite a lot of negatives erm due because of Corey’s behaviour and how challenging he can be.... (Lines 4-6)

She goes on to explain how this pattern of negatives with some positives has been over time using the metaphor.

...but he’s had quite a. It’s been quite a rocky road I would say. (Lines 12-13)
It is interesting to note that Sandy changes her perspective from her son ‘having’ the experience to placing herself as also having the experience by using ‘it’s’ instead of just ‘he’. Sandy used the metaphor of ‘rocky road’ to reflect the range of negative and positive emotions that she has experienced regarding Corey at school. This is a further instance of Sandy using a very physical metaphor to describe her experiences (others being ‘barrier’ and ‘brick wall’). This suggests that by making experiences physical rather than personal she is able to distance herself from the emotions involved and therefore protect herself and her family from them.

Sandy shared the experience of trying to take Corey to stay and play sessions at the school and that she found this difficult and it is the expressed emotions shared through this experience that may have led Sandy to use externalising language to cope with them.

…it was an absolute nightmare to the point we nearly stopped taking him…. (Lines 19-20)

Sandy is sharing the instinct to wish to stop taking Corey to the sessions. This could be in order to avoid confronting his behaviours and to protect him from the judgement of others or from the judgement of her and her parenting. Although Sandy considers disengaging she continued to attend the sessions. She continues with this strength of emotion in her language as she describes the behaviours that Corey showed and the impact on her emotional state.
...it was an absolute nightmare we used to go away from there absolutely mortified’
(Lines 26-27)

These stay and play sessions provided Corey and his mother their first experiences of attending school and this was also when the school became aware of Corey. Once Corey entered full time school Sandy found that staff around Corey used very negative language about the causes of his behaviour.

...she [head teacher] used to tell us that Corey was er a violent unkind child and he had no empathy for anybody and it was really, really negative. (Lines 43-44)

And

...again it is usually he is a violent child you need to come and get him not that Corey is really struggling with the unstructured time at the moment. (Lines 68-70)

In the above quote it is evident to see that Sandy is trying to view Corey’s behaviour as showing her how he is managing in school. In her view school staff would appear to be quite dismissive of the possible reasons for his behaviour and viewing violence as a fundamental characteristic of Corey’s. This is an assumption which Sandy shares that she does not accept. Sandy reframes the school staff assumption of violence to view his behaviour as an indicator that he is not coping and therefore suggesting then that this behaviour is modifiable and not static.

Sandy’s perception of the situation is of negative views expressed from school staff with regard to Corey and why staff thought that he was behaving in the way that he was.
However, Sandy reflected that this was not consistent for all members of staff. Sandy, throughout this negativity about Corey held on to beliefs about her child as an individual and shared that some staff were able to see these more positive individual characteristics.

...he was very much... erm... seen by I think, I think by parents as well as also by some of the staff as being very boisterous and wanting to hurt other children, and it, it didn’t take that long before it was sort of seen actually, no he’s not meaning to hurt them he actually hasn’t got the skills and he invades their space and all of the real reasons as to why he does it.... (Lines 30-36)

Sandy’s use of the phrase ‘real reasons’ highlights her perception of the truth regarding her child’s difficulties. The behaviour is viewed through a positive lens of a skills delay as opposed to an innate difficulty. This may support the view of reflective attachment and that a parent, for the child to remain supported, will emphasise the positive characteristics about their child. This view is further supported by:

...they really understood how actually he’s a really nice little boy and actually really wants to do well and is quite bright and he can do this and he can do that... (Lines 50-52)

And

...I think a lot of them, I know he’s my little boy, but a lot of them really like Corey, it’s like they’ll say ‘Hi Corey, you know.... (Lines 56-58)
These quotes suggest that Corey is loved and accepted by Sandy regardless of the difficulties that he may show and therefore that Sandy will support and protect her child. They also show that not only is Sandy focussing upon the positives about her child but also reflecting on other adults and if they are viewing her child positively. When the EP presented her view of Corey’s behaviour this supported seeing Corey as an individual with a range of positive traits as well as his areas of difficulty. Sandy reflected on the emotional impact of professionals giving a holistic view of her child.

*I must admit you know we as parents felt quite, we, we sort of went ‘aaahhh’ (sigh) somebody else can see that there’s some difficulties there you know, its not necessarily us causing them. And you know it’s just Corey being Corey and that’s you know what we need to tackle as you know what we are going to do to make it better, if you like, the situations better.* *(Lines 205-210)*

This external view of Corey’s difficulties supported Sandy’s view that the difficulties that Corey was having were not due to them as parents, and her wanting school staff to view Corey as an individual. It could then be suggested that once staff view Corey positively then they will also view the parents positively and Sandy will not be subject to blame.

*4.2.3.2.1 Summary: The child as an individual*

Within this section we have viewed the way in which Sandy perceived Corey’s individual characteristics to have been labelled very negatively by members of the school
community and that she had continued to push for a more positive view of her child. Throughout the interview Sandy reflected on Corey’s behaviour difficulties as an element of his individual characteristics but that Corey had a range of more positive characteristics that she wished for others to see and appreciate.

**4.2.3.3 Superordinate theme: Social perceptions of behaviour**

Social perceptions of Corey’s behaviour were not only evident within the school context but also within other social contexts. Sandy reflected that Corey’s height, being taller than other children his age also altered other’s expectations, but that there may be other ways of interpreting his behaviour.

...he needed to be taught that when you’re playing you know. ‘Cos he is quite a big lad, he is a lot taller than the others you know, that actually him going in and playing is just his way of playing... (Lines 89-92)

Friends and family of Sandy also offered their views of Corey’s difficulties, particularly in comparison with his older siblings.

...cos I’ve got three elder children and I had none of these issues with them and people used to say that it’s not the same Corey is different... (Lines 130-132)

Sandy has found that within social situations she has been concerned about how Corey has managed and she has been torn by supporting him to conform within social
boundaries whilst also wanting him to be happy and not always constrained by social expectations.

... you want to pull him out and take him home and just think that at least no one can see what he’s doing if he is at home you know, he can shout and scream and jump up and down and do all those sorts of things happily at home rather than it being an issue you know. (Lines 124-128)

This could also be interpreted as Sandy wishing to protect Corey and that taking him back within the home protects him from the judgement of others and potential negative actions. Sandy’s expression of ‘you want to pull him out’ also suggests a level of anxiety that she feels in being out in situations where Corey is not always successful. This anxiety may be due to Corey’s behaviour being perceived as a direct reflection of her parenting abilities.

Sandy reflects on the emotional impact of others judgement on her when she describes ‘you have to harden up and actually say and say I am dealing with it like this’ (Lines 145-146).

4.2.3.1 Summary: Social Perceptions of behaviour.

Sandy was able to reflect upon how Corey was viewed from a range of perspectives both within and outside the school situation. Others’ views were welcomed but there were also times when the views of others and the constant battles with the negative labels given to her son led to Sandy reviewing and clarifying her role as Corey’s parent.
4.2.3.4 Superordinate theme: The role of parents.

When Corey entered school Sandy expressed that all his difficulties were attributed to them as Corey’s parents.

...That it must be parenting skills as to why he was as he was. And we had some really hard times... (Lines 45-46)

And

...it’s more labelling, you know them deciding on what Corey’s difficulties are, whose fault it is and what they are and what we should be doing... (Lines 79-81)

And

...I used to go home to my husband and say they think it’s parents, they think it’s us. What are we doing wrong? (Lines 109-111)

The above quotes introduce the notion of blame, initially by telling Sandy that the difficulties are due to parenting skills and secondly by looking at ‘fault’. Sandy interpreted this as her and her husband doing something wrong. This statement of self-doubt and the subsequent self-reflection suggests that Sandy was willing to examine the possibility that she was ‘to blame’. However, through Sandy’s experiences it is reflected that this concept of blame and fault has caused Sandy to experience several conflicts with key members of staff. Sandy believed that she needed to ‘harden up’ and to protect her view of being an effective parent. Sandy’s comments reintroduce the suggestion of the concept of power and that those in positions of power, such as the head teacher, are able to take control, label the
difficulty and present this to the parents as a final analysis. Thereby disempowering Sandy and impacting upon her self-concept as a parent and the subsequent emotional impact of such views upon the family.

Sandy reinforces this assumption that the concept of blame on the parents appears to be mostly initiated by individual members of the school staff.

*You know, so on that level they would they were fine but it was more the the hierarchy if you like...you know to the reasons why they thought it was happening.* (Lines 265-267)

Sandy’s report of the lack of support from the head teacher impacted upon her ability to have any support within the school in a position of power. This perceived disempowerment of Sandy was highlighted in the regular conflict that she had with the head teacher and the exploration of other options.

When parents do not feel that they have anywhere to go within a school they may look to gain independent advice from the local authority Parent Partnership service or may look to move schools. Sandy looked at both of these options but believed strongly that her child was entitled to attend his local school and that she would continue to try and work with the school staff.

*...to the point where I have taken advice from Parent Partnership and gone to the authority what can I do because I’m really not happy about what this lady, you know, leading the school with children...but I’m very much a believer that Corey’s entitled to go*
to that school, and it’s a lovely little school and there’s a lot of staff there that you know, and why should I move Corey... it has crossed my mind but I, it is very much a one person issue I think... (Lines 273-285)

The above quote shows that Sandy had to make a decision regarding how she is going to support her child. Throughout this interview Sandy maintained her stance that, although Corey had some difficulties, he also had a lot of positive qualities. She always remained the advocate for her child. This advocacy for her child led to the drive for shared understanding and the frequent attempts to work together with staff. Sandy was able to see that Corey had difficulties in school and there are several quotes in the text that describe the behaviours that he demonstrated both with her outside school and incidents at the after school club. Sandy shares how she feels school staff should put boundaries in for Corey such as:

...sitting him out of the after school club and saying you’re not having the computer for the rest of the week... (Lines 354-356)

Sandy was expressing her support for the members of staff for whom Corey can sometimes be difficult and reinforcing what they are trying to do:

... they could actually deal with that and say Corey don’t do that you know you’re not having the computer now you can sit there and being quite firm with him which they can be with him you know. (Lines 362-365)
Although Sandy expressed that she wished to work with support staff she was aware that her job and experience may influence how others saw her. She clarified this by reinforcing that she should be seen as Corey’s parent and nothing else, and this was expressed very strongly. This suggests that Sandy did not wish to view her child as if he was a child that she worked with, and therefore does not have an emotional view about. This suggests a continuing wish to advocate for her son, as her son, including the emotional responses that she may have.

...the head actually ask what she wha what I thought the targets should be for Corey in school, I don’t know I’m not with him in school you know, but again I think some of that is clouded a little bit with the fact that she knows what my job is but that’s not a, that shouldn’t come into it in the slightest bit at all it should be that I am Corey’s mum you know, I could be a stay at home mum, I could work down the pit, I could work at Tesco’s, I could be a doctor, I could be anything it should make no difference, if you’re a parent you’re a parent and that’s how it should be isn’t it really. (Lines 387-397)

Sandy’s reaction could be viewed as her refusing to be collaborative with the school but this is incongruent with her reported frequent attempts to work with the school. Sandy reports that it was the head teacher who requested her views on appropriate targets and given the relationship issues she may have been less willing to collaborate with this member of staff. Such a response could also indicate that Sandy’s expectation of a meeting may have been regarding what the school have put in place. Therefore being asked to
contribute targets could indicate that school are not putting in effort to meet her child’s needs. If this is the case, Sandy may have been more defensive and therefore considered that she needed to reiterate her view as advocate for Corey as his mother, professional or not.

This suggests a sense of emotional feeling as to how strongly Sandy feels about her identity as a parent and that none of the other roles that she has should impact upon the recognition of this when having conversations about her child. This strength of feeling could suggest the emotional impact that having to engage in such difficult conversations is having on Sandy through her suggestion that all parents will have an emotional response regardless of their background. Sandy is sharing her view of the identity of being a parent.

This role of advocate for her child has also been required within other social settings as Sandy has tried to ensure that Corey is exposed to the full range of social experiences for his age such as parties:

...you’d sort of get worried taking him anywhere, you know, whether he would get invited to children’s parties and if he does gosh we are going to be watched... (Lines 113-115)

At these times Sandy has developed her resilience and worked to accept that she is able to manage Corey’s behaviour in her own way. This approach shows clear commitment to promoting Corey’s social skills even though it may be very difficult for the parents to manage the public scrutiny.
...*how we gonna respond if he does this, this or this, really really difficult and as time has gone on, I have sort of, we have changed our attitude, it’s Corey, he is who he is, you can come and talk to me about it if you want but at the end of the day we know Corey very well and know how to respond and if you don’t like it, sorry about that but that’s how we’re dealing with it...* (Lines 116-122)

Throughout the interview Sandy refers to ‘we’ referring to herself and her husband. This suggests that Sandy has a strong view of the concept of parents as an executive subsystem of the family. Sandy is also alluding to making joint decisions regarding approaches with Corey and that they as ‘a family’ can protect Corey. This self-acceptance and resilience from Sandy may have developed as a response to the regular negativity about Corey from school staff and the local community, and this is something that she has had to adjust to and develop. When Sandy talks about being out in social situations she comments:

*...at the time we’ve had some really quite upsetting situations...* (Lines 123)

This suggests that Sandy has found putting herself and her son out in the scrutiny of others has led to some negative experiences. It may be that confronting the reality of how Corey may behave with others, and assimilating that with the son whom she loves, causes emotional conflict. She may feel responsible for any harm that he causes and within such situations would hope that he would be able to conform to social boundaries. His difficulty in doing so may lead to concerns for how he will get on with others as he gets older and ultimately whether he is a successful adult.
Sandy highlights a potential ‘need’ for her child to be accepted for who he is and not just negatively. Bjorklund, Yunger, and Pellegrini (2002) discuss the role of evolution of parenting and the high level of investment that parents, particularly mothers, put into their children. Molleman, Quiñones, and Weissing (2013) raise that social learning rules are part of social evolution and that “By learning from their peers, individuals can rapidly acquire adaptive information about which behaviour is optimal under a variety of environmental conditions” (Molleman et al., 2013, p. 1) Such theories could be used to explain why Sandy is showing such a repeated desire for her son to be accepted and for his skills to be acknowledged so that he is seen to be an individual who will go on to be a successful adult.

4.2.3.4.1 Summary: The role of parents.

The role of being a parent runs throughout all the subordinate themes and this role has developed in many ways as a response to the experiences that Sandy has had in trying to support Corey in school. Sandy has looked to herself and examined her parenting skills in comparison with how Corey’s siblings have developed; she has developed a resilience to both the negativity from school staff and other parents; and developed as an advocate for her child. Therefore she has frequently put herself into conflict with some of the school staff. Sandy has wanted her child to be understood and respected for the positive qualities that he holds. Finally and fundamentally Sandy wished to reconcile the role of ‘parent’ with all the knowledge of her child; knowledge of her own parenting; knowledge of schools; and all the emotions that accompany parenting.

4.2.3.5 Superordinate theme: Finding solutions

So far within the superordinate themes there has been an emphasis on the more negative aspects of the phenomenology of having a child in school with behaviour difficulties. This final superordinate theme explores some of the strategies and approaches
that parents and school worked towards. Throughout this time Sandy was looking for explanations as to why Corey’s behaviour differed from that of his siblings and explored medical labels for this.

...we went to the paediatrician once with his behaviour and everything to start with, that was right back in nursery... was it just that his social skills were a little behind... just because they were you know and they would catch up and then everything would be fine, but he is extremely hyperactive, doesn’t sleep you know and he he does take melatonin at night and things to make a difference but takes it and it makes no difference what so ever (smiles). (Lines 151-160)

Sandy shared that, as a family they initially thought that these differences could be due to lack of social exposure as Corey was looked after by grandparents when he was young, and had siblings who are considerably older than himself. To limit the impact of only being around older people Sandy ensured that she took him to soft play to promote his social skills.

...we did used to take him to soft play centres and we used to do those sorts of thing deliberately to promote all of his social skills although he was a nightmare (laughter) and we’d end up quite often coming home after about, sort of, I don’t know, we’d give it about half an hour quite often and then we’d end up coming home because he’d sort of hurt somebody or you know done something like that... (Lines 177-183)
The quote also suggests that Sandy would withdraw Corey to avoid confrontation and to return to the family home. This sense of retreat to the family and to the home has occurred previously as a coping strategy that Sandy has employed. Sandy continued to explore non-judgemental reasons for Corey’s behaviour particularly once he had entered school. This was also supported by the holistic view that was promoted by the EP:

... there were lots of strategies that that Natasha suggested to school that they tried for a little bit... (Lines 215-216)

Sandy also continued to phrase Corey’s difficulties in positive terms such as ‘too bouncy’ (Line 246) to describe incidences where he was more active than others. Sandy reflected that some staff in school were able to see that Corey responded better when he was given more space, or access to the outdoors.

Using outside has worked really well with him and I think that’s something that they’ve done quite well with him... they’ve worked out that’s quite a good strategy for Corey really that he will learn better when he’s moving around and you know, doing gardening of digging or you know anything like that... (Lines 320-328)

Sandy shared experiences when she worked directly with members of staff they were able to use effective communication to promote positive behaviours. Sandy reports that through this communication staff have got to know strategies that work effectively with Corey, such as distraction or using the outside. However, Sandy reflected on how much
more difficult this was now that Corey was moving up through the school and had less frequent access to the outdoor space. This suggests that Sandy feels that the demands of the curriculum which involves more limited access to the outside may impact negatively on Corey.

Finally Sandy expressed that in her opinion Corey’s diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, had been delayed by the school:

…eventually they got it you know but it was p’haps a year too late really you know, a year we could have been, a bit further on now had that had that you know been a bit more swift I s’pose but that’s it probably how how it has been really for us with him (laughs). (Lines 404-408)

This final statement from Sandy emphasises her importance on the role of the diagnosis as a non-judgemental way of viewing Corey’s behaviour. It suggests that Sandy has become resigned to the fact that her experiences with the school have not been easy and that she continued to experience positives and negatives about Corey. In stating ‘that’s how it’s been for us really’ this could suggest that Sandy is stating that in not retreating and by exposing him to everyday experiences this poses challenges which she has accepted.

4.2.3.5.1 Summary: Finding solutions.

Sandy realised when Corey was quite young that there were behavioural differences between him and her other children. Sandy discussed exploring a range of reasons as to why this might be and also tried to put in some of her own solutions. As Sandy had taken
this view this suggests that she saw his behaviour as a single component of his personality. She described that without a diagnosis she struggled to get school staff to share her understanding of his behaviour and to implement what she thought where the most appropriate strategies. Therefore for Sandy the diagnosis was important in gaining shared understanding and impacting positively on the communication she had with some of the school staff and to empower her to stand up for Corey’s needs as these are externally validated and recognised.

4.2.4 Summary of case 1

Sandy commented on her experiences of trying to gain shared understanding of her child’s needs. Sandy shared her own perspective that although she was aware of difficulties before Corey entered school she did not always agree with how the school staff managed these difficulties. Sandy described a tense relationship between herself and the head teacher however she reflected that she had built up more positive relationships with other members of staff.

In the superordinate theme of the child as an individual this built upon the difficulties explored in the development of shared understanding superordinate theme. To be able to have shared understanding Sandy described trying to work with the school around identifying Corey’s needs. Sandy reported seeking validation through external agency involvement suggesting that she believed that more change may occur if it was not her but other professionals stating what Corey’s needs were and then from this how they might best be met.
When questioned Sandy went on to discuss issues that had occurred within wider social settings such as soft play and parties. Sandy’s description of these suggested that the family were inclined to withdraw Corey from such situations and from the public scrutiny of others and had the desire to retreat to the family home. Comments throughout the interview suggested that Sandy believed that she needed to become resilient to such scrutiny and to develop her own coping strategies.

This development in parenting and the comments throughout the interview pertaining to this parenting role led to the superordinate theme of the role of parents. In the interview Sandy frequently refers to ‘we’ when commenting around the parenting role. This would suggest an identified sense of family and the family unit. Sandy compared Corey with his siblings and examined the strengths and difficulties they have had as parents. Sandy’s comments suggested that she developed in her role as advocate for her child to the point of refusing to view him as ‘a child’ and providing targets for him from an objective perspective and instead wanting to be involved in her perceived role of ‘mum’.

Sandy sought views from external education agencies and medical professionals as to why, in her view, Corey was different to her other children. This search for medical reasons led to the validation of Sandy’s view of her son as having a reason for his behaviour. Sandy has then been able to go back to the school and look to develop shared understanding of her child’s needs based upon his diagnosis and his individual characteristics. In addition, her role as a parent has been supported as Sandy is not ‘to blame’ for Corey’s difficulties and suggests that she is able to support her child as being a valued member of the community with his individual strengths and difficulties.
4.3 Case 2

4.3.1 Interview 2 contextual information

Gail, interviewee 2, had responded to the letter being sent out to her home regarding the research. The researcher contacted Gail and made an appointment for the interview to take place the following week. The researcher was made aware that Gail would be looking after her two year old son whilst the interview was taking place. As the interview was held at Gail’s home this caused minimal interference as her son had a range of toys available to him and only occasionally requested his parent’s undivided attention. At such points the interview was temporarily paused so as to not cause any upset to the child or to Gail.

Gail works four days a week in an area not related to education. Gail had hoped that her husband would be able to join the interview but Gail reported that he had been unable to get the time off work.

4.3.2 Case 2 findings

This interview was led by the participant and she was proactive in wanting to share her views. When the subordinate themes were sorted, although the perspective was different to interview 1, the superordinate themes were still represented. (See Figure 2)
Figure 2 Super-ordinate themes and sub-ordinate themes from interview 2
4.3.3 Exploration of superordinate themes: Interview 2

4.3.3.1 Superordinate theme. Development of shared understanding

Throughout the interview communication is highlighted as a key issue for Gail, the parent. She reflected on difficulties in maintaining effective communication due to both parents’ working arrangements. Gail used to work three days a week and dropped off her son, George the other two days.

…it was quite useful because on a morning you could have a quick word and say ‘oh, he’s had a bad morning just to warn you. (Lines 167-169)

Gail reported that this communication had then changed to a home school book now that she works four days a week. She has found this method of communication more difficult and that she is not given information as incidents happen.

…why wasn’t I told about that? Oh, and it’s like ‘oh I thought I’d mentioned it to you’ and it’s like no one has said a thing so, which, yes things get missed… (Lines 192-194)

Throughout the interview Gail reports wanting to know about everything that happens regarding her child. There are several possible reasons as to why this might be the case: It may be that she wishes to fully support school and embrace the concerns of school,
however, this does not correspond with Gail’s difficulties in understanding school staff’s concerns; she may wish to protect her son from any criticism and therefore by being aware of all visits and advice she is able to ensure compliance or to ensure that she has developed reasonable arguments for each of the concerns raised. Therefore incidents of not being informed are highlighted by Gail. Gail comments that she is understanding of the demands on school staff and that she finds them approachable, however the inconsistency on receiving information is a concern for her. Gail uses dialogue around the family and the child to explain away most difficulties. By receiving all communications this may give her more information as to where the professionals may interfere next or what their theories may be, thereby giving her time and space to consider these views within her developmental perspective.

Gail also thought that due to the number of people involved with George that she would like to know when people were coming in to see him and that she should be aware of all actions that were regarding George both within school and from outside professionals.

...sooo just a little fore warning might help even if it just an email just to say, just to let you know we plan on calling in on this week... (Lines 221-223)

Gail reflects that school staff leading the communication of resources or strategies is not an effective method of communication as she does not always get messages that the professionals are sharing.
It would be helpful if we got a copy as well at the same time erm rather than the school then saying that they’ll then forward a copy on to us cos we’re not necessarily always getting a copy of it... (Lines 238-241)

Gail’s use of the phrase ‘it would be helpful’ raises the issue of helpful to whom? If these strategies are school based only and Gail is not reporting a problem at home, then the information should only be useful to school staff. It may be that Gail wishes to hold all of the information so that she has arguments as to why she does not need such approaches and to question why school does. Gail highlights that within this age of modern communication there are a range of methods available and reinforces that everyone working with her child should inform her of what is happening:

...we have no problem with being emailed or even called so I mean I’ve got a direct dial line at work erm my mobile is on so even if I can’t answer it then you can always send a text message saying ‘d d d we have just stuck a letter in the post for you’ so I know it’s coming or whatever or yeah. (Lines 308-314)

This emphasis that Gail places on sharing the range of communication methods again highlights the importance that she places on being informed, and potentially raises issues as to how she may feel about her work, life balance and that although she may not be available at the school gates she is available in other ways. Gail has limited choices with regard to her son’s attendance at school as education is compulsory and she is aware that
she is placing her son within the school environment where there are views she does not
necessarily agree with.

Gail commented that she thought that the regular reviews in school were helpful in
knowing what was happening but that some of the communication issues meant that Gail
was not always aware of information prior to the meeting and that this impacted upon her
ability to process the information and be prepared for the meeting.

_Erm the IEP’s are helpful ...(erm... it’s just things seem to be brought up in them
that haven’t been mentioned when we’ve picked him up.... (Lines 187-189)_

The communication issues that Gail shared exacerbated the difficulties that she has
had in gaining shared understanding about George. Gail commented that both parents
regularly attended the review meetings but that she was unclear as to the difficulties in
school. Additional questions needed to be asked in the interview to gain any understanding
of what school staff might see as difficulties as Gail did not include any problem talk
regarding her son when answering the set questions.

... _I think he struggles with his concentration so if he is just sat in the class if he can
find something else to look at he does... (Lines 172-174)_

Gail appeared to accept that there may be difficulties in school but that George
responded differently when he was at home. This difference in view suggests that the
reason that communication may be so important for Gail is that she has to process the
information with her view of her child and then may be looking for potential reasons as to why such difficulties may have occurred within the school setting. Communication is therefore vital to Gail. Gail did not share school staffs’ view of George and attributed any difficulties that staff may be facing to environmental factors such as being bored.

*I’m not sure if it’s a boredom thing because I know that he can do it because when we’re at home doing stuff, I know he can read better than he is probably doing at school and know that he can write better than he is doing at school... (Lines 174-177)*

The use of the word ‘probably’ in the above quote highlights the lack of clarity that Gail has about how the school staff see George. This suggests that there may have been a lack of clear information, such as work in his books, to indicate the level that he is achieving in school. It also highlights that school and home are not communicating effectively to explore why there might be such differences in what he achieves in the two settings, should such differences be evident. The communication was reported by Gail as problem based and within child based as evidenced though the requests for referrals with health and education. It may be that Gail is unclear as to how such intervention is going to help her child to be successful at school and the school benefits. This does not appear to be understood and therefore such requests are not meaningful to Gail. She sees no need within her home context for such referrals to take place.

This lack of communication around the review meetings also impacted upon Gail’s ability to be able to examine and consider situations that have occurred, and to talk to
George, prior to any meetings. Communication issues may also allow Gail to keep her distance from school staff’s concerns as she is able to state that she is unaware of the issues.

...because then you’re having a discussion and you haven’t had a chance to consider it or think about it or speak to George and say what happened? Why did this happen? Etcetera. (Lines 200-203)

This problem perspective from the school staff did not support Gail to develop an acceptable understanding of the staff’s difficulties and it could be suggested that Gail is quite defensive regarding the school staffs’ perception of George. Gail expressed that her son’s issues in school were developmental and that in time he would not continue to require support. Given this understanding, Gail shared that school had not been open with her when they began talking about much longer timescales. It is also worth considering that school staff are likely to be working hard to support George’s needs, putting in additional support and strategies, but the communication is not working to support collaboration between home and school, or even for Gail to really know why school staff require this support to be in place, and how it helps them.

...I mean cos at the last IEP I did say how long is these IEPs going to be going on for and they just said ‘oh all the way through his school’ and I were like ‘ah alright. OK, which that were never explained to us. (Lines 407-411)
Gail reports a lack of clear information and shared understanding about George which suggests that she thought that staff had not been honest with her and that they were not really telling her what was wrong. She was aware of being asked for permission for a range of professionals to get involved but not really able to explain why. It is then questionable as to whether this parent has actually given informed consent for the professionals to get involved, fully understanding the role of the professional and how they are going to help her child and the staff. It is clear that she has agreed to the referrals to support staff, but Gail’s responses suggest that she and school staff did not share the same concerns and therefore the same necessity for professionals to be involved. It suggests that she was informed of the professionals that school wished to refer to and it was easier for her to agree to such referrals than to question why they were needed.

When he is at home he does everything alright maybe it’s just school maybe there’s something wrong at school that he is not telling us about erm... yeah, so it could be explained a bit better when you are first referred and you could possibly do with like a proper sit down conversation with the teacher where they explain exactly what they think instead of it just being ‘we think he needs to see a psychologist doing, we think he needs this and we think he needs that yeah yeah... (Lines 389-398)

This reported lack of agreement between home and school regarding issues for George only served to feed further questions that Gail held regarding the relevance of having such a large amount of support in place for him.
...sooo I know things have changed since I were at school but it just seems a bit excessive at times. (Lines 81-84)

All of the above analysis so far has shown that Gail was struggling with the communication that she was receiving from school and suggests this impacted upon her and the school staff establishing joint understanding of George. Due to school staff’s concerns they requested several professionals to support them in meeting George’s needs but that appears to be quite bewildering to Gail as she does not view George as having any difficulties. This leads to some conflict as the evidence that Gail has about her son is problem free and therefore Gail maintains her viewpoint that the difficulties George is having are only school related. For Gail the role of the professionals may aid her as they are able to view what is happening in school, which she states that she would like more detail regarding, therefore the psychologists and the doctors can be useful in dismissing some of the concerns raised by school staff.

Gail maintains this view throughout the interview and goes on to describe how the support that her son is receiving is for the benefit of the school and not that she agrees with the staff that George has difficulties that need to be supported.

...it’s just erm I think to help him and try and help him progress through the classes as trouble free as possible’ (Lines 345-347)

Even though Gail reports that she has been working with the school for a sustained period of time she reflects that she was not aware of any difficulties prior to him entering
school. Therefore Gail had not considered that he may have any difficulties and was struggling to accept this view of her child.

…but when he starts getting referred the first thing you try and think, why my child?

No one else has said that oughts wrong. (Lines 378-380)

These comments suggest some tension between Gail’s understanding of her child and the school staff and outside professionals’ understanding of George. This is the dominant thread throughout the interview. Gail maintains, at regular points in the interview, that she does not see her child as having an issue. Gail uses the phrase ‘you do wonder’ twice within the closing comments of the interview as if she is considering that there may be a reason that she is not aware of for school wanting to get other professionals involved. Such assumptions could be supported with Gail’s possible frustration at the number of professionals and her lack of clarity regarding their roles and their use of language.

Cos we go into the IEP’s and because there’s like psychologist and the...

communications person there and the teachers half the time the conversations are all .. 5 point scale and 3 point scale and this and that and other and me and me husband are normally sat going (whispers) what’s that? So because there’s like more people there who know what they’re talking about and there’s us that haven’t got a clue it tends to be that we have to say can you explain what you’re talking about? and what do you mean?. (Lines 152-162)
It is not possible to tell from the interview as to whether professionals are aware of Gail’s difficulties following their viewpoint and therefore their suggestions for strategies to support George. It also raises the issue as to whose responsibility might it be to ensure that Gail does understand the professional’s concerns and approaches and whether the parent has to agree with them. When parents are concerned about their child in school they may research the difficulties and read up about solutions. As Gail is not really aware of what the difficulties are it is likely that she may only be accessing information from the professionals meetings thereby making them vital in gaining shared understanding of George and the needs as they are seen within school and for school staff to hear and acknowledge how Gail views her child and his individual characteristics.

An alternative interpretation to the phrase ‘haven’t got a clue’ may be that Gail is able to hide behind the language and therefore does not have to engage with the concerns that are being raised, as she is unable to access them. Gail could be alienated by the language used and therefore become dislocated from the process that she is being asked to engage in which allows her to maintain her problem free, child centred perspective.

4.3.3.1.1 Summary: development of a shared understanding.

There would appear to be many barriers to the development of shared understanding of George’s needs. Gail cites a lack of communication as part of the reason that she is not always informed about issues in school, or that this communication is poorly timed, such as during meetings with all the professionals.
The language used by the range of professionals as well as some of their titles also appear to be confusing to Gail. Gail’s dialogue is generally problem free and therefore she does not recognise if there is a need for such a number of professionals.

Gail expresses that she does not see issues within the home situation and that George’s difficulties as based within the school setting. Even when discussing the issues that school staff have shared with her, Gail views these as only evident within the school setting with limited impact upon her family life. Her opinions suggests that she is family and child centred and that all problems are developmental and therefore will naturally resolve themselves. It is of note that Gail reports that she has had involvement from external professionals for a sustained period of time, however her interview still suggests that although there may be agreement as to George’s issues between professionals, this is not shared by Gail.

4.3.3.2 Superordinate theme 2 The child as an individual.

Gail shares her view of George and his individual characteristics in the context of her family and how within this context she does not perceive any difficulties. When Gail was asked what concerns she was aware of in school she proceeded to share a range of positive characteristics that her child has. It could be suggested that Gail was responding by presenting the concerns that have been raised and how she views each of these concerns.

...he is quite a ..... quiet child he is happy in his own company so he is quite willing to sit and play on his own or he will run up and down playing in his own little world he has
a really good imagination so he is happy playing on his own but it has been brought up that he doesn’t socialise as much as they want him to. (Lines 63-69)

Gail repeats this pattern of each concern regarding her child interpreted as just who he is and his individual characteristics. It was apparent through my professional role as an educational psychologist and the range of professionals involved that the professionals concerns are regarding social interaction skills and associated behaviour difficulties. This is also reinforced by each area that Gail discussed as characteristics of George and her positive view of these. Gail presents as consistently viewing her child as problem free. There is no reason to assume that the problems that the school may be having are shared by the family due to the significant contrast in the environment.

He was quite happy playing and yeah there didn’t seem to be any problems. (Lines 115-116)

Gail continues to share that she sees children as individuals and that by comparing her child with her view of her own child development, there are no issues. Such support services did not exist and therefore nothing was made of it. I feel that Gail is suggesting that as she has not had problems into adulthood she therefore has no evidence that her son will have issues that are long lasting.

‘I think some kids are quiet, some kids are happy in their own company he likes sitting down with a book and look at the pictures…’ (Lines 70-73)
and

*I know I was the same when I was a kid but when I were a kid I didn’t have all this I were just I went through school and there weren’t psychologists to see or occupational health or this that and the other... ’(Lines 77-81)

It could also be suggested that those traits for which she may admire in her son and value are the same traits that are now being seen as problems by other professionals.

4.3.3.2.1 Summary: The child as an individual

Gail shares that her son’s characteristics are positive within her family context and that he is a happy child within the home. Gail’s difficulties with her son being referred to outside agencies so quickly and the use, that she perceives, of placing young children in categories, suggests that Gail just wishes her son to be valued by school staff for the individual characteristics that he has.

4.3.3.3 Superordinate theme 3 - Social perceptions of behaviour.

It is apparent from the interview with Gail that she did not have any concerns regarding George’s general development and therefore was not prepared for the reaction of school staff. This is highlighted in Gail’s response to what could have been done differently.

*When George did start nursery and they referred him for his language after two weeks, the head of the nursery that did that has actually retired now, so it’s a different*
person so I’m not sure how much it was the way she worked in comparison to the way the new head works or whatever…. (Lines 224-229)

The above response suggests that Gail was unhappy with the speed with which her son was referred to external services. Gail used her relationships with other parents and their children to assess whether she thought that there was a problem.

But you see a lot of my friends have got girls so as he was growing up it was girls that he played with and not boys…which I know girls take to sitting and doing school work better, boys are more ‘I want to do running up and down and or kicking a ball or whatever or playing erm, they are less, I want to sit still and draw and things’, so I don’t know whether him being a boy is the difference in losing his temper and things because we’ve got another one (laughs). (Lines 255-264)

From Gail’s response to the questions this suggests that she was not aware of the social expectations of school or that school may feel that her son was not meeting their expectations. Gail shares that she thought that assumptions were made too soon about her son and how he may get on in school.

So yeah, it just seemed as though they seemed to be like clumping them into groups with problems immediately and not giving them a chance to settle in a bit… (Lines 16-19)
Gail’s use of the phrase ‘not giving them a chance’ suggests her negative response to school staff’s concerns. This also suggests that in her view George should have been given longer in school to settle in and to get used to the change in his routine and circumstances and that this was, for Gail, too quick a judgement. Such judgements by school staff may also suggest a failure on the parent to have identified and acted upon what the school staff have responded to as a significant concern. Whereas, the parent’s expressed view was that she did not and does not perceive any difficulties with her son’s social development. This therefore brings tension into the home school relationship.

It could be suggested that in order to bring some congruence and common ground between Gail’s view and that of school, she looks to wider social norms changing as the reason for the different perceptions of the problem.

...there weren’t psychologists to see or occupational health or this that or the other.... (Lines 79-81)

And

...the things you could feed a baby 20, 30 years ago , the things you could feed a baby 5 years ago is different to what they recommend now, so it’s all different as things progress and the science and technology gets better and we know more what’s happening ...
(Lines 382-387)

This suggests not only that Gail feels that this is a problem created by society, and not that her child is any different to either herself or her husband but this also protects her
from blame as she would not have expected such problem perceptions and interventions based upon her own experiences of childhood.

It could be suggested that Gail and school staff are working within different developmental frameworks. School staff are focussed upon attainment, achievement and challenge and Gail is focussed upon a more experiential approach with play, time and settling in being important to her.

Gail continues to validate that her child is not different to his peers by also comparing him to others and that George is not the only child who requires some additional support.

George’s help is looking after four on an afternoon, it is not just our George that there’s a problem, there is other children that’s under that, but cos you can’t discuss it it’s like you automatically think well why’s it my child? My child seems alright, he’s been fine at home. Yeah but it’s obviously not there are obviously other kids with problems and you just, they seem to label them so quickly… (Lines 417-424)

There is sense of sadness in this statement and suggests how there may be feelings of loss for what Gail was hoping to be her experience of her first child entering school. There is also an expression of isolation in not being able to talk about other children and that her child may not be the only pupil for whom the school are requiring additional support for. Through this requirement for confidentiality, and no mention by Gail of other support mechanisms such as a parent group, there appears to be limited opportunity for Gail
to share and hear from other parents and therefore gain a wider perspective of children’s social development.

4.3.3.1 Summary: Social perceptions of behaviour

Gail looked to her experiences of other children to assess whether she thought that George had difficulties and these did not lead her to believe that there would be any issues on entering school. Gail shared that she saw that social expectations had changed significantly since her experiences of school and that it was these wider and cultural changes that led to her son requiring additional support.

As there were other pupils who Gail saw required additional support this supported her to ‘normalise’ that her son also required support and that he was not the only one. However it appeared that Gail was isolated and did not have an outlet to share her experiences with other parents.

4.3.3.4 Superordinate theme 4: The role of parents.

The dominant role for Gail appears to be one of compliance with other’s concerns and expectations. Gail uses very strong language when referring to what has been expected of her as a parent and the professional’s views that further professionals need to be involved.

An IEP meeting it was brought up, oohhh he has to see an occupational therapist, we think he needs to see an occupational therapist and it was sort of being pushed on us so I kept saying yeah, yeah, I’ll look into it, yeah, yeah, yeah. In the end I did take him to the
doctors and the doctor looked at him, checked him all over, and said he didn’t think he needed to see the occupational therapist… (Lines 33-40)

The use of the phrases ‘being pushed on us’ and ‘in the end’ support the suggestion that Gail took George to the doctors to comply with professional’s requests and not because Gail had her own concerns. Her view was then validated by the doctor who Gail reported also did not have any concerns. The doctor’s opinion, which Gail also goes on to share was supported by an Occupational Therapist on the phone, starts to place professionals with contradicting views. This potentially leads the parent to be confused or enables the parent to align themselves with the professionals whose view she is in agreement with. This contradiction led to Gail questioning why professionals in school wanted her to take such action. However as school is compulsory it could be suggested that she was obliged to follow their advice to engage with the health service, but that she may not have been obliged to push the view of the education professionals.

So yeah, it just seemed as though certain things are being pushed without much explanation as to why they think he might need to see people and stuff. (Lines 58-61)

It could be suggested that staff are trying to soften information for the parent as they request intervention from professionals. However, this is being interpreted by Gail as not being open and honest. It could be suggested that staff may be more effective in their communication with Gail if it was clear as to why the school staff required the additional support, and how school staff would benefit. Gail’s compliance with school requests
without a clear understanding of the role of that professional was again evident when she discussed the referral to the EP.

_We were just, we went in for an IEP and they just said ‘oh we want the educational psychologist involved is that ok? That were about it. Erm I can’t remember whether it were in relation to him losing his temper or something like that erm but yeah that were about all we were told._ (Lines 120-125)

This suggests that that the mother was disempowered in her role as a parent being able to make informed choices regarding her child. Gail reports a lack of information regarding the role of outside agencies. There is a suggestion throughout her experiences of working with school staff and professionals that Gail has complied. This may possibly be to be seen as a responsible parent, even though she does not fully understand the professionals’ roles, how they can help or why each professional has been requested. This is further confirmed when Gail is unable to recall who the different professionals are and which teams they are from.

_Gail: ...it was just brought up at an IEP saying they wanted to get the psychologist involved and the..I can never remember the name ..child..CI [pause ]_

_Interviewer: the communication interaction and access team?_

_Gail: yes that’s the one._ (Lines 143-149)
Professional’s language is also reported by Gail to be inaccessible to her and her husband and that she has to request that professionals explain what they mean or what an intervention involves.

...there’s us that hasn’t a clue it tends to be that we have to say can you explain what you’re talking about and what do you mean? (Lines 160-162)

The number of professionals and their use of language alters the power relationship for the parent with them being disempowered by a lack of knowledge and ready information. It could be suggested that professionals are not always aware of their power, or able to find a way in which to disseminate the information in an accessible way. Gail is reporting needing to ask for further information as well as complying with professionals without fully understanding the reasoning behind it.

The suggested lack of understanding regarding the role of the agencies and the impact upon the parent could lead to the parent feeling a failure in their parenting role. Gail expressed her emotional response as to what everyone else saw was wrong with her child that she does not see.

When he was getting referred and everything it’s like why? Why? Why? Why my child? Why what’s wrong? I do know that he was having anger issues but his dad is the same, short fuse... (Lines 368-372)
The experiences that Gail shares regarding her as a parent are those of not being an equal partner. There is reported compliance with professionals and school staff concerns but the parent is also reporting mixed messages. Gail appears to be disempowered in her role as parent by the lack of information that she receives, the use of specific language and the number of professionals involved. It could be suggested that Gail normalises behaviour by interpreting the concerns into everyday language such as ‘his dad’s the same, short fuse’. By deconstructing the concerns and reframing them into everyday language they become everyday concerns and therefore not requiring special support.

It could also be suggested that Gail is able to withdraw from the problem dialogue by not understanding the language. She may wish to lack power in order that she can legitimately disengage and the fault be with the professionals as opposed to the parent.

Gail was the one parent who proactively contacted the researcher to take part in the research and this could be interpreted in several ways: as an attempt to be heard; further compliance; or just yet another professional contacting her that she feels obliged to respond to.

4.3.3.4.1 Summary: The role of parents

Gail shared that she was compliant with the wishes of professionals even though she may not understand the need for the intervention. Gail believed that actions were imposed upon them but although she may have resisted for periods of time she eventually thought that she had no choice but to comply.

Due to this compliance it can be questioned as to whether the parent gave informed consent for each professional to become involved or whether parents were empowered to
have the information to give informed consent. Informed consent may also be interpreted differently by participants. Consent may have been given in order to gain alternative views, to stop school from questioning the parent or so that the parent is able to distance themselves from school concerns as they are now being dealt with by others.

Further disempowering to the parent is the use of language by the professionals involved and how the parent did not always receive resources promptly. These difficulties meant that Gail was always playing catch up and needing to request further explanation from professionals.

**4.3.3.5 Superordinate theme 5: finding solutions**

Gail reports having good links with school staff despite some difficulties regarding communication. She reports finding this useful and appears to be understanding of the demands on school staff. However, Gail discusses being unhappy when these demands stop her from knowing all of the information about how George is doing in school.

...*you can’t remember when they’re being let out at the end of school, everything that you need to tell a parent but if it is going to be put into his IEP it should really be brought to our attention before we’re sat in a meeting with everybody.* *(Lines 195-199)*

To improve the communication Gail reported that school have started to use a home school book, but this strategy has only served to add further questions for Gail as to the need for such a high level of intervention.
He has one to one and she writes in a book what they, if they’ve had issues or, and nine times out of ten it’s a good report. He’s had a good morning with his work, he’s tried extra hard at reading d d d. And so we do that which helps. (Lines 179-183)

Gail described how she believes that the individual support that George is receiving is used. This highlights Gail’s understanding of the issues that school may be having and she talks about this in language which sees the issues as minor difficulties requiring minimal support.

It’s more of a to prompt him ‘right George we need to do some literature next, literacy next so you’re going to have to sit down and do writing’ which he hates writing he doesn’t like doing writing, he loves maths erm and he loves the computer erm but he is not keen on writing so it’s some mornings its ‘yeah I’ll sit down and do it’ and on other mornings its ‘no George come on come away from that. It’s not playtime no you need to sit down’. It’s to prompt him and get him to do it and then she’s like helping him to go through the work that everybody else is doing on the board cos he’s got his own little table where he sits so he isn’t distracted and stuff. (Lines 327-338)

Gail comments that George hates writing and that he requires support to do this. Gail reports elsewhere that he is able to achieve more in writing at home than he does at school. It is unclear from her comments as to whether at home he requires a high level of support to engage in writing or whether he is more willing to attempt it, or that the expectations of George differ between the two settings. Gail expresses the view that George
gets on better when he has the individual support but that she does not expect this all the time. Gail is sharing that her understanding of the support that George needs is prompting and therefore the schools strategy of support to do this is effective.

Gail discusses the strategies that she uses with George and how these suggest that she does not view these as over and above what you would reasonably be expected to do in meeting your child’s needs. Gail is setting out what her expectations are of her children and also of herself as a parent. It is only then when such expectations are not met that this would lead to concern and worry.

If he doesn’t want to do something he digs his heels in and he won’t do it erm and then that causes his temper so it’s, it’s like my husband, because I spend so much time with them know how to phrase things to get him to do it whereas if you don’t, if you say something one way or you say it in a different way you can have two different outcomes so he’ll either lose his temper or he’ll go ‘hmm alright then’ like kids do. (Lines 135-142)

The final phrase ‘like kids do’ reiterates that this is what, in Gail’s view, would usually be expected of a child and therefore not an issue. Gail is able to normalise George’s behaviour in relation to her perception of his child development. Gail is aware however that school are concerned and Gail discussed her frustration when school were using strategies that she was not aware of or that she had not been given all of the resources for. Gail continues to share that she is willing to follow the strategies that school employs and therefore be compliant with their wishes.
Soooo it’s like, it’s been like four or eight months where they’re using something which we haven’t been using at home so we haven’t been reiterating it and bringing it to his mind, front of his mind all the time, if he has been losing his temper. (Lines 248-253)

Throughout the interview Gail maintains that the issues that George may have are developmental and that he will grow out of them, thereby deconstructing any ‘problem’. She also shares that it is as likely that George’s difficulties are environmentally based and not within child. This continues Gail’s narrative that she does not see her son as having significant difficulties which require intervention from a range of professionals.

We are finding as he is getting older and getting more used to it that he is hopefully calming down a bit and getting a bit better so……. (Lines 253-255)

And

So hopefully as he gets older and the school lessons get more structured and he’ll get a timetable of when he is doing what so he knows what’s coming on it might be a bit easier for him. (Lines 300-303)

Gail explores family traits as a further reason for George’s behaviour and these are again viewed positively and with understanding. It may be suggested that as both parents are working that Gail sees that following family traits as not necessarily a negative.

...because I were the same I didn’t like authority in schools so yeah and I’m stubborn and I dig my heels in so maybe I understand better than most. (Lines 375-377)
It is of interest that Gail has used the phrase ‘I understand better than most’ it could be suggested that given Gail’s standpoint of not necessarily agreeing with school staff’s perception of her child, this could be her expressing that they do not understand her child for who he is. They wish to place labels upon him and to see that there is something wrong whereas she sees him as an extension of herself with the same traits that she herself has.

Finally Gail looks to the curriculum and the expectation on children as being a further explanation for George’s difficulties in school. Her perception is that children do not have play in their education and therefore this is less motivating for George. She refers to her own character traits as she expresses that she, as an adult would have difficulty sitting for as long as the children are expected to do.

They don’t seem to be children two minutes before it’s like they want to start school and sit like robots doing classes, not moving, not speaking just learn learn learn learn learn and there’s no play anymore. Which it all used to be learn through play that was the main thing make it fun for them and they’ll learn more and now it seems to be well yeah that’s what we’re supposed to do but we still want them to sit and not do anything and sit still and not move and... they’re kids... they’re still finding out about stuff and everything so, I mean I struggle to sit still and I’m 38! (Lines 424-434)

This final monologue which concludes the interview gives us insight into Gail’s perception of childhood and education. It suggests that with her belief of what children
should be expected to do, her son would not have difficulties and that such difficulties are only socially constructed through the expectations of the education system.

4.3.3.4 Summary: finding solutions

Gail shared her understanding of the strategies that school were employing to support George. Gail’s understanding of these appeared limited with the main role being prompting.

Gail continued to use problem free talk with regarding how she supports George at home. She shared strategies to support George but viewed these as what she would usually expect to do to support her child at home. Gail also views that George is having fewer issues as he gets older and that he will not require support in time, this was in contrast to what school had said to her. Finally Gail reiterates that it is the environmental conditions and the curriculum which means that her child is perceived as having difficulties whereas if this were to be different her son would not be different from the others.

4.2.4 Summary of case 2

Gail has a dominant dialogue that is present throughout the interview and in her expressed interpretation of him in school, that her son only has issues within school and that she does not perceive her son to have difficulties. This narrative is within all of the subordinate themes. Gail searches for explanations and reasons as to why school may have difficulties with her son and put these down to environmental issues.

Gail’s perspective may also be a barrier to her hearing the messages that the range of professionals are trying to give regarding her son’s needs in school. The professionals
may also not be actively listening to what Gail has to say about how George responds within alternative environments. The use of specific language and Gail’s feelings of being pushed are likely to compound the lack of understanding between parents and professionals.

Gail is disempowered by communication difficulties and perceives that school staff are not being open and honest with her. The number of professionals is overwhelming and there is limited understanding as to the specific roles of each of the professionals involved. Gail does not wish to look to labels and is overwhelmed by the speed with which she perceived her son was ‘pigeon holed’ on entry to school.

Gail and school staff have developed solutions for the difficulties that George is having in school although Gail finds the communication barrier does not always allow for her knowing exactly what is happening. It could be suggested that Gail wishes to have control in what is done to support her child, have the knowledge to understand why each of the professionals are involved and to make decisions as to what she thinks is important. Gail wishes to be informed about all the activities in place and when George is seen. It could be suggested that this would redress the balance of George being her child and for her to be the most important person regarding her child.

4.4 Case 3

4.4.1 Interview 3 contextual information

Mary had agreed to be contacted after discussion with the EP for her son. On contact by telephone by the researcher a home visit was set up. On attendance at the home visit Mary was not at home. The researcher contacted Mary again by phone to see if she
was still available, if she wished to withdraw from the research or whether she wished to rearrange the interview. Mary stated that she had forgotten about the interview and that she was happy to rearrange. Mary was at home for the rearranged date. I had to try and build a rapport with Mary prior to the interview as she appeared nervous and this was to reassure Mary that I was interested in what she had to say.

4.4.2 Case 3 findings

This interview was relatively brief at fifteen minutes, however there were still recurring themes identified as the subordinate themes and these corresponded to some of the superordinate themes from the other interviews. However, for this interview there were only four clearly evidenced superordinate themes. These are: the development of a shared understanding; the child as an individual; the role of parents; and finding solutions.
Figure 3: Superordinate themes and subordinate themes from interview 3
4.4.3 Exploration of superordinate themes: Interview 3

4.4.3.1 Superordinate theme 1: development of shared understanding

At intermittent points throughout the interview Mary’s comments suggest that although she was engaged in this interview to discuss her child’s behaviour difficulties, she wanted to point out that he was showing improvement. When Mary used emotional language to describe her son, Daniel’s, difficulties, she then follows this up with an improvement comment such as:

M...every time the phone rung, I knew it were summat bad, I had to go and pick him up from school, it were horrible.

I: Right

M. But he’s started being a bit better now. (lines 8-11)

This also highlights some of communication issues that Mary raised when her son first had difficulties in school, in that communication was usually negative. Mary reports of feeling ‘dread’ (line 6) when having to pick Daniel up or ‘oh what are they going to tell me today’ (line 20).

Mary comments that ‘I had to go and pick him up from school’ in response to a phone call from school. This suggests that Mary had limited choices as she feels that for herself to be seen as a supportive mother she had to comply with the school staff request. Although attendance at school is statutory there is no statutory obligation to pick children up before the end of the school day without a formal exclusion. There is no evidence that
Mary advocates for her son or questions the decisions made by the school staff. Or if Mary was not available to collect Daniel from school.

Mary discusses that communication improved through the use of the common assessment framework (CAF) meetings, although this raised an issue of Mary’s understanding of what CAF meant and confusion with other meetings namely CAFCAS, which is part of the court proceedings for family custody. Regardless of the title of the meeting, Mary appeared to value the level of communication that she received through these CAF meetings:

Yeah, cos I obviously got to find out everything they were doing and what’s been happening um, instead of just like seeing his teacher at the end of the day. (Lines 78-80)

Mary’s engagement in the CAF meeting also enabled her to share her views, although there were times when she didn’t feel listened to and school staff did not take on her advice. Mary demonstrated that she knew her child’s behaviour over extended periods of time, in a way that school staff were not able to do. This knowledge meant that Mary knew that although her son’s behaviour was improving times of change would most likely lead to further behaviour difficulties.

...they wanted to close the CAF meeting, I said don’t close it, I think it were end of year one, they closed it, and I said don’t close it ‘cos he’ll start again. (Lines 89-92)
Mary reflected that communication had changed over time and that she now received both positive and negative phone calls from the school. Mary stated that she valued that she has been told everything that has been happening regarding her son and that this meant that she can reward Daniel when he has had good days at school. When prompted Mary confirmed that receiving positive information about Daniel also benefitted how she felt. As Daniel had challenging behaviours from a young age in school, Mary’s comments suggest that the information from school guided her relationship with her son.

*It’s like I have to pick him up from school and I have like planned to do something with him but I pick him up and he hasn’t been good so I can’t do anything with him. (Lines 110-113)*

Within the interviewing process there was a feeling of nervousness and tension, Mary presented as lacking confidence in her parenting but appeared eager to get it right and to do what she had been told by professionals. Mary commented upon a very positive relationship with some of the staff working with her son and valued the help that they had given.

*...S who works with him she’s absolutely amazing and she’s done everything with him, she takes him for one to one work, she does like anger management, she does all different skills with him so she’s been really good. (Lines 64-68)*
Mary did comment on her ability to be able to communicate with the staff and that she did feel able to do so. However she comments that you need ‘to be right with them’ (line 148) which suggests that she is not aggressive in her manner with school. She has a level of detachment in her responses which maintains the power imbalance and suggests that she is not empowered within these interactions with school staff.

*I’ve just like got on with them and been right with them, if I’ve had something to say I’ve said it, if they’ve got something to say to me they’ve said it. Good communication really. (Lines 147-750)*

Mary suggests an equal partnership between her and the other professionals involved however, when asked further questions Mary showed a lack of confidence and her comments do not suggest that she is empowered by the process.

*I’m no good at all these questions and stuff (line 155)*

Other indicators that Mary lacked confidence, and therefore potentially disempowered with professionals was the way in which she interacted with me, she reiterated several times that Daniel’s behaviour had improved with a linguistic tone of anxiety and whilst remaining curled up on the sofa facing away from me. Mary showed trust in those adults that she know well and had developed a relationship with and was then guided by their suggestions such as getting the EP involved.
Well his teacher that works with him she’s really good so she just explained everything to me and erm well I just said ‘yeah its fine, whatever’ if it’s going to help him then I am happy. (Lines 47-50)

The discussion with Mary suggested that she is positive on commenting on other professionals in school and that their use of the CAF meetings enabled her to know what was happening for her child. However, this comment does not suggest any emotional attachment to the difficulties expressed in school. It could be suggested that Mary feels a lack of choice as Daniel has to attend a school setting but also that she may feel that she has no further opinion or view to offer from her ideographic perspective. Mary’s tone and perceived nervousness with myself also raises the question as to whether Mary is empowered by this process and confident or whether she just goes along with professional’s decisions and discussions. It is evident that the increased communication and the development of relationships between Mary and school staff have led to some shared understanding of Daniel’s needs.

4.4.3.2 Superordinate theme 2: the child as an individual

Mary was able to clearly state the range of behaviours that she sees with her son Daniel at home and that these are the behaviours that he also demonstrates in school. Even when sharing a list of behaviours Mary was eager to share that her son was improving and showing greater restraint such as ‘he’s calmed down a bit’ (line 43).
Mary comments that school staff know her child well and are able to put things in place to meet his needs. Mary’s comments suggest that she may trust the members of staff as she relied on their information when agreeing to a referral to outside agencies.

...well his teacher that works with him she’s really good’ (line 47)

And

...she’s been absolutely amazing and she’s done everything with him (line 65-66)

Within the interview Mary shared very few other characteristics of Daniel and this was not asked for explicitly. When Mary raised treats for Daniel out of school there was no indication as to what these might be or the sorts of activities that he enjoyed at home.

It is not known why Mary did not give further information regarding Daniel, suggestions could be that: it was not requested; or if Mary’s concern of another professional talking to her inhibited her responses; she was concerned of being judged; she thought that this is not what people want to hear; that she did not think that the information was important or that she did not have any further information to give. Mary frequently gave direct answers to the questions asked and it could be assumed that this compliant, non-challenging approach was typical when working with professionals in and out of school.

Daniel’s individual characteristics, such as not liking change, which Mary comments upon briefly, he don’t like changing (line 95) will impact upon his behaviour. Daniel will also have interests that he enjoys doing, which are alluded to when Mary raises
treats outside of school but from this interview it is very difficult to gain a holistic view of Daniel’s strengths and difficulties or how he is viewed by school staff.

4.4.3.3 Superordinate theme 3: the role of parents

Mary uses a range of emotive language when discussing how it has been for her as a parent. In her opening description of her experiences (lines 5 -9) she uses the adjectives ‘dread’, ‘bad stuff’, ‘summat bad’ and ‘it were horrible’ this language suggests that Mary feels some responsibility for her child’s behaviour and therefore the information shared with her has caused her some emotional distress. She continued to go on to say that she had found it ‘stressful’ (line 23) and when summing up her experiences of having a child in school, as ‘it’s been a nightmare’ (line 105).

It is interesting to consider if this primarily emotional response to Daniel’s behaviour in school has dictated how Mary has worked with school staff. Such as, being compliant with school staff requests and approaches and possibly being more of a passive recipient, accepting of the help offered by the school. It is positive that Mary feels that the school staff have put things in place for her child and that they have met his needs but she did not share that she has introduced any of her own strategies or approaches that she then uses in her daily interactions. When asked about general advice for parents Mary was able to share a number of strategies but in the way she recounted these it suggested that this was a given list rather than well used strategies and fundamentally believed by Mary.

...You’ve just got to try and ignore when they are kicking off, you’ve got to try and ignore them and make sure that that if you’re like punishing them you’re sticking to it cos if
they know they can get away with it then they’re clearly just going to keep doing it. Don’t lose it (laughs). That’s it really. (Lines 140-145)

When delivering these strategies Mary laughed when she stated ‘don’t lose it’, this could be interpreted in a couple of ways: this could suggest a nervousness of the situation particularly as it is following a string of negative information and she is possibly trying to make light of this or that she is ambivalent to the situation and she is indicating detachment by laughing at what she has been asked to do.

It could be suggested that school staff appeared to dictate how Mary should interact with her child in that if they gave her positive information she and Daniel could go out and enjoy time together but that if the information was negative there was an expectation that Daniel would not receive positive attention from Mary.

*I pick him up and he ‘ant been good so I can’t do anything with him. So it’s like. Or he’s grounded all the time ‘cos he’s not allowed out for being naughty and then I feel awful but there’s nowt I can do. He needs to learn. (Lines 110-115).*

The comments suggest that feeling unable to act positively is something that Mary may find difficult and that it suggests the emotional impact of managing her son’s behaviour. It suggests that she takes a passive view and evokes a sense of powerlessness. She does not demonstrate in her discussion advocating for her son or mediating between her son’s and the school staff’s view. When Mary was asked about any further information that she would like to share Mary found it difficult to respond and her answers showed
limited reflection on the situation. Mary had limited criticism for the support that she had received and her comment of ‘there’s nowt I can do (line 115)’ suggests a level of disempowerment and doing as she is told.

4.4.3.4 Superordinate theme 4: finding solutions

Throughout the interview there were suggestions that the approaches from school started with the sharing of bad news and what could be interpreted as exclusionary approaches as Mary was asked to take her son home. It is not known from this interview as to whether these were recorded as formal exclusions.

Every time the phone rung, I knew it were summit bad I had to go pick him up from school, it were horrible. (Lines 7-9)

When asked about Daniel’s behaviour she commented that she had not assumed that he would continue with his behaviours within the school setting. The comments suggests that attendance at school itself would be the factor that Mary thought would impact upon Daniel’s behaviour.

He’s always had a temper on him but I didn’t think he’d be like that at school. (Lines 28-29)
Mary goes on to comment upon the behaviours that her son shows both in and out of school. When describing the behaviours Mary does not allude to any strategies that she uses with her son or may have used in the past.

*It’s like when he can’t get what he wants or when you say no or if you do summit that he don’t want to do and it were just like a major argument and kicking off, throwing stuff, punching stuff, slamming stuff’. (Lines 32-35)*

Mary’s comments suggest that strategies implemented by the school staff were initially unsuccessful as she was not always able to talk to a member of staff and find out how the day had gone. Although Mary was sympathetic with regard to why this was not always possible. Once the school staff put a CAF meeting in place for Mary she was able to be better informed about how Daniel was managing. The interview suggests some reliance on school based strategies as Mary places importance on the CAF meetings and does not want these to stop when her son is coming up to a point of transition. Mary comments upon very few other strategies and how these work with her son.

*Well obviously at the end of every day the teachers got other parents and kids to deal with, they’ve not always got time to like say he’s not had a good day, but he’s not had a bad day, at CAFCAS meetings they tell you what’s been happening and stuff. (Lines 80-84)*
One of the strategies that Mary does highlight is having the discussion with her son each morning as to how he is going to get on.

*Tells me he’s going to be good every single morning and then when I pick him up I can tell by the look on his face if he has been good or not. (Lines 100-103)*

Mary exhibits some frustration with her son’s ability to modify his behaviour, this could suggest that she struggles to understand his difficulties and possibly what she is able to do about them. To her it is a simple decision and this difficulty with seeing situations from her son’s perspective may make it difficult for Mary to be able to adapt her own behaviour or to offer Daniel other strategies that he might use. It could be suggested that this difficulty with mind mindedness has impacted upon Daniel’s ability to reflect upon his emotions and behaviour.

*It’s just. You just want him to, but he’s doing really well in his work it’s just his behaviour so it were just like. All you need to do is to make your behaviour well and then everything is fine. (Lines 107-110)*

Mary is able to reflect upon the strategies put in place by the school such as anger management and individual support, she is also able to list a range of behaviour management strategies such as ignoring and following through on your decisions but missing throughout the interview is any reference to the impact of these strategies. She comments that he is getting better and calming down but these appear to be within child
differences such as ‘he’s calmed down a bit’ she does not comment upon whether techniques such as grounding him, or giving him rewards is effective in supporting him to manage his emotions.

4.4.4 Summary of case 3

Although Mary stated that she was happy to take part in the interview, and indeed she rearranged after not being available for the first appointment, she appeared nervous sitting with her legs folded up and facing away from me. She showed anxiety in wanting to get the answers to the questions right and asked on a couple of occasion if she had understood correctly. Mary did not always understand the questions as intended and although questions were generally open ended they were answered with short answers without a lot of elaboration, particularly at the beginning of the interview. Mary did not share the level of additional information about her son that the other mothers had been keen for me to know such as their likes and interests and their own strategies for helping their child manage their emotions. Mary’s lack of confidence is likely to influence how she interacts with the professionals in schools, being compliant with their requests and concerned to avoid further exclusions. This may then help to understand the reliance upon school based strategies and the impact of the school on Mary and her son in steering when he is rewarded, when he is able to access treats and when he is grounded.

From the interview there is no evidence of reflective functioning, as might be observed through reference to how Daniel may feel about the situation. It would appear that Mary sees Daniel as an extension of herself and therefore she can do little to change the situation, all she can do is try to comply with requests made of her in order to fulfil the
statutory request of him attending school. When Mary discusses interventions these are either school based or home based and do not exhibit any interaction between the two, other than withdrawing positives. Mary laughs on a few occasions during the interview and the placement of these indicates that Mary is actually disengaged from what school is trying to achieve and does not really consider it once they have left school. It would be easier for her when picking him up if he ‘just made his behaviour well and then everything will be fine’ (line 109)
Chapter Five Discussion

5.1 Evaluative summary

This discussion will aim to evaluate how the analysis of the data is able to answer the research question. It also aims to identify the implications for further research and for practice both within school and educational psychology services. Limitations of the research will also be raised with the possible impact that such limitations may have had on the research findings.

The initial part of this discussion will look to bring together the analysis for each of the superordinate themes, how these compare and contrast for each of the participant’s experiences and to therefore draw some conclusions as to the potential impact and interaction of each of the superordinate themes. These conclusions are the response to the research question.

The research question that the data analysis has addressed is: What are mother’s experiences of school regarding their child’s challenging behaviour and referral to the educational psychology service?

5.1.1 Development of shared understanding

The title of this superordinate theme suggests that this collection of experiences represent how gaining an understanding of the child is a developmental and ongoing process. As a developmental process it is also one which may or may not be achieved and the rate at which each of the parties, mothers and school staff, move towards understanding each other’s perspectives can be varied. Therefore this is an active and dynamic process,
which is likely to continue for the duration of time that the child is in school, as they develop and change with age.

There are two consistent subordinate themes as to how the development of shared understanding is achieved across all three participants. These are communication and external agencies, including EPs. As highlighted in the research on parental involvement by Porumbu and Necșoi (2013) the interpersonal interactions significantly impact upon how each of the parties communicate with each other. Linked to this, the development of relationships with professionals both within school and with external agencies, to gain shared understanding. There is an onus on the EP, other agencies and the school staff to ensure that parent perspectives are heard, acknowledged and recorded so that their views should not be negated or dismissed. There is a clear overlap with the superordinate theme of finding solutions as in order to formulate and develop any joint solutions this would require shared understanding of the child’s needs.

The accounts the participants in this research revealed that communication was a dominant theme for all of the mothers and the nature and quality of the communication had significant impacts upon the women. They all shared the emotional impact of receiving negative accounts of their child and how they were getting on at school.

All the women interviewed encountered the ‘expert model’ as described by Dale (1996) where they were told by the school what the problem was and how school staff wished to resolve it. Sandy experienced her child being labelled as naughty by the school staff, she pursued medical labels and external agency support to try and move this expert opinion. In contrast Gail was told that her child had a range of needs that required medical assessment and a number of education based professionals. Gail did not want her child to
be labelled and complained that school staff were trying to ‘pigeon hole’ her child. Finally, Mary was not given a label for her child but both she and her son were expected to participate in a range of school directed activities.

In the use of the expert model (Dale 1996) all three women shared the emotional impact of being subjected to education professional’s opinions about their children. They all commented upon feeling distressed at the experiences that they have had and the ways in which they have been communicated with by the school staff. Sandy commented that “we used to go away from there absolutely mortified” (line 27). Gail expressed her experience as “the kids have been put in pigeon holes as bit as though they have been classified as oh this one’s got this wrong with it” (line 4-6) and finally Mary described feeling “I used to dread picking him up from school cos they just used to tell me bad stuff all the time” (lines 5-7). Greene (2011) commented upon the use of negative language when working with families and that this can lead to disempowerment and barriers between school staff and parents. Greene (2011) advocated the use of the term ‘lagging skills’ as a more positive approach to describe difficulties.

All three women interviewed were able to describe regular meetings in school. However, none of the mothers described these as two way meetings in which they were actively listened to or where there was equal partnership. Mary shared the experience of asking the school to keep the CAF meetings open for her son but that the meetings had been stopped; Sandy described meetings as either her being told what the problem was with her child in negative terms or in her view, being asked to provide the targets for her child in school; and Gail shared attending meetings where she did not understand what was being said, not being aware of incidents discussed or being encouraged to organise and attend
medical appointments that she did not wish to make. None of the examples above suggest equal partnership between the schools and the mothers, whereas Lewis, Kim and Bey (2011) found that for the development of positive relationships between staff and parents, teacher’s need to show respect for the parent’s knowledge and skills.

There are, however, examples of school trying to share their concerns and ‘informing’ the mother. This is explained by Dale (1996) as the transplant model, whereby there is still a power imbalance, and that balance of power is held with the school as experts within the system, but they try and share information with the parents so that parents can make informed choices. Within this model the information is heavily lead and potentially biased towards the view that the school staff and the invited external agencies are holding. However, it is how such information is delivered to the mother which then impacts upon how the information is perceived.

The women held a range of views with regard to the external agencies and their role within the development of shared understanding. Sandy, with her knowledge of education systems, had actively pursued external agencies being involved with her son in order to break from the stereotype of him just being labelled as a naughty child. Sandy: “Erm I think that I’d suggested that maybe it would be good for an educational psychologist to be involved (Lines 190-192)

She therefore comments upon the role of these external professionals in adjusting the perspective of the staff and when one external agency is less successful there is a further referral to the educational psychology service. When the educational psychology service referral was discussed with the other two mothers they commented on accepting the referral if the school thought that it would help.
Gail commented that she was not fully informed as to the reasons behind the referral and would have liked to have understood this better. *Gail:* “So it could be explained a bit better when you are first referred and you could possibly do with like a proper sit down conversation with the teacher where they explain exactly what they think instead of it just being we think he needs to see a psychologist doing, we think he needs this and we think he needs that” *(Lines 391-397)*

Gail’s comment that she would like a proper sit down conversation suggests that she does not understand the problems from the perspective of the school and that there may be a role for greater opportunities to meet with the class teacher with appropriate space and time. Information as to the specific difficulties that the class teacher is finding in school without judgement or prejudice regarding the home situation, could lay the foundation for the mother working alongside the teacher, with how the mother may tackle such issues, if they exist in the home situation. Conversations, even well managed, are going to cause some emotional reactions for the mother as they take on board the difficulties that their child is having in school *(Gascoigne, 1995)*. It is useful to have regular meetings so that the parent is able to reflect upon the situation and their response to it. This approach may be useful in many cases but there may be those parents who see that the problem is based only in school and it is therefore solely the responsibility of the school to find solutions. Some mothers may view that they have little to give with regard to collaborative working and therefore just go along with school’s suggestions and strategies. In addition it could also be considered that the mother being the expert on their child could be intimidating for them and that they may be having difficulty and therefore not have developed their own effective strategies for working with their child.
In order to address some of these issues school staff need to be able to convey that parents’ opinions and engagement matters in their child’s education (Harris & Goodall, 2008) and parents need to be supported to be able to engage with the school system and staff.

When Mary comments regarding the referral to the educational psychology service she expressed that she had received an explanation, that she did not question the reason for the involvement or the role that this involvement might take. *Mary: “She just explained everything to me and erm well I just said Yeah, That’s fine, whatever, if it’s going to help him then I am happy.”* (lines 48-50)

It is possible that an understanding of the role of an EP prior to the school wishing to request their involvement assists in this intervention being viewed positively and proactively. For those parents who may not have been aware of the work of educational psychologists or other professionals within the school setting such a request can be daunting. Therefore the parent, possibly in order to be compliant with the schools request for support, agree to the referral with little understanding of what this means. It could be suggested that the statutory nature of the school system immediately disempowers parents and they comply in order to be seen to be doing all that they are requested to so that their child continues to attend school. Furthermore, there is not always agreement between educational psychologists as to the exact nature of the work that they undertake and how this is communicated (Burnham, 2013) so it may be that school staff are unsure how to communicate this role to parents.

Gail and Sandy both saw the professionals as working ‘within child’ and that they provided opinions based upon the medical model of diagnostic labels. This was a concern
for Gail as she did not want her son to be given labels and expressed that within their family dynamic there were no issues. Sandy and Mary had both assigned their own labels to their children’s needs. Sandy was looking to a medical diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) whereas Mary used colloquial phrases such as ‘he wasn’t right cracking’ to describe Daniel’s behaviour.

The use of subject specific and complex language and acronyms emphasises the lack of control and knowledge that those parents outside of education may have. There is a lack of linguistic congruence between that used by the professionals and that used by the mothers. Mary was unable to recall the names of meetings and advice from the external professionals and tended to just remember the information from the staff that she has regular contact with. Mary: ‘er CAFCAS meetings or whatever they were’ (Line 55) Gail is aware of the number of professionals but finds it difficult to recall their long and complex titles and the possible role that they may have in supporting George. Gail: ‘They wanted to get the psychologist involved and the. I can never remember the name. child. C.I?’ (Lines 144-145)

This lack of in depth understanding of the vocabulary and the roles of the education professionals and their advice compounds the power imbalance for the mothers. Mary’s ability to reflect on the situation and to add further insight to her child difficulties appears to be limited and therefore she is happy to go along with whatever people say without questioning these approaches. Sandy’s experiences are made more difficult by the role of the head teacher, and the gravitas of such a role, therefore she sought mediation through the external agencies. Gail reflected on being disempowered by not having access to all the information, she emphasised that she was always contactable in some way and that she
needed to know if people were coming in to see George. She commented upon not having
time to consider incidents and being aware of all the strategies that professionals had
advised. Taking into consideration her desire not to have a label for her child it could be
perceived that she required the information in order to be able to actively argue against it or
say that it was not required and therefore protect her family’s status quo.

This research would also support the argument made by Crozier (1999) that school
staff adopt the same strategies when promoting parental engagement irrespective of the
differences that the parents may have, therefore due to the strategies being from a
logocentric position this can reinforce working class parents’ view as passive and fatalistic.

Although not an explicit superordinate theme within the initial analysis of the
individual case studies, it is evident from the joining of the experiences and how they each
sought to gain a shared understanding of their children that their relationships with the staff
in the school significantly impacted upon their experiences and the actions that they took.
Kalin and Šteh (2010) found in their review of teacher parent cooperation that teachers are
aware of the effectiveness of mutual problem solving when a child is having difficulties.
Kalin and Šteh (2010) concluded that it is a matter for discussion as to whether teachers are
ready to accept parents as partners and demise from their role as the only experts and
develop their confidence in developing these interpersonal relationships and the
expectations of the wider social environment.

This development of relationships is a two way process both in how schools
approach and share with mothers their concerns and with how open, honest and engaging
the mothers are with the schools. This is a dynamic relationship and is impacted upon by
those early interactions which all of our mothers state were negative. This interpersonal
relationship between the home and school settings can see the sides rallying against each other, leading to disguised compliance as mothers make decisions to appease the school or ambivalence as mothers feel they have no options, little to add and have to comply due to the statutory nature of the education system. These experiences would support the view of Todd (2007) whereby what is often missing from these relationships is reciprocity whereby parents and children play a central role and are not just led by professionals and that this will continue to confirm inequalities and do little to facilitate inclusion.

5.1.2 The child as an individual

The child as an individual is closely related to the previous superordinate theme of the development of shared understanding. However it is distinct, as this superordinate theme represents more of the parent’s views of how they see their child. It is then this aspect that in the previous superordinate theme is potentially not heard and acknowledged by those professionals around the child.

Each of the mothers, but most particularly Sandy and Gail, shared their view of how they wished their child to be viewed in the world and how they saw the identity of their child. It was of note that Mary gave very little information regarding how she viewed her child and there was little evidence of his identity other than the problems that she experienced both inside and outside of school.

Sandy and Gail’s need to promote their child’s characteristics and identity as viewed by others would appear to drive how they worked with the school to develop shared understanding. Sandy’s responses were very protective of her son, acknowledging that there were issues that they had to manage, but wanting these to be seen as a developmental delay and medically rooted. Such views could also stem from Sandy’s understanding of
child development, as a teacher, and then knowing that she could employ an expert in child
development, the EP, to promote her views further. ‘Sandy: *The educational psychologist*
came in and that was a bit of a turning point for school because she sort of very much
outlined what Corey’s issues were’. *(Lines 86-87)*

This is in direct contrast to Gail who is potentially defensive of others’ views of her
son. She does not engage in problem talk and continually emphasises George’s positive
traits and that these are indeed family traits and as such people outside of the family are, in
criticising George, criticising her and her family unit. *Gail: ‘I do know that he was having
anger issues but his dad is the same, short fuse, er but it’s all how you say things most of
the time.’ *(Lines 370-373)*

Mary does not show evidence of either being defensive or being overly protective of
Daniel. She empathises with the traits seen in school and this is in agreement with the
behaviour that she sees at home. She does not push for any change in perception of school
staff. When Mary commented that she did not expect Daniel to be the same at school as he
was at home, she acknowledges that she thought that the change in setting would support a
change in behaviour and that potentially, she did not have to change his behaviour. She is
accepting that this is who he is and that there is little that she can do, or needs to do, to
change that. *Mary: ‘He always had a temper on him but. I didn’t think he’d be like that in
school.’ *(Lines 28-29)* As in McAllister et al. (2005) it is likely that even with limited
insight Mary would have been able to comment on her son’s readiness for school and been
able to benefit from support with his early challenging behaviour.

In common with all the mothers interviewed was the promotion of positive and
contrasting views of their child from school staff views. Lowe and Chapparo (2009) in their
research may be able to explain this due to the parent’s and school staff’s different priorities for education and therefore concerns from mothers may not be the same as school staff concerns.

Mary frequently commented that Daniel was improving and getting better in his behaviour. Gail used contrasts with George’s peers and family members to maintain that George’s behaviour is normal. It is these comparisons that appear to inform Gail regarding child development and what she might expect as George and his sibling get older. Gail also views some of the traits that school share as problematic as positive within the home context and that these behaviours, such as happy to play alone, are valued and positive within the home situation. George is who he is and there is no need to do anything about this.

Sandy is accepting of her son’s characteristics and that these may be challenging, however, she maintains a positive outlook and works hard to reframe the school staff’s negative perceptions. Sandy seeks out reasons and looks to externalise the problem, Corey is not the problem; the ADHD is the problem. This highlights the need for a diagnosis that cannot be argued against by negative school staff and provides validation for the reasonable adjustments made by the school staff with positive perceptions of Corey. Corey is who he is and those around him can change. ‘Sandy: ‘the real reasons as to why he does things it, but it, did take a while for them to establish that no, it’s not because he’s an unkind child’.

(Lines 35-37)

It is these perspectives which impact upon the way in which the mothers interact with the school staff. The mothers are advocates for their children and look to represent their child as they are comfortable with them being seen, particularly within the school
context and with how staff interact and perceive their children’s difficulties. When this is in conflict the mothers are then taking on a role to maintain and protect their view of their child and not just to conform to the perspective of those with the greatest power.

5.1.3 The role of being a parent

The mothers’ perceptions of their role as parents was quite diverse but with the common themes of parental responsibility, parent knowledge, identity as a parent and parents as powerless.

All of the parents accepted some responsibility for their child. They all regularly attended meetings in school, and discussed strategies that school raised. Sandy was proactive in going in to school to share her views. Gail and Mary also went into school but this was at the request of school staff. It could be suggested that due to the compulsory nature of school attendance in the UK, both mothers believed that they had to engage with school staff. Gail’s experiences suggest that her compliance may be due to wanting to be perceived as a ‘good parent’ and as such not under further scrutiny from school staff and other professionals. ‘Gail: I kept saying yeah yeah I’ll look into it yeah, yeah, yeah. In the end I did take him to the doctors’. (Lines 35-37) Mary presents as being passive within the system and complying because she is asked to do so. These experiences support the argument by Crozier (1998) that teachers persuade parents to adopt their value system of what it means to be a good parent and a good pupil, and that those who share the agenda are acceptable but for those who do not they can be left without a voice or tensions can surface.

The prior knowledge that the parents bring to the situation regarding either the education system or child development impacts upon how the mothers perceive their child’s difficulties in school. Sandy’s background in teaching and having experienced
education with her older children enables her to have a baseline for expectations for Corey. However, Sandy also wished to delineate between herself as a professional and how she saw herself as a parent, ‘Sandy: I could be anything, it should make no difference, if you’re a parent, you’re a parent and thats how it should be, isn’t it really?’ (Lines 395-397) For Mary and Gail, these are their first children to go through the education system. Sandy was able to turn to organisations such as Parent Partnership to discuss her concerns regarding the school’s approach with her son and consider a range of options whereas there is no evidence to say that either Mary or Gail were aware of this service.

Although Gail did not have older siblings or experience within school to draw upon, she was given information by the medical practitioners that she saw and who were consulted with. The knowledge that Gail took from these meetings was that these medical professionals were not concerned about her son’s behaviour or difficulties as expressed by school staff and therefore she did not have to buy in to school staff’s concerns. ‘Gail: ‘the doctor looked at him, checked him all over, and said he didn’t need to see the occupational therapist’’. (Lines 37-39)

Mary’s knowledge of the difficulties and expectations for her son were led by the information that she was given by the school staff that she was working with. Therefore she had no information to contrast with, such as siblings or medical practitioners, and as Mary experienced Daniel’s behaviours within the home setting she did not feel any necessity to challenge or contradict schools concerns. It is also likely that Mary would not have known that activities such as being rung up to collect her son was not a legal course of action but it may have been preferable to Mary than a formal exclusion. It could be suggested that the threat of formal exclusions would encourage Mary to comply with requests from school
staff. ‘Mary: Every time the phone rung, I knew it were summat bad and I had to go and pick him up from school’. (Lines 7-8)

All three mothers experienced some sense of powerlessness when trying to assert their views to the school staff. Such a sense of powerlessness is likely to impact upon the emotional wellbeing of the mothers. Sandy referred to it being ‘a nightmare’ (line 350) when school staff took the action of excluding her son from after school club, she also reported conflicting views with the head teacher and the limited options that she had to manage this such as moving schools, Sandy: Corey’s entitled to go to that school’. (Line 281). Gail repeatedly comments upon her resistance to the ‘pigeon holes’ that the children are put into and although she resisted taking her son to the doctors she eventually took him. Gail also comments upon not being able to understand what the professionals are talking about and the terms that they are using as well as the number of professionals involved. Gail: ‘so because there’s like more people there that know what they’re talking about and there’s us that haven’t got a clue it tends to be that we have to say can you explain what you’re talking about and what do you mean?’. (Lines 158-162) Gail shares a sense of frustration at not being in control of what is happening and what others are thinking about her son. She wants to be informed of every visit and recommendation completed by professionals. In contrast Mary describes her interactions as being dictated by the school staff and their reports each day. When Mary tried to stop the CAF meetings from closing she was unsuccessful and there is the sense of frustration that her view had not been acted upon. Mary: they closed it and I said don’t close cos he’ll start again.’ (Lines 91-92)

For all three mothers they are in a relatively powerless situation as also reported by previous research (Crozier, 1999; Dale, 2008; Todd & Higgins, 1998). Their children
accessing education is compulsory and therefore they may feel that they need to do all they can to support their child’s school attendance to which challenging behaviour is a threat. There are few options that parents have if they are unhappy with the management of their child in school. School staff have access to much greater resources and statutory procedures that support their position as the authority within the parent school relationship.

The mothers’ responses to having had children in school, with the school staff reporting behaviour difficulties, and the disempowered position of the parents was impacted by how they viewed their identity as a parent. Sandy wanted her child’s needs to be fully understood and to be accepted by the school community as he was at home. Sandy: ‘by the end of it they really understood how actually he’s a really nice little boy and is quite bright and he can do this and he can do that’, (Lines 49-52). Mary saw parallels in both her own view and in the view of school staff, Mary shows limited insight into what being a mother meant to her and how she parents her child was influenced by school promoted strategies. Mary’s laughter within the interview suggests that this has not impacted upon how she sees herself as a mother, and that she took a fairly light hearted view of the difficulties. Mary: ‘Don’t lose it (laughs) that’s it really.’ (Line 145)

Gail’s identity as a parent almost appears to be threatened by the implication that her son has difficulties in school. When discussing how the experiences have made her feel her comments are regarding ‘why my child? No-one else has said ought’s wrong’ (Lines 379-380) and looking for plausible reasons for nothing to be wrong. Gail looks to disengage from the problem in order to protect her identity as a parent with a child whose ‘dad is the same’. Gail places the problem at those around her son, as when she adapts her interactions there is no problem. Such defensiveness and rejection of the identification of
‘problems’ appears to imply that should such things be real and present this would be a failure of Gail’s parenting and potential failure as a mother. Gail: ‘why my child? He seems fine when he is at home, he does everything alright. Maybe it’s just school’ (Lines 388-390). Gail’s adaptation of her interactions reinforces to her that she is a good mother and that she is able to communicate effectively with her son in order to get the desired outcome, again rejecting that the difficulties lie within child.

Gail’s attempts to ‘normalise’ all of the difficulties as described by school could suggest that this is how she has developed her resilience in how she interacts with school. This is also a way in which she is able to accept that her son may have difficulties in school but that she does not see these difficulties within the family home, as within the home context they are normal. Dinnebeil et al. (2013) found that differences in social skills and problem behaviours can possibly be accounted for by the children behaving differently in different settings and in comparison to other children in the classroom. Gail draws parallels with herself as having similar difficulties and now being an achieving adult also serve to minimise the concerns as they didn’t stop her. Gail: ‘I mean I struggle to sit still and I’m 38. (Lines433-434)

Sandy shares other ways of developing resilience to the difficulties that her son is having in social situations. There is acceptance that Corey has difficulty in a range of situations and that Sandy has believed that she needed to ‘harden up’ and to access support services to manage the judgements of others.

Both Sandy and Gail’s interview responses suggests that the need to develop resilience is in part as a reaction to the perception of blame by school staff on the parents. Gascoigne (1995) commented that parents of children with emotional and behavioural
difficulties are likely to feel blamed and judged as opposed to their child’s needs being assessed. This blame is rejected by Gail when she responds ‘no one else has said oughs wrong’, (line 379) ‘my child seems alright’ (Line 420). Sandy also rejected the blame that she was put under by the school staff by reflecting upon the accusations, using her knowledge of her other children and the responses of others to work through the blame and conclude that it could not just be her fault. This led to Sandy pursuing the medical route and gaining a diagnosis for her son which places the blame at within child difficulties. Sandy: 
He has a diagnosis of ADHD now,’(Line 148). Even though Sandy pursued this diagnosis she continued to advocate for her child and wished to be presented on all occasions as his parent and therefore able to focus upon all of his positive characteristics.

It is evident that how these mothers perceive their role as parents and how they wish to see both themselves and their families projected in the world impact upon some of the decisions that they make and how they interact with the education system.

5.1.4 Finding solutions

All of the mothers interviewed had experienced both negative and positive relationships with school staff. It is these relationships, with staff whom the mothers usually had daily contact with, that they cited as being able to listen if they wanted to share information about their son that morning or who would share information with them.

Through these relationships between school staff and the mothers they have developed and implemented behaviour strategies. These strategies have been different for each of the mothers but in all cases have developed to more formal meetings in school. This supports collaborative approaches as described by Michail (2011) as a key solution to address behaviour and prevent exclusions from school.
Formal meetings in school and referral to external agencies have looked to explore how each of the children have accessed their education, their individual progress and to some extent the progress of those around them. It is through these meetings that the mothers have been able to compare their expectations of their child and those of the school staff. Sandy’s expectations incorporated an education viewpoint due to her training however her philosophy of inclusion and how Corey’s school staff viewed this are in contrast. Sandy: ‘I have taken advice from Parent Partnership and gone to the authority. What can I do because I am not happy about what this lady, you know, leading the school’.

(Lines 273-276)

For Gail and Mary this was their first experience of education as a non-participant. Mary’s expectation appeared to be such that school would fix her son’s difficulties and she was surprised when the difficulties that she observed at home continued to be present at school. Gail comments that her view of education is that it is too restrictive and that her son is struggling to conform to the curriculum constraints placed upon him. Gail: ‘...Sit like robots doing classes not moving, not speaking, just learn, learn ,learn, learn, learn and they don’t play anymore,’ (Lines 425-427). Gail and Sandy shared strategies that they found worked within the home situation but were more limited within the school environment. Gail and Sandy were able to explain that school staff had used some of their strategies but that this was maybe not to the extent that the mothers would have liked or that due to increased expectations in the classroom there were more limited opportunities.

Mary and Sandy had both experienced the use of exclusion from the school offer as a tool for school staff to be able to manage behaviour. Neither mother reflected positively on these experiences however, they both shared the negative emotional and social impact
that such approaches had on them as adults. *Sandy:* ‘*Corey was quite happy to come home earlier. All it did was make it a nightmare for me and my husband.’ *(Lines 349-350)*

Mary was compliant with school requested approaches such as withholding treats and being sent home, whilst school put in place individualised support including anger management and social skills groups. However, Mary’s view was still that her son should be able to make his behaviour better. *Mary:* ‘*All you need to do is make your behaviour well and then everything is fine.’ *(Lines 109-110)*

Sandy wanted to promote the use of the outside but this was becoming more limited in school as he was moving through the year groups and the academic expectations were increasing. Sandy does not mention about any individualised interventions for her son. Gail does share interventions for her son, such as social skills groups and individual support however she sees these as being for the benefit of school and not necessarily for the benefit of her son. Gail’s comments could be interpreted such that they suggest that she wanted to have all the information regarding interventions and concerns in order to be able to ‘test’ whether such suggestions are useful to her and almost to prove that her son does not need these at home, again adding the emphasis that this is a school related difficulty. *Gail:* ‘*they’re using something that we haven’t been using at home so we haven’t been like reiterating it and bringing it to his mind... we are finding as he is getting older and more used to it that he is hopefully calming down a bit and getting a bit better.’ *(Lines 249-255)*

Both Gail and Sandy engaged in a search for reasons. They both looked to find explanations for their son’s difficulties: for Sandy, this was for situations both inside and outside of school; for Gail, although there was some comparison with peers she focused
upon the reasons for him having difficulties in school. Gail: ‘I’m not sure if it’s a boredom thing because I know that he can do it.’ (Lines 174-175)

Both Gail and Sandy commented that their children had opportunities to socialise with other children before entering school. Both families were supported by grandparents for their childcare and commented that these opportunities may have been more limited than other children’s. Both mothers commented on considering this as a possible factor and then dismissing this as a reason for their children’s difficulties in school.

Sandy continued to provide varied social opportunities for Corey such as soft play and social groups to see if such regular contact would help him to improve his social skills. Gail also discussed access to play groups and comparison with her group of friends who had girls of a similar age. They both concluded that their children approached these social situations differently but Gail thought that this was due to George being male and Sandy assumed that her son was having difficulties in managing his energy and that this was impacting upon his interactions with others.

Both mothers then went on to assess whether they thought that this was likely to be a long term difficulty for their child or was purely developmental and that they grow out of it. Gail has accepted this as the reason for her sons difficulties and frequently commented that he is getting better and was therefore unhappy when school staff indicated that they believed that George had long term difficulties and that he would require intervention for all of his time in school. Gail: I did say ‘right so how long is these IEP’s going to be going on for? And they just said ‘oh all the way through his school’ and I were like ‘oh, right, ok’ which that were never explained to us.’ (Lines 408-411). Sandy’s assessment was that
Corey had more long term difficulties and therefore rejected that these were just developmental difficulties.

These alternative viewpoints have then led to very contrasting opinions on the role of labels to understand their child’s needs. Gail’s view of her son’s difficulties being developmental has led her to reject all attempts by professionals to assign labels to her son and she has been unhappy when referrals have been made or suggested to assign his difficulties as having a medical basis. For Gail all George’s difficulties can be explained through the genetic condition of being ‘like her’ or ‘like his dad’.

Sandy has had a contrasting experience of some staff assigning Corey’s behaviour difficulties as being naughty and fully within his control. Sandy: ‘I know that there’s something more than him just being a naughty boy or being mischievous or whatever.’ (Lines 132-134) Sandy explored medical reasons for her son’s behaviour to argue against the naughty label and have potentially a more non-judgmental reason behind his behaviour difficulties and that these are not fully under his control. Corey did then go on to receive a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder with supporting evidence from school staff.

5.1.5 Social perceptions of behaviour

As part of Gail and Sandy’s search for reasons or explanations they both looked to compare the behaviour of their child with other children and family members. This led to Gail continuing to normalise her child’s behaviour and not see this as a concern. As a boy she expected him to be lively and from the limited information that Gail shares about his behaviour he fulfilled this expectation. However Gail was pleased with other behaviour traits that George showed such as being able to play by himself and not be too demanding
of adult attention. *Gail: ‘I think some kids are quiet, some kids are happy in their own company. He likes to sit down with a book and look at the pictures.’* (Lines 69-71)

Sandy reported much more negative experiences of social situations. It may be that this was her perception due to her view that Corey’s behaviour was not what she had expected or experienced before. Sandy reports other parents having negative opinions about her child and about the way in which she managed his behaviour. *Sandy: ‘sorry about that but that’s how we’re dealing with it’.* (Lines 121-122). This led to Sandy wishing to withdraw her son from such situations and keep him within the family home where he would not be judged. It could be suggested that these early social experiences may have heightened Sandy’s anxiety when Corey was required to enter school and therefore her proactive approach. For Gail social situations had not been a difficulty and therefore she did not expect there to be any difficulties when he entered school. *Gail: we didn’t envisage any problems or anything when starting school. There weren’t anything that stood out. He was quite happy playing and there didn’t seem to be any problems.’* (Lines113-115)

5. 2 implications for theory

Figure 4 shows a model of the relationships between each of the superordinate themes and how communication impacts at all levels.
This research has highlighted that each mother with a child showing challenging behaviour in school interacted with the school system in their own way. All of the families are having to engage with an institution that is compulsory and within which parents are disempowered. Systems, language and policies can be difficult for parents to be able to access and feel that they are able to influence, and this is therefore particularly challenging for those parents whose children are having difficulty in complying with the system and associated expectations.

Prior to entry to school the mother and child develop their own expectations and interactions to be able to engage in family life. These expectations are influenced and modified by the experiences that the child has, the views and comparisons with other parents, other children, family members and professionals and how these are communicated to the mothers. These comparisons and the mothers’ own social perceptions of behaviour
for their child and how they see themselves as a parent influences the skills and strategies that the child develops and how they learn as an individual.

On entry to school these skills and strategies for managing the world around them are tested as children are expected to conform to the expectations set out by the class teacher and within a busy social environment.

The compulsory attendance in education with its specific language, systems, curriculum, policies, legal frameworks and political stressors is likely to be difficult for the mother of a child with challenging behaviour to comprehend without clear and specific information and communication from the school staff. The tensions between compulsory attendance, the ethos and management of children with challenging behaviour by the school staff and the staff’s responsibility for large groups of children will impact upon the mother’s experiences. Illich (1971) commented that obligatory school attendance divides society, into those times when the focus is on the ‘academic’ or ‘pedagogic’ and those when it is not. Through the recent changes in the national curriculum and rigid focus on school attendance there is currently a high level of value placed upon the academic.

Informative and valued communication between school staff, mothers and professionals is then vital to the development of shared understanding of how that child responds in a wide range of situations. It is only once all opinions have been heard and valued that effective individualised solutions can then be put in place. These can be to support the child in school, to keep the mother informed, strategies to try at home and for her to be heard through regular opportunities to meet with time and space to hear each other’s concerns.
The parent’s engagement with education professionals appears to be influenced by how they view education within their own family context. Within this research it raised that education can be viewed as childcare, as child centred or as constraining, there are also other views of education as increasing cultural capital by having high expectations and achievements (Carolan & Wasserman, 2015). Each family wished for their child to be successful at school but this would support the research that implies that parent outcomes for their child’s education can differ significantly from those of the school (Lowe & Chapparo, 2009). The school is driven by the education agenda of the government of the time and is required to strive towards the outcomes set. Parents in this research do not appear to be driven by wanting their child to follow the political agenda, if they are aware of this, but aim for their children to be happy and playing (Gail), learning basic skills (Mary) and to be curious about the world around them (Sandy). This range of views and approaches highlights the lack of homogeneity that ‘parents’ have as a group. ‘Parents is a term so well used we rarely think about its meaning. One under-articulated aspect is the lack of homogeneity of parents – that all parents are different, and assumptions cannot be made about the perspective or actions of ‘parents’ (Todd, 2007, p. 72)

The concepts as described by Dale (1996) of the transplant and expert models of communication in school still appear to be pertinent. Generic documents such as the home school agreement set out in the statutory guidance for home school agreements (DfE, 2013a) continue to reinforce the expert model of telling parents what they need to do and what schools will provide, rather than a document that is underpinned by the parents’ philosophy of education for their children.
5.3 Implications for practice

The themes of communication and disempowerment running through this research and underpinning all interactions between school and home is explicitly highlighted for educational psychologists as part of their professional standards. The guidance from the Health and Care Professions Council for Practitioner Psychologists requires all psychologists to be aware of the power difference between themselves and their clients when communicating (Health & Care Professions Council, 2015). This power imbalance has been a dominant area for debate within this research. Parents are statutorily obliged to engage with the education system, which immediately puts them at a disadvantage as they seek to engage with a system that they may themselves have been very uncomfortable with and of which they may have very limited knowledge.

The parents’ view of their child will be primarily based upon how they are within the home setting. It should not necessarily be assumed by professionals that the issues observed within the school setting will automatically be seen within the home setting. It was evident within two of the three interviews in this study that family expectations and adaptations to their environment minimised the impact of the difficulties within the home setting. In addition, dependent on the child’s difficulties, they may not exhibit the same behaviours at home as at school. Sharing why the children do not have the same difficulties at home could help lead to the development of solutions within the school environment and preparation for the school environment could be supported in the home.

The parents and staff expectations and knowledge of child development can be seen to impact upon how parents and school work together effectively. For parents for whom this is their first child within the system and who have no prior training in child development,
their expectations are likely to be based upon their own child’s behaviour and that of their peers, with whom they may have limited contact. Documentation is now explicit as to what is expected in the Early Years with the Early Years Foundation Stage descriptors and the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014c) and parents may benefit from staff being clear about a child’s progress rather than using generic or negative descriptions. Parents having all of the information with regard to what the school are working towards and therefore how the child is having difficulty with these, should aid the development of shared understanding. The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfE, 2015d) advocates the use of one page profiles to highlight a child’s strengths and difficulties and to set and track progress. This collaborative person centred approach with parents will also enable the parents to have a greater understanding of what each professional is doing, what progress is being measured and how they can support this process. Parent’s knowledge of their child outside of school may also be invaluable in supporting the child’s skills and parents are likely to have their own unique ways of adapting the environment or approaches for their child to be successful.

The large number of professionals that can be involved with a child in school can lead to the further disempowerment of parents as they are unsure of the specific role and title of the individuals and yet they will all have an opinion about their child.

External agency professionals and school staff need to ensure that they engage in active listening of the parents. That they allow space within discussions for the parents voice to be heard and that suggestions are taken on board and used to gain a shared understanding of the child’s needs. Information should be shared in such a way that parents are able to reflect and give opinion on the difficulties without being made to feel that it is
their fault or that their voice is being outnumbered. Some parents may require additional support to take on this role of professional for their child and some parents may not be comfortable with this role at all, however, building a sense of collaboration and empowerment for parents should lead to an effective intervention for the child.

To further support this notion of collaborative working with parents, school and external agency staff need to ensure that parents have access to unbiased and uncensored information. If the child is being excluded, either formally or informally, parents should be able to know their rights with regard to this without having to seek them out. Information regarding statutory processes (DfE, 2015c) should be easily accessible and include all the processes that are likely to have come before a statutory request is made, including school responsibilities. In 2014 as part of the SEND reforms the coalition government requested that all schools and services place their information on a web based server known as the local offer (DfE, 2015d). It is yet to be determined whether parents are aware of this local offer especially if their child has behaviour difficulties. Professionals should also look to ensure that information or strategies that they suggest are also able to be accessed by parents so they are fully aware of the strategies in school or in order that they are able to use some of the same strategies within the home setting.

When working collaboratively with parents or when delivering parenting programmes, educational psychologists may look to support parents and staff mind mindedness and reflective functioning with the children (Slade et al, 2005). Supporting such techniques making emotional regulation both conscious and usual should support young children to achieve their social developmental milestones and to develop strategies in order to be able to manage their emotions and avoid conflict with peers (Meins et al,
Such emotional literacy should be evident throughout the school setting for both children, parents and staff creating an atmosphere of support for emotional regulation and well-being.

Working collaboratively with parents would enable approaches to be tailored to the individual with support specifically targeting those aspects that are impacting upon the child’s ability to manage within the school setting (Michail, 2011). This should also ensure that school staff are hearing and acting upon feedback from the family with regard to the emotional impact of the difficulties the child is having in school and how this could be supported either by the school or by early help approaches.

Many settings visit the home prior to entry at primary school, these visits are vital in listening to the parents and hearing about the child’s readiness for school. Additional support can then be offered for both the parent and the child in order that social and emotional skills are a priority on entry to school. School staff may wish to collect more detailed information with regard to how the child plays with others, how they respond in large groups and their range of social experiences (Heibert-Murphy et al, 2011). If such reviews and support were in place for all children on entry to school this would also minimise families seeing their child as being singled out for support (McAllister et al, 2005). If further support was deemed necessary and all of the above was in place, parents would be aware of the difficulties that school staff were having, be aware of the expectations of their child in school and feel empowered to be able to voice their opinions as to how their child could be best supported.
5.4 Implications for future research

In this research each of the mothers had experienced school staff informing them that their son had behaviour difficulties within the school setting. Although the nature of these difficulties may have been different in each of the settings with no uniform definition applied due to schools using their own. Each of the mothers reported attending meetings and that a range of professionals had been involved. This was a unifying experience that each of the women had and therefore they were a homogenous group. Parents whose children are having behavioural difficulties in school would appear to have more difficulty in establishing shared understanding within education settings than those children with other ‘lagging skills’ (Greene, 2011). School staff may present their own ‘expert opinion’ of the problem; staff may be less sympathetic (Ofsted, 2010); the pupils’ difficulties may not be viewed as requiring additional support; and parents may need to negotiate the exclusions system as well as the education system. Further research into approaches and intervention in the early years to support social and emotional skills and to include parents as part of these may aid parents to feel more supported, and that their child is being supported as opposed to being labelled as having a behaviour difficulty. The current political approach of offering places in educational settings (currently 15 hours when aged 2 years) (DfE, 2015a) for the most deprived families does increase the child’s exposure to other environments and expectations. However, this research would indicate that rather than children being offered sessions away from their parents, to support the parents with regard to child development and social and emotional understanding, sessions could be delivered alongside the parents or caregiver (McAllister et al, 2005). This would also be at a time when there was not the
compulsory aspect of education and the parent’s philosophy of education for their child could be explored and educational systems explained.

Research into raising the emotional literacy of pupils, staff and parents in the early years and the impact that this may have on academic achievement should be explored (Katzenelson, 2014).

The report by Steer (2010) on behaviour and the role of home school agreements was published. This highlighted some of the successes of the home school agreement agenda however, it also identified that such agreements should be personalised and should be developed in collaboration with the parent through meeting such as parent’s evenings for them to be meaningful agreements. Further research into the use of the home school agreements as a functional document to support the family and the school should be explored further with regard to its ability to improve parent engagement and for schools to be able to place themselves in the role of the parent.

The concept of communication within education should also be explored as to how to enable parents to have as much knowledge as they require in order to make informed choices about their child’s education (Day, 2013). This process has already been started through the Children’s Act 2014 and the requirement of all school and services to have a presence on a web based ‘local offer’. However there is currently no research with regard to how effective this method of communication is, particularly for those parents of children who are not only having social, emotional and mental health difficulties, as defined by the 2015 SEND Code of Practice, or who may only be receiving exclusion approaches for challenging behaviour.
Each of the superordinate themes could be explored as to how each theme could be effectively developed and improved in order to then assess whether all of the superordinate themes are equal in importance, if there are key superordinate themes or whether there are particular approaches or resources that could be developed in order to support the process of working with parents whose children show challenging behaviour in school.

Research into whether this model of superordinate themes and their relationships is applicable to other areas of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and therefore whether improvements could be made to the effective management of the child’s difficulties so that they are able to access strategies that best meet their needs and allow for them to be successful within the education system.

The participants in this research were all mothers of boys, further research could evaluate whether mothers of girls have also had comparable experiences and if the same superordinate themes are also present and able to provide a useful framework.

Exploration of working with specific populations of parents such as those deemed as hard to reach (Crozier 2007) to review whether the same superordinate themes occur and therefore strategies can be applied in the same way would be beneficial should this be found effective with the initial group of parents. This would aim to provide positive and proactive ways forward of working together with mothers of children who show challenging behaviours on entry to school.

5.5 Limitations of the research

Even with small sample size being an accepted part of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach (Smith et al, 2009), it transpired that although all
three mothers met criteria to be involved in the study their experiences were quite different. For a more homogenous analysis of the experiences it would have been beneficial if more of the mothers had children with more similar difficulties and therefore the range of approaches to the same difficulty could be explored in more detail. This highlights the difficulty that each school will request educational psychology support meeting their own internal criteria and that this is not uniform across schools.

All of the participants in this study were mothers, therefore only a mother’s perspective could be explored. This could possibly be justified as in many cases the mothers continue to be the main communicators with school but this misses the unique role that fathers can have (Pepe and Addimando, 2014).

As with all IPA research the interviews and transcripts are open to multiple interpretations (Smith et al, 2009). Researchers with a different psychological perspective or epistemology may view the comments as holding alternative meanings. This is not intended to be a definitive truth but aims to represent one interpretation of the mother’s views in a way that can provide a useful insight to how schools and mother’s work together.

This piece of research is only an initial exploration into this topic area, and given the current situation with regard to the increase in young children’s exclusions from school, demands further analysis. This introduction to the role of communication and the superordinate themes only raises questions as to how work in these areas and the development of support and strategies could be used to achieve better outcomes for children with challenging behaviour early on in their school careers.
References


Department for Education. (2014b). Early years (under 5s) foundation stage framework (EYFS). Retrieved 28/07/2015, from


Department for Education. (2015d). Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0-25 years. from


## Appendix 1 Excerpt of Transcript: interview 1

### Interview 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive/negative</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>I: As a parent what have your experiences of school been so far?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>S: Erm, a very, a mixed… bag I would say. I’d say as far as school staff related to, you know, to how C has settled etc that has actually been really really quite positive however also quite a lot of negatives erm due because of c’s behaviour and how challenging he can be erm… a lot of things have been quite a big, sort of, very brick wall, that you know we’ve come to school for this that and the other and its been quite negative but like I’ve said there’s also quite a lot of particular members of staff within the school that are fabulous with C and know him and have got to know him really well after you know,from nursery onwards basically but he’s had quite a, its been quite a rocky road I would say.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Range of responses</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Recipient of negatives</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>I: Is that different roles? I was just interested in…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negatives over time</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>S: Of the adults in school do you mean?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I: Yes, I was just interested in some brick walls and some not. Is that the roles that they are doing?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative early experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td>S: Yes I think its partly that. C started by going to FEET group. He did all of those erm.. and it was an absolute nightmare to the point where we nearly stopped taking him because he was just, he, he, he had a thing about babies and some of them bought younger siblings and he would go and he would, (Arm swipe</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘Absolute nightmare’ – strong language</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use of metaphor: ‘brick wall’ indicating negative comments – not a two way process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delayed social skills</td>
<td>Very negative emotional experience</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative perceptions of child by others</td>
<td>Parent’s construction of their child – reflective attachment</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for social acceptances of child</td>
<td>Use of negative labels by others</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blame by others</td>
<td>Ability to be understood</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He didn’t have the social skills to know: ‘Absolute nightmare’ repeated</td>
<td>‘Absolutely mortified’ Strong associated emotions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[struggle to be viewed as good or bad] Others negative perceptions of his behaviour.</td>
<td>Change of views to more positive frames perceptions of his behaviour by others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Real reasons’ – perceptions of truth/Parent formulation/assessment</td>
<td>‘got to know him’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very negative terms ‘really really negative’ ‘That it must be parenting skills’ – blame?</td>
<td>‘Really really got him’ – understanding of child – links with attachment Nice little boy, wants to do well, bright – parent needing staff to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parents positive view of individual characteristic

Child is loved accepted and forgiven by parents

Parents as powerless

Labeled as violent by person in power

Parents avoiding blaming others?

Parents accused as being at fault

- included then you need to monitor him and stay with him and you know, you know and its, I think that when its like when now obviously he’s year one now they’re actually quite.. huh.. I think a lot of them, I know he’s my little boy, but a lot of them do really like C it’s like they’ll Say Hi C you know and what have you been doing and he’ll he’ll chatter away to anybody, all the time you know, a bit too much sometimes (smiles) but, but there are, you know, the issues that we have are more discussions now where as when it was started it was more them telling us that he’s done this and this is because he is a violent young child or he’s that, you know, erm we do have.. quite a few, we have we have a few incidences I would call it rather than quite a lot, we have a few, were we have to go and get him from after school club or something like that. It is usually due to him hurting another child erm but again it is usually he is a violent child you need to come and get him not that C is really struggling with the unstructured time at the moment. It will be better if you could get him home earlier, it was all very much how we how we are told that information if you like and I think that because of what I do I am a little bit more… resilient s’pose to being spoken to like that cos I get I get why they are speaking like that because of what I do but I think that there are a lot of parents who think that if they were spoken to like that and they had C as their son they would be absolutely devastated you know of all the … I don’t know what the word is really. accusations.. well not accusations… it more… labelling, you know them deciding what C’s difficulties, whose fault it is and what they are and what we should be doing and you know erm… …and then it was within nursery that I think Early Years were, came, and I think it was J and they came in and said that there wasn’t really any problems apart from C being you know and see these characteristics. Contrasting blame.

‘my little boy’ indicating loved and accepted- wanting staff to like him too.

Indicating forgiveness?

‘them telling us’- power relationship Violent label

Violent label
Perception of the problem negative by HT, parents seeing this as a ‘struggle’ for their child.

‘what I do’ distancing herself to cope with labels?

Trying to empathise and sympathise with other parents?

Fault – parent feeling accused - blame

Not supported by other agencies?
| Role of external agencies | 85 | that was when it went to EPS, where……N I forget her name, came in and that was a little bit of a turning point for school because she sort of very much …outlined what C’s issues were and actually that he didn’t, he needed to be taught not to invade the spaces and that he needed to be taught that when you playing you know, cos he is quite a big lad, he is a lot taller than the others you know, that actually him going in and playing is just his way of playing and then, all the typical ADHD stuff was coming out although that wasn’t necessarily, that wasn’t particularly mentioned at that point erm.. but its, at the school were given a lot of advice at that point about IEP targets and what sort of things would be good to do with C. They weren’t necessarily all done… but I think … there was a few more positive messages because someone else, a professional was saying..erm well actually maybe it is because of this and this and this and I think that there was some some p’rhaps did think oh not it just cos he’s naughty… but you know the advice that did sort of start to slip in a little and I think that sort of crept as we have gone along if you like, you know. |
| External agency promoting strategies for difficulties | 90 | ‘taught’ looking for positive strategies – not inate -needs to be ‘taught’ |
| Physical development influencing perceptions of behaviour | 95 | Taller - physical difference impacting on perception of behaviour? |
| Need for professional external agency mediation. | 100 | Medical label |
| Perception of child’s identity | 105 | Control? |
| Parents to blame | 110 | Does it need to be a professional? |
| Perception of parents as ineffective | | Power balance? |
| Other agencies then as a ‘turning point?’ | | Reasons for behaviour – identity as ‘not its just cos he’s naughty’ |

(7:00)

I: Earlier you said that said that sort of because of your resilient because of what you do that you know maybe you deal with this differently, putting that aside in a way, how did all that they make you feel?

S: How did it make me feel? I used to go home and cry quite regularly and you know I used to go home to my husband and say they think it parents, they thinks its us. what are we doing wrong? You know, we are trying our best and we are doing this and we are doing that you know and that, to the point where (voice higher) showing emotion, feeling blamed.

‘trying our best’ effort not acknowledged?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other parents seeing the parents as ineffective</th>
<th>115</th>
<th>you’d sort of get worried about taking him anywhere, you know, whether he would get invited to children’s parties and if he does gosh we are going to be watched you know, what we gonna, how we gonna respond if he does this, this or this really really difficult and as time has gone on, I have sort of, we have changed our attitude towards C he is who he is, you can come and talk to me about it if you want but at the end of the day we know C very very well and know how to respond and if you don’t like it, sorry about that but that’s how we’re dealing with it you know and that thats how we do it now but at the time we’ve had some really quite upsetting situations you know where you just think that you want to pull him out and take him home and just think that at least no one can see what he’s doing if he is just at home you know, he can shout and cream and jump up and down and do all those sorts of things happily at home rather than it being an issue you know. Erm but yeah very negative feelings for us as parents you know, and I think also, cos I’ve got three elder children and I had none of these issues with them and people used to say that its not the same C different and I said I know he is and I know that there’s something more than him just being a naughty boy or being mischievous or whatever you know cos I did nothing different with him than I did with the other three and they literally sailed through, they were little darlings all three of them school wise you know. And, so but yeah no, feelings wise it did really affect how we I suppose how we viewed other people and how .. ah.. Probably confidence levels as well as to whose watching us do what , which is a really horrible thing, and I think. How are they going to deal with that situation, wonder what they’ll do now, what what will they do cos he’s just kicked them, wwwwwhat will they do and you feel very much pressured as to you know,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents acceptance of themselves</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Fear of perception of other parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents as realists</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>Really really – emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance with social norms</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>Parents acceptance of C and rejection of others negative responses. Parents need to be resilient?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted by social norms</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>Parents ‘need’ for control of the situation? Acceptance of their own approaches? Socially unacceptable behaviour? ‘very negative feelings for us as parents’ ‘something more’ – something more than a naughty boy label – looking for a reason – comparison with siblings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social construction of them as parents by comparison with siblings</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>Looking for external reason. Confidence in parenting skills undermined by other perceptions? ‘horrible’ - being watched, judged?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents need to be resilient</td>
<td>are we going to do what they want us to do and I think at some point that where you have to you have to harden up and actually say and say I am dealing with it like this.</td>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Parents must maintain a positive view | (9:30)  
I: You mentioned ADHD is that? |
| External reason. Diagnosis, role justification for behaviour non judgmental | S: He has got a diagnosis of ADHD now  
I: Right |
| Medicalisation | S: which he got about six seven months ago something like that erm.. yeah basically we went to the paediatrician once with his behaviours and everything to start with that was right back when he was in nursery erm.. and they looked at lots of various things really lots of questions about how he responded in different situations, was it just that his social skills were a bit behind erm… just because they were you know and they would catch up and then everything would be fine, but he is extremely hyperactive, doesn’t sleep, you know and he he does take melatonin at night and things to make a difference but he takes it and it makes no difference what so ever (smiles). |
| Parents exploration for cause – early development and social exposure | I: So where you aware of difficulties before he went into school? You talked about FEET but were you aware before that?  
S: Yeah Yeah Yeah in C, when I went back to work after having C he stayed at his grandparents we were lucky enough that his grandparents could have C for us. And.. they they don’t particularly go out an awful lot so it was very much in a home |

Trying to accept their own way regardless of others, the negative isn’t helpful therefore looking for other strategies. The need to ‘harden up’.

Medical diagnosis

External vs internal reasons – blame?

Extremely hyperactive

Medication
| Parents trying to find solutions | situation apart from walks from the shop and things like that didn’t involve lots of social activities, she did take him to a mothers and toddlers and things like that but …. He was sort of away from a lot of that and we wondered to start was with was it because he’d not been sort of saturated in, with enough little children because my other three are quite a bit older, I mean the next one up is 15 and obviously C is 6 so obviously that you know.. its its it is a big age gap. So he didn’t have any sort of younger siblings of his own age to look at social skills but there again we did used to take him to soft play centres and we used to do those sort of things deliberately to promote all of his social skills although he was a nightmare (laughter) and we’d end up quite often coming home after about sort of, I don’t know, we’d give it about half an hour often and then we’d end up coming home because he’d of hurt somebody or you know or done something like that er but yeah we were aware he was he was different you know and just too bouncy for it to be you know you you could never you could never tire him out … never (laughter). | Looking for reasons – blame/cause |
| Identifying differences non judgemental | I: You talked about the educational psychologist getting involved. I just wondered what you experience, how that was approached to you? | Family dynamics looked at as a possible reason |
| Parents drive for support and understanding in school | S: To be honest erm.. it was, it wasn’t done (sigh) necessarily through the right channels school wise erm I think I’d suggested that maybe it would be good for an educational psychologist to be involved. Erm.. and I think C was then talked about at a planning meeting but it was sort of after a prompt if you like. Erm.. and then after that it was N that phoned me and spoke to | Family working on solutions to his difficulties |
| | | Identifying differences to other children |
| | | Expressing disappointment with school – needing to be driven by parent |
Parents drive for alternative perspectives on behaviour

| Parents view validated | me about it and and she came to see me at the house and you know we had lots of visits lots of con. No not lots of visits, a couple of visits and some contact and she obviously went and observed C in school and gave me feedback and a report etc but it it was .. it was more I would have said prompted by by what I wanted cos I was concerned about what was happening at school rather than school asking
| Parents drive for external attribution of the problem? |

| Positive view of identity of their child and individual characteristics | I: right
S: initially, I think they would have done it but maybe not quite as soon as as I’d sort of you know my concerns were if you like.. erm.. but quite in you know a very positive I must admit you know we as parents felt quite we we’ve sort of went ‘Haaahhhh’ (sigh) somebody else can see that there’s some difficulties there that you know its not necessarily us that causing them. and you know its just C being C and that’s you know what we need to tackle as you know what are we going to do to make it better you know the situations better. Erm.. and that did help and she did she did liaise quite well with school I have to say but unfortunately it sort of then went to pot because once that initial work had been done it was sort of back to how it was for a little while maybe not quite as far back you know … as as it was erm.. there were lots of strategies that that N suggested to school that they tried for a little bit but they weren’t consistent and they didn’t carry on and you know.
(14:00)

| Consistency over time | I: is that still your experience now? |
| Consistency important? - need to carry on [parents have to carry on regardless?] |

| Shared perspective | Parents wanting to be active participants to support their child. |

[Sigh]
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<th>Parental strategies</th>
<th>Communications about negatives only</th>
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<td>working</td>
<td><strong>Parental strategies</strong></td>
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S: (sigh) My experience now is that we have a lot of battles with the headteacher. Erm .. I don’t, I, I, actually my view, obviously its only my view but my view is she doesn’t get C, she doesn’t get who he is, however the staff within the school, the relationships are very positive you know they know I I I take, if C really hyper in the morning I’ll take a sensory toy or something or something that he can sit and mess with or you know, or I’ll say to them you really need to watch him because he might just be too bouncy and end up bouncing on somebody and hurting them or you know and they are very receptive of that you know which is which is brill but its its more.. the staff that are on that level you know the ones that run the breakfast club the one you know. The class teacher I have got a good relationship with class teacher now but again its all very much … (tut) quite a lot of the time we feel as though its its me going in and saying ‘could we do this?’ or ‘could we try this?’ rather than it being the other way round and I do think as a parent really it should be school coming to us more … well it should be both really but.. its mostly us that are going and prompt well me that’s going cos I’m the one that’s going on a morning really erm and going and prompting and saying you know, hows this hows that and the only things we do get from school tend to be the negative bits rather than the positives… you know…

- Need for a joint view? Need for understanding? [power relations] ‘get who he is’ as a worthy individual
- Headteacher vs staff relationships
- Parental strategies to support
- Awareness of issues ‘too bouncy’
- judgement free description
- Which is brill
- Don’t feel supported? Could we do this? Could we do that?
- School coming to us
- Hows this hows that? – positive and negative possibilities, negatives rather than positives
Appendix 2 Interview 1 themes

through abstraction

1. 13 cards. Labels
non judgemental
Diagnosed
Created
‘cause’

2. 12 cards- strategies
acknowledgment of need for strategies
Parents
Schools
External agencies

3. 10 cards-collaborative working
Parents resilience to non-collaboration
Parents requests for collaboration
Impacts on parents

4. 9 cards- Perception of parents
By themselves
By other parents
by school

5. 8 cards leadership
Range of approaches
Conflict

6. 5 cards-child as an individual
Rights
Acceptance

7. 5 cards-social acceptance
Norms
Expectations
Desire

8. 4 cards-blame
On parents
School

9. 4 cards. Power

10. 3 cards- Rights of parents

11. 4 cards-communication

12. 3 cards individual needs

13. 3 cards –negativity

14. 3 cards –Role of parents

15. 3 cards –inclusion

16. 2 cards external agencies
Appendix 3: Polar sorting interview 1

1. Value of communication vs tone of communication
   Communication important
   Communication around general ok versus specific issues
   Vs
   Tone of voice used to communicate

2. Negativity vs positive view of the child
   Negative labels by others
   Negative perceptions by others
   Parents feeling negative
   Recipient of negative views
   Negative emotional experience
   Communication from school about negatives only
   Negative over time
   Negative early experience
   Vs
   Parents positive construction of their child
   Parents positive view of individual characteristics
   Positive views of identity of child and individual characteristics
   Parents must maintain a positive view
   Parents rejection of negative labels
   Positive and negative

3. External agency wanted vs need for external agency
   Role of external agencies
   Perception of barriers to identification of need
   Vs
   Need for external agency mediation

4. Conflicting Approaches vs clear leadership supporting a common approach
   Range of responses
   Individual staff approaches
   Conflicting staff approaches
   Dominant staff opinions
   Conflicting approaches within the school
   Vs
   Leadership important
   Leadership and ethos
   Consistency over time

5. Non judgemental reason for behavior vs judgement by others
   External reason diagnosis, non judgemental
   Identifying difference non judgemental
   Non judgemental identification of behaviour
   Label as a non judgemental reason leading to greater understanding
   Vs
   Labelled as violent by people in power
   Authority figure deciding on reasons for behavior

6. Behaviour supported by strategies vs external reason for behaviour
   agencies promoting strategies for behaviour
   Parental strategies
   Parents have expert knowledge
   Child as individual responding to individual approaches
   Clear and consistent response graduated approach
   Parents knowledge of effective behaviour strategies for their child
   Consideration of individual needs and approaches
   Vs
   Parents finding and trying solutions
   Some approaches supported by parents
   Parents desire for support and understanding from school
   Parents desire for alternative perspectives on behavior
   Search for reasons
   Parents exploration for cause early development and social exposure
7. Parents as knowledgeable vs parents as powerless
Parents recognition of difficulties
Knowledge of parental rights
Parental responses
Parents views validated
Medicalisation of difficulty
Vs
Lack of access to independent information
Parents as powerless
Power relationships

8. Parents self-efficacy vs others criticism of parenting
parents need to be resilient
Parents objective to cope with authority figure
Parents as resilient
Parents acceptance of themselves
Social construction of themselves as parents by comparison with siblings
Parents avoiding blaming others
Vs
Perception of parents as ineffective by head teacher
Concern that other parents will perceive them as ineffective
Parents judged by other parents
Reflection on abilities as a parent
Staff perceptions of the parents capabilities
Blame on parents
Parents to blame at fault
Parents to blame

9. Social acceptance vs social stigmatisation
Delayed social skills
Physical development influencing perceptions of development
Restricted by social norms
Concern with compliance to social norms
Vs
Parents support behavior being addressed
Desire for social acceptance
Perception of identity as not just naughty

10. Group needs vs individual needs
Curriculum constraints
Vs
Ability to be understood
Child is loved accepted and forgiven
Child as an individual
Rights of the child
Inclusion agenda
Adaptation of the day to meet individual needs

11. Collaboration vs opposition
Wanting a shared perspective
Parents wish for collaborative working
Relationship between parents and staff
Maintaining relationships for the child
Parents and staff working together
Parents requesting collaborative working
Vs
Exclusion approaches
Head teachers decisions impacting negatively on parents not child
Appendix 4: Interview 1 List of superordinate themes

1. *The development of a shared understanding*
   - common approaches
   - conflicting approaches
   - tone of communication
   - collaboration
   - opposition
   - value of communication
   - external agency needed
   - external agency wanted

2. *The child as an individual*
   - individual needs
   - positive view of the child
   - negativity about the child

3. *Social perception of behaviour*
   - non judgemental reasons for behaviour
   - social acceptance
   - social stigmatism
   - judgement by others
   - group needs
   * role of reflective attachment? Or evolutionary psychology

4. *The role of parents*
   - parents as knowledgeable
   - parents as powerless
   - parents self efficacy and resilience
   - criticism and blame of parents

5. *Finding solutions*
   - role of labels
   - external reason for behaviour
   - behaviour supported by strategies
Appendix 5: Interview 2 themes through abstraction

Superordinate Themes through Abstraction

1. communication
Communication Communication
Lack of communication
Greater communication from all agencies
Parents wanting two way communication
two
Parents constantly available e-mail Bown
Communication through a third party not affected
Parents not been heard
Need more communication
I.e. P meetings are effective

2. understanding
Parents unclear of school based difficulties
Slower responding differently in different situations
Open dialogue between parent and professional
No shared understanding of normal
Parents wanting to have all information
Need for honest discussion about all the implications and timescales
Parents understanding of the role of support

The impact of jargon on parents understanding is diempowering

3. strategies
Parental approaches to of behaviour
Parent wanting to reinforce strategies
Strategy is not shared with parents to support
School strategies
School based behaviour strategies

4. Normalisation
Comparison with peers for normalisation
Schools perception of social norms
Cultural changes
Cultural changes labeling Child as a problem
impact of cultural norms
Being a boy in normalising behaviour
Family traits not problems whose problem?

5. school based problem
Projection of the problem to school only
Prevent trouble for school not a child issue
Relationship with peers an issue
Issues once entered school no earlier concerns
School based difficulty
No problems at home
6. individual characteristics
Parents positive view of their child
Trials individual characteristics
Child as an individual
Parents acceptance of child social development

7. professionals
Number of professionals
Parents not aware of all professionals overwhelming
Impact of professionals on child
Whose child? Professionals, parents?
Lack of informed consent to professionals

8. school staff
School support
Positive relationship with support staff
Appreciative of demands on staff
Approachable staff

9. labels
Labels
Resistance to labels
Problem label by staff
Resistance to school perceptions

10. environmental
Environmental factors
Solution is environmental
Environmental reasons

11. Compliance
Parents pushed
Parents wanting collaboration
Compliant
Compliance not agreement

12. Power
This empowering parents
Power and control

13. Curriculum
Curriculum requirements causing problem
Curriculum constraints

14. Medical
Parents views validated by medics
Medical reasons

15. Transition
Transition issues
Lack of information regarding transition

16. Perception of parenting
Perception of failure as a parent

17. No issue!
Minimising concerns
Happy child
Parents construct of childhood
Parents comparison with themselves
Problem as explained by parents
Normalised by sibling
Appendix 6 Polar sorting interview 2

1 Professional involvement vs Professional interference
parents not aware of all professionals - overwhelming
vs
number of professionals
whose child? parents or professionals

2. innate characteristics of the child vs environmental factors
being a boy - normalizing behaviour
minimizing concerns
family traits not problems - whose problem?
projection of the problem to school only
prevent trouble for school not child issue
issues once entered school no earlier concerns
school based difficulty
no problems at home
parents positive view of their child
resistance to school perceptions
problem as explained by parents
parents comparison with themselves
normalized by siblings
vs
child responding differently in different situations
environmental factors

solution is environmental
curriculum requirements causing problem
curriculum constraints
environmental reasons
environmental factors
parents views validated by medics

3 relationship issues with peers vs medical reasons

4. positive labels vs negative labels
resistance to labels
happy child
parents acceptance of child's social development
vs
problem label by staff
labels

5. parents compliance vs parent's relationships with staff
parents unclear of school based difficulties
lack of informed consent to professionals compliant
compliance not agreement
parents 'pushed'
vs
parents understanding the role of support
school support
positive relationships with support staff
appreciative of demands on staff
approachable staff

6. school strategies vs parental approaches
school strategies
school based behaviour strategies
vs
parental approaches to behaviour

7. individual characteristics vs social norms
child’s individual characteristics
child as an individual
vs
parents construct of childhood
comparison with peers for normalisation
school perception of social norms
cultural changes labelling child as a problem-impact of cultural norms
cultural changes

8. communication issues vs importance of communication
lack of communication
communication through a 3rd party not effective
parents not being heard
need more communication
lack of information regarding transition
transition issues
vs
parents constantly available e.g. email and phone
IEP meetings are positive
communication

9. power vs dis empowering parents

10. lack of information vs understanding
strategies not shared with parents to support
parent wanting two way communication
open dialogue between parents and professionals
need for honest discussions about all implications and time-scales
parents wanting to have all information
parents wanting collaboration
vs
impact of jargon on parents understanding
greater communication from all agencies
no shared understanding of 'normal'
parents wanting to reinforce strategies
Appendix 7: Interview 2 list of subordinate themes

Communication and information
Joint understanding
Strategies
Normalisation/social norms
School based problem
Individual characteristics
Professional involvement or interference?
School staff
Labels
Environment
Compliance
Power/dis empowerment
Curriculum
Medical
Transition
Perception of parenting
No issue!
Relationship with peers
Appendix 8: Subordinate themes
devolved through abstraction:

**Interview 3**

**Communication**
Communication
Two way communication
Listening to parents
Communication positive and negative

**Collaboration or compliance?**
Confidence with professionals
Collaboration or compliance
Compliance with school promoted strategies
Parental compliance with school approaches
Parental compliance with request for external agencies

**Individual characteristics**
Parents knowledge of their child’s individual characteristics
Parent’s knowledge of their child
Positive improvement
Child’s behaviour in home and school
Reflect improvement

**School strategies**
Early intervention
School strategies

Exclusion approaches
CAF

**Parent’s strategies**
Emotional response vs parenting strategies
Parent’s strategies
Parent’s expectations
Parents reinforcing expectations

**Impact on parent**
Emotional impact
Parental reflection
Emotional impact
Emotional impact on parent

**Relationships with professionals**
Relationship with staff
School support for parent
Parental concerns of professionals views
Impact of jargon
Negative experiences of school
Confidence with professionals
Appendix 9: Polar sorting of themes

Interview 3

Parental strategies vs school strategies
Parent strategies
Parental expectations
Parents reinforcing expectations
Emotional response vs parenting strategies
Vs
School strategies

Communication
CAF meeting
Communication
Two way communication
Communication positive and negative
Vs

Not listening to parents
Impact of jargon
Parental reflection

Relationships
Relationships with staff
Confidence with professionals
Vs
Parental concerns of professionals views

Individual child view
Positive improvement

Reflect improvement
Vs
Parent’s knowledge of their child’s individual characteristics
Parents knowledge of their child
Child behaviour in school and at home

School approaches
Early intervention
Vs
Exclusion approaches

Collaboration or compliance?
School support for parent
Collaboration
Vs
Compliance with school promoted strategies
Parental compliance with school approaches
Parental compliance with request for external agencies

Emotional impact
School support for parent
Vs
Emotional impact
Emotional impact on parent
Negative experiences of school
Appendix 10 Final Subordinate

themes: interview 3

Development of a shared understanding
Communication
Relationship with professionals

The child as an individual
Individual characteristics
Parent knowledge

Positive views

The role of parents
Collaboration or compliance
Emotional Impact on parents

Finding solutions
Parent strategies
School strategies
School approaches
Appendix 11: Participant information sheets

An Interpretative analysis of the experiences of parents with primary school aged children where school have identified social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study as part of my Doctoral training at the University of Manchester. I am carrying out a research study on the experiences of parents of children under 8 who have been identified by the school as having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and have a named Educational Psychologist.

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

Who will conduct the research?
Tracy Laverick, School of Education, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester

Title of the Research
The experiences of parents with primary school aged children where school have identified social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

What is the aim of the research?
It is of vital importance that the views of parents are sought by professionals, particularly in regards to children who have special education difficulties, or encounter difficulties in school. As an educational psychologist, it is key to our role, to form effective relationships with parents, and listen to their views on how we can best meet their child's needs.

I am particularly interested in finding out about parents' involvement in their child's education and what parents perceived as positive when their child was having difficulties.

Why have I been chosen?
All parents of children who are in Year Reception, Year one and Year 2 and referred by the school to the Educational Psychology Team for social emotional and behavioural difficulties have been chosen to take part in this project, and it is felt that your views would be of great value to this research.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?
If you agree to take part in an interview, a date and place will be agreed upon, and an individual interview will take place, in which you will be able to share your views. The interviews should last up to an hour. In the interview you will be asked about your experiences working with school when your child was referred to the Educational Psychologist. You will only be expected to discuss information you feel comfortable about, and if at any point during the interview you wish to stop, you will be able to do so. If you wish to raise a complaint at any point during or after the research, Professor Kevin Woods (University Research Supervisor) should be contacted (for contact details see below).

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the research, it is hoped that by sharing their views, parents will help other parents in the same situation and inform professionals about what they think is helpful when their child is experiencing difficulties at school.

What happens to the data collected?
The interviews will be made into transcripts. These transcripts will then be used for the researcher to interpret and analyse to identify common themes and messages.

**How is confidentiality maintained?**
All the information collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will be given a false name so your real name will not be used in any reports or publications.
The audio recordings of the interviews conducted in this research will only be used for analysis. No other use will be made of them without having your written permission.
All records, both recorded and written, will be held and analysed by myself and will be appropriately destroyed when the research is completed. Only anonymised information will be shared with other professionals, unless I was to obtain evidence that a child is, or has been unsafe, and I believe that sharing this information would be necessary to ensure that the child in question is safe.

**What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason

**Will I be paid for participating in the research?**
There is no payment for participating in this research.

**What is the duration of the research?**
The research is a single interview of up to 60 minutes.

**Where will the research be conducted?**
The research will be conducted where you feel most comfortable to talk. This could be your child’s school, local library room or a home visit. This will be agreed with you in advance.

**Will the outcomes of the research be published?**
The findings of this research will be published in my Doctoral Thesis (DEdPsy Educational Psychology), copies of which will be available at the University Library. A summary of the research may also be fed back to schools in the ________ district and, potentially, the research findings may be published at a later date (e.g. in a journal article). Any information published or shared will remain anonymous and you will not be identifiable.

**Criminal Records Check**
I have an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check.

**Contact for further information**
My contact details are;
Tracy Laverick.
Block C, Normanton Town Hall, Normanton, WF6 2DZ
01924 307403

**What if something goes wrong?**
If at any point during the interview you wish to stop your participation, you will be able to do so.

If there are any issues regarding this research that you would prefer not to discuss with members of the research team, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to ‘The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL’, by emailing: Research-Governance@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093.
An Interpretative analysis of the experiences of parents with primary school aged children who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

3. I understand that the interviews will be audiorecorded

4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes

5. I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals.

I agree to take part in the above project

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Appendix 12 Outline interview schedule

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research. I am interested I hearing about your views regarding you and your child’s experiences of school so far.

What have your experiences of school, as a parent, been so far? Can you tell me more about that? (if required)

To what extent were you aware of any difficulties prior to entering school?

What was your experience of school staff wanting to refer to the educational psychology service? How was this explained?

What have been the most helpful things that school have done to support your child? How did this make you feel?

Is there anything else that you would like me to hear regarding your experiences of school for your child?

Thank you very much for your time taking part in this research.

Possible prompts
Can you tell me more about that?
Why?
How?
How did you feel?
Appendix 13 Confirmation of ethics approval

Mrs Tracy Laverick  
School of Education, Educational Psychology  
tlaverick@wakefield.gov.uk

ref: ethics/13163

19 February 2014

Dear Mrs Laverick

Research Ethics Committee 1

An Interpretative analysis of the experiences of parents with primary school aged children who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. (Ref 13163)

I write to confirm that the amendments to the ethics application form and participant information sheet, and the provision a cover letter and a research agreement form from the local authority, satisfy the concerns of the Committee and that the above project therefore has ethical approval. The general conditions remain as stated in the letter of 20th September 2013.

Finally, I would be grateful if you could complete and return the attached form at the end of the project or by February 2015, whichever is earlier. When completing this form, please reference your project as:  
“An Interpretative analysis of the experiences of parents with primary school aged children who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. (Ref 13163)”

We do hope that your research goes well,

Yours sincerely,

Katy Boyle  
Secretary to University Research Ethics Committee

Combining the strengths of UMIST and The Victoria University of Manchester